

Refugee Empowerment Project Evaluation report



Executive summary

In April 2009 the Refugee Council started the Refugee Empowerment Project (REP). The REP was funded by City Parochial Foundation and ran for a year. The project aimed to build on the campaigning skills and capacity of participating individuals and their Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and illustrate how they can be supported by a larger organisation to pursue shared campaign goals in the longer term.

The REP worked with 17 individuals who were based in 8 organisations. Seven of the organisations were RCOs located in the three neighbouring London boroughs of Barnet, Brent and Camden, and one was a second tier/umbrella organisation that works with RCOs across London.

This report discusses data collected from participants throughout the project, as well as discussions with campaigners and information collected from mentors as the work drew to a close in March 2010. The report will highlight participants' views of the REP in terms of what worked well and what could be improved, and make suggestions to guide the delivery of future projects adopting this model of working. Key findings and suggestions for future projects are highlighted below.

What did participants want from the project?

The motivations identified were predominantly concerned with the desire to affect change to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers and to acquire skills that would make them good campaigners.

At the outset of the project, destitution was an issue that all of the organisations felt they could work on.

Campaigners were in general agreement that they had taken a lot away from the experience.

Campaigners expressed that the support they received through the training sessions and mentoring has equipped them with skills, knowledge and confidence to conduct campaigning.

Training

The campaigners attended six training sessions delivered by different members of Refugee Council staff that outlined the ways to campaign effectively, and aimed to equip them with knowledge of particular topics to enable them to plan and deliver a campaign with clear asks tailored to specific audiences.

There was an agreement from all campaigners that the training had been useful. Many participants were enthusiastic about the skills they had learnt and the information they now possess.

Several campaigners noted the usefulness of the training sessions, but recognised that it provided them with a basis upon which to build, and the experience of developing and running a campaign is just as important.

Several campaigners wished there had been a pack or a toolkit with all of the information in one place

Working with other organisations

The REP brought together a range of organisations with varied remits and it was hoped that participation in the project would encourage RCOs to work together and learn more about each other, and the Refugee Council itself. Focus group discussions and interviews explored these issues and the responses were mixed.

Bringing together a diverse range of RCOs with varied experiences resulted in some learning more than others, depending on the pre-existing knowledge and remits of the participants.

Some campaigners were more positive about the potential for joint-working than others.

Although some participants had not been in contact in the time between the training sessions ending and the focus group taking place, other organisations had made links and had contact with each other.

Some campaigners thought that there should have been more support for them to enable organisations to maintain contact and work together.

In terms of information-sharing more broadly, some campaigners noted that it had been useful to receive information about upcoming events that were relevant to them, and policy updates from the Refugee Council

Mentoring

When campaigners were asked at the end of the project whether, on reflection, they thought that mentoring was the right choice and what they thought of it, the response from the majority was positive and people highlighted what they had gained from the relationships.

Some campaigners were disappointed because they felt that their mentor did not have sufficient expertise to guide the organisation's campaign, and because it was felt that one individual did not follow through on promises of support.

It was suggested that it may be beneficial to use mentors from further afield.

Mentors were asked to identify what they felt had gone well in their mentoring relationships. Several mentors felt that it was good to use their expertise (both personally and as part of a large NGO) to help support smaller organisations develop campaigns.

Mentors appear to have enjoyed the time they have spent with the campaigners, and were positive about the interactions.

When mentors identified things they had thought had not gone so well, the main problems identified related to the difficulties encountered when trying to meet up due to busy schedules, and the time scales allocated to their involvement being too short.

Some mentors highlighted how much they had enjoyed being part of the project. It has also made them think about how the Refugee Council can work with RCOs in the future on campaigning activities.

Funding

For some of the participants, the amount of money they received was not deemed sufficient to cover the work they were doing as part of the project.

Suggestions of other types of support

Some campaigners would like to know more about what others were doing so they thought it would be good for there to be ongoing contact between organisations facilitated by the Refugee Council after the training sessions finished.

During the collection of opinions at the end of the project, two campaigners specifically mentioned the significance of the evaluation exercise itself and were happy that it had been conducted.

Future campaigning

The organisations involved intended to carry on what they had started as part of the REP.

Some of the campaigners saw the REP as the first step in their own work, but also thought that the project could be built upon, and their involvement could be expanded to help them support other RCOs.

RCOs' involvement in campaigning

REP participants were asked whether they thought that RCOs should be involved in campaigning on issues relating to their communities. Most agreed that it was.

Participants acknowledged that there were many barriers to their participation in campaigning activities, some of which are related to the fact that they are refugees. These included: limited capacity, resources, knowledge and energy; intimidating processes, especially if your first language is not English; difficulties accessing the right people to influence; and the fact that campaigning for change is a slow process.

The participants highlighted that as well as there being general barriers to campaigning, the subject of destitution also created additional difficulties, particularly in terms of finding information about a population that is largely hidden.

Relationship with the Refugee Council

There was a mixture of responses with some saying that they did not really have an opinion of the Refugee Council before they joined the project or that they did not really know much of its work before participating. Others offered positive responses.

Although this is only a small proportion of RCOs who operate across the country, the response from these campaigners indicates that this model of working can help to change negative perceptions of the Refugee Council through capacity building and partnership working.

Suggestions for change

On the basis of the findings, there are suggestions of ways of working that could be adopted in order to improve future projects with the same aims as the REP. These are outlined below.

Organisations are permitted to identify the key topics they wish to campaign on rather than recruitment being based around a specific issue.

A booklet of all information and handouts is produced and distributed at the beginning of the project so participants have everything in one place to refer to in the future.

Explore the possibility of delivering longer training sessions with more interactive elements and case studies

A member of the project team, or a mentor, should be made responsible for ensuring that organisations share information with each other.

The Refugee Council should pass on relevant information about policy and events relevant to their campaigners.

Organisations could be brought together after the training has finished and campaigns are being developed so they can explore opportunities for collaboration.

Ensure that mentors have the relevant expertise to be able to provide appropriate support and guidance to campaigners.

Put a review system in place to ensure that mentors follow up on the actions they agree to do for campaigners.

Consider recruiting mentors from beyond the Refugee Council to broaden the pool of expertise available and help with the sustainability of future projects.

The period of the mentoring relationship should be extended so there are more opportunities for interaction.

At the beginning of mentoring relationships, both sides should agree expectations and future meeting dates.

Refugee Council considers the types of support it can give RCOs to campaign beyond projects like the REP, and also develop more campaigning with RCOS.

The amount of money given to participating organisations should be assessed to make sure it covers costs, or a different method of distribution could be developed.

The Refugee Council could consider submitting joint funding applications with named organisations for future projects.

The Refugee Council could support RCOs in applying for funding for campaigning work. This could be incorporated into the programme of support for organisations within the project.

Refugee Council to facilitate ongoing meetings of campaigners after formal training sessions have ended.

Explore the potential of using an extranet or other online support. This should be put in place from the outset of the project so people get used to using it while there is still regular contact between organisations.

Ensure that participating organisations receive this evaluation report.

Consider having these organisations as a group of refugee campaigners that gets added to with other RCOs as other projects develop.

Consider working with these campaigners to help deliver future capacity building to other organisations.

Support these campaigners to be champions of this type of project.

The length of the project could be increased to ensure that there is enough time to cover the training and fully develop and launch a campaign.

1. Introduction

In April 2009 the Refugee Council started the Refugee Empowerment Project (REP). The REP was funded by City Parochial Foundation and ran for a year. The project aimed to build on the campaigning skills and capacity of participating individuals and their Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) and illustrate how they can be supported by a larger organisation to pursue shared campaign goals in the longer term.

The REP worked with 17 individuals who were based in 8 organisations. Seven of the organisations were RCOs located in the three neighbouring London boroughs of Barnet, Brent and Camden, and one was a second tier/umbrella organisation that works with RCOs across London.

Prior to the commencement of the project, the Refugee Council's consultations with members of the refugee sector identified destitution as an issue that presented real challenges to RCOs and members of their communities, and had the potential to undermine community cohesion. It was decided that the campaigning activities undertaken as part of the REP would focus on destitution.

Members of the Refugee Council's Policy and Development Directorate and the Media Relations Manager delivered six training sessions for the campaigners that covered the following topics:

1. General introduction to project and each other/discussion on nature of 'power'.
2. Overview of campaigning
3. Developing your campaign (including influence trees/campaign tools)
4. Lobbying
5. Understanding the media/messages
6. Developing your campaign strategy

The aim of these sessions was to provide the campaigners with the tools they need to plan and run a campaign, and they then used this knowledge to shape the specific activities their organisation wished to focus upon.

When the training sessions were completed, the campaigners were matched with a mentor who could provide individual support and guidance to the organisations to develop their campaign strategy and to run their campaigning activities. In addition to the support received from the training and the mentors, each campaigner received £1,000 to help them with their work. This money was given to each individual involved, so the amount received per organisation varied from £1,000 to £3,000.

This report discusses data collected from participants throughout the project, as well as discussions with campaigners and information collected from mentors as the work drew to a close in March 2010. The report will highlight participants' views of the REP in terms of what worked well and what could be improved, and make suggestions to guide the delivery of future projects adopting this model of working.

2. Data used in this report

The information discussed in this report comes from the following sources:

- An initial questionnaire completed by each organisation at the beginning of the project.
- Workshop evaluations completed at the end of the training sessions.

- A 'mid-term' questionnaire completed by respondents.
- Feedback from some of the workshop facilitators.
- A focus group of seven campaigners (from seven different organisations) in March 2010.
- Interviews with three campaigners in March 2010.
- Information gathered from 7 mentors in March 2010.

One of the participating organisations was not consulted at the end of the project as we were unable to arrange a suitable opportunity. This data has been drawn together to discuss different aspects of the project below, and to assess their success and identify improvements that could be made.

3. What did participants want to get from the project?

At the beginning of the focus group and interviews with individual campaigners, project participants were asked what interested them in getting involved in the REP. The motivations outlined below are predominantly concerned with the desire to affect change to improve the lives of refugees and asylum seekers and to acquire skills that would make them good campaigners.

"Because I'm from the refugee community so I wanted to be involved in campaigning about change that we can bring into the difficulties that many refused asylum seekers are facing."
Organisation 2

"I think because in my daily work really, I work with refugees and asylum seekers, and it's almost every day week that we have failed asylum seekers, destitute. Me coming here was more to do with empowering myself. Learning new skills and jointly working with other organisations in order to have the same voice, that voice that will change the decision, making changes."
Organisation 1

"I was very interested in campaigning...so that my voice can help the many problems that are faced by very many refused asylum seekers."
Organisation 8

"...it was an opportunity for me to learn new skills for campaigning."
Organisation 4

"...it was an opportunity for us to get the skills to be able to campaign."
Organisation 5

"We decided to join the campaign at least to have the skills to make us be effective to help our people."
Organisation 7

"The main pull was campaigning skills, but destitution does fit in with client group."
Organisation 7

"We thought that campaigning would be good and undertaking a review of the project. We thought it would be good to take part in the training."
Organisation 6

One campaigner felt that participating in the project would help to raise the profile of their organisation and learn how to deal with the national media, and another felt that working on a project with other organisations would help them to understand organisational needs too.

The campaigning organisations completed an initial questionnaire at the start of the project. This questionnaire collected information on the participants' perceptions and experiences of

campaigning and their thoughts about Refugee Council's campaigning activities. This information provided the REP team with information on what types of support the participants may have required during the course of the project.

The responses to the questionnaire revealed a good overall understanding of what campaigning is, and also revealed that there were differing experiences of campaigning activities across the participating organisations, ranging from no involvement to it comprising approximately 60 per cent of their work. Those who attended the focus group revealed that they did not have much experience of campaigning prior to joining the project, so even though it may have comprised a significant portion of an organisation's work, it did not follow that REP participants had been directly involved.

When asked what they would most like to gain from the project to improve their campaigning work, the responses included:

1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic plan • Steps to follow • Lobbying process
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why to campaign (objectives and aims) • Methods of campaigning • How to convince or persuade the target community • How to pass the message
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy • How to plan the campaign • How to work in partnership with other organisations • How to work with government
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge to make contacts • Dealing with the press
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign strategies • Planning a campaign • Mobilising an effective campaign
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools and methods • Identifying potential partners and alliances • Understanding the structure and decision making processes to influence change in London
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make my campaigning achievable I need to have very good knowledge and skills in planning series of campaigning and working with a team
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to improve and increase the ways, means, skills to carry out sharp and effective campaigning tools

The needs identified above are focused upon obtaining specific skills and information to enable effective campaigning and the training sessions discussed later were designed to cover these aspects.

As stated previously, the subject of destitution was chosen as a focus of the project, and organisations agreed that they would develop campaigns that focused on various aspects of the issue. The organisations were free to choose which aspects of the topic they wished to campaign on, which was influenced by the experiences of the communities they work with. Campaigners were asked during the focus groups and interviews if destitution was an important issue for them and there was general agreement that this was the case.

"[Destitution] was definitely important to me. I didn't have a lot of information about destitution so that was of interest to me and I was really grateful for the information I took away."
Organisation 4

"Generally as an organisation it was a key issue to us as a lot of refugees and asylum seekers face these difficulties. If it had been left more open it would've given organisations the opportunity to identify their issues, but luckily it fitted into our remit."
Organisation 6

At the outset of the project, destitution was an issue that all of the organisations felt they could work on. However, during the course of the project one organisation identified an issue that was important to themselves and their community, which did not comfortably sit within the topic of destitution. They are now pursuing a campaign on an issue that is more salient to them, but the change of direction required negotiation and agreement across the project board and with the funder and this has delayed the start of their work.

Suggestion:

Organisations are permitted to identify the key topics they wish to campaign on rather than recruitment being based around a specific issue.

In the focus groups and interviews at the end of the project, campaigners were asked if taking part in the project had helped participants to plan and run a campaign to see if the REP had met the expectations they identified at the outset. Campaigners were in general agreement that they had taken a lot away from the experience.

"Yes for me I think I have learnt a lot and I've learnt how to get to, the process to get to the decision-makers, the policy makers but it is requiring a lot of support, a lot of support from your own organisation, members and also from other RCOs in the borough. So, I've learnt a lot in general, yeah."
Organisation 1

"Definitely. It has given us the foundation on the procedures of how to run a successful campaign, given us some good skills to take away and use in all of our different campaigns."
Organisation 4

I think it's given both [my colleague] and I confidence, so in terms of confidence building, yes. Could we run a campaign - we could definitely give a shot."
Organisation 5

"It was a pilot and I thought as an initial pilot I thought it was good. As a workshop on campaigning skills – I thought it was excellent. I thought it was great overall."
Organisation 5

"It's given us more knowledge about some of the things to think about, so yes."
Organisation 6

These responses indicate that the support given to the campaigners through the training sessions and mentoring has equipped them with skills, knowledge and confidence to conduct campaigning. On a more practical note, focus group participants were asked to write down one key campaigning activity that they had done as a result of being part of the project. Each organisation was able to identify some concrete achievements:

"Being part of Amnesty International's campaign at Parliament against no recourse to public funds and meeting our MP last November."

"Collection of data from community (fresh claims and no transport provided by UKBA) and meeting the councillors."

"We are working on a case study, so meeting two destitute asylum seekers is an achievement."

"We've conducted a research for evidence of refused asylum seekers who were denied healthcare."

"Planning and setting up our campaign."

"One thing important for me was to get involved in this project and learn skills about campaigning."

These examples illustrate the steps people have taken as part of their campaigning work, three of which highlighting background research to provide evidence to support their asks. The last two responses are less focused on specific activities, but do note what participants felt they had accomplished.

4. Training sessions

As outlined in the introduction, the campaigners attended six training sessions delivered by different members of Refugee Council staff that outlined the ways to campaign effectively, and aimed to equip them with knowledge of particular topics to enable them to plan and deliver a campaign with clear asks tailored to specific audiences.

There was an agreement from all campaigners that the training had been useful and the evaluation forms completed at the end of each training session showed much positivity. On these forms, participants stated that they felt "excited", "inspired", "impressed", "enthused", "energised", "stressed and impatient to take action", "empowered", "confident" and "having a lot of light bulb moments". Many participants were enthusiastic about the skills they had learnt and the information they now possess.

"I think it was really good because it was like an eye-opener and for example, the stuff you have to do professionally. For example the elevator test or whatever stuff we learn. Because usually you take things for granted, you think you know the topics or you know the problems of your people but you don't consider it in a model or professional way, so it was really helpful."
Organisation 5

"The workshops were very useful... I think the sessions were really good. There was quite a lot of information sometimes. A fantastic networking opportunity to meet small grass roots organisations who were interested in campaigning and motivated."
Organisation 5

"They were useful, they were interactive, useful and kept us interested as each organisation was able to relate it to their own issues and each organisation had a chance to contribute their own experience so it felt practical rather than theoretical."
Organisation 6

Several campaigners noted the usefulness of the training sessions, but recognised that it provided them with a basis upon which to build, and the experience of developing and running a campaign is just as important.

"I think it was very useful in terms of what you have learnt because seeing as I had not done any campaigning before, the handouts, the way to use the handouts and how to do a campaign, and how to sell something, it taught me all of these things. So in the future if we wanted to do something we know where to start. And if we need help we know where to seek the help as well. So all in all it was a good starting point and we need to get to do it hands on, things that mean we can get experience in real life. I mean today if I want to do a campaign I know how to start it so it has been useful."
Organisation 4

"Useful to some extent but still you have to do some work hands on to be actually applied, to gain experience in the field..."
Organisation 8

One campaigner stated that he had found the training sessions useful but he felt they were not as interactive as he would have liked them to be and he *"would like to have spent more time on new media and how to capitalise on that as I think it can be really effective. I would have liked to have gone out and did small projects with the team"* (Organisation 4). This in contrast to the person quoted previously who thought they were interactive and provided organisations the opportunity to contribute. On a workshop evaluation forms, there were other requests for additional content to be covered and a slight variation in delivery. One campaigner felt there had not been enough explanation on the causes of destitution, and several noted that they would have liked more case studies and examples of actual campaigns (perhaps on video).

Although there were handouts distributed during each training session, several campaigners wished there had been a pack or a toolkit with all of the information in one place.

"For me I think that if there is a pack or something with all the topics in it in one place it would have been helpful."
Organisation 5

"I think a huge missed opportunity was that there was no handout or toolkit to refer back to. Given that the training sessions happened a long time ago, they are only putting it into practice much later so it is hard to remember. I did raise issues in relation to the breakdown of Government etc which was addressed in the session and wanted something in writing which was promised and not followed up. A lot of information was given but it's impossible to retain it all. Small RCOs working on this and need to be able to cascade to other members of staff so a booklet would be good. In fact, any organisations...It would have been useful to have an agenda at the beginning of each session and would have been useful to make notes alongside that during the session. This was mentioned throughout the course but wasn't taken on board."
Organisation 6

Suggestion:

A booklet of all information and handouts is produced and distributed at the beginning of the project so participants have everything in one place to refer to in the future.

In terms of practicalities, one campaigner stated that he thought the room in which the training was held during the first two sessions was not suitable as it was too small for the number of people participating. In response to the feedback about the room received from

campaigners during the initial sessions, the Refugee Council changed the venue for the rest of the training sessions.

Some of the workshop facilitators were asked for their opinions on the delivery of the training sessions. The facilitators were generally positive about the experience and the engagement of the participants.

"...you felt you were working with the participants to achieve something rather than just talking at them!"

"The chance to meet up with people from RCOs and find out more about RCOs – very valuable learning."

"[The most valued element of the training for me] was the lively group – inspiring, challenging."

When asked what could be improved, some suggestions were put forward.

"I personally think full day sessions are better because we can cover more ground without recapping, and have more time for networking and break-out discussions. But that would've put costs up and may not have been easy to attend for many of the campaigners...more one-to-one support needs to happen earlier, with disciplined homework such as influence mapping, scouting out decision makers, etc."

"People were probably given too much detail about different campaigning techniques, some of which they simply don't have the resources to use."

"The web workshop was difficult to pitch at the right level as there were obviously big differences between people on how much they knew."

Some of the issues raised by the facilitators echo those from participants in terms of the way the sessions are delivered. This suggests the need to reassess how the sessions are delivered in future projects.

Suggestion:
Explore the possibility of delivering longer training sessions with more interactive elements and case studies.

5. Working with other organisations

The REP brought together a range of organisations from three neighbouring London boroughs with varied remits and it was hoped that participation in the project would encourage RCOs to work together and learn more about each other, and the Refugee Council itself.

The mid-term evaluation conducted half-way through the programme of training sessions asked for participants' thoughts on working with other RCOs. The responses at this point in the project were positive.

"Was really great, enlightening, empowering."

"We worked closely and shared objectives – spelled out that the vision and purpose of this campaigning project is to construct the moral solidarity of mankind."

"Partnership is always encouraged in the voluntary sector."

"Sharing expertise, skills, knowledge."

One campaigner noted that there were two sides to working with other RCOs and described it as:

"Advantages = alliances, shared problems. Disadvantage = conflicting priorities."

The focus group discussions and interviews also explored these issues. The responses were mixed and there are some differences to the opinions expressed when the training sessions were still taking place.

Interviewer: Do you think you have learnt from the other organisations taking part in the project?

"Yes. We've sort of learnt from working with them some of the barriers and challenges they face. It was good to feed off some of the organisations in terms of their passion. It's helped to inform our work."

Organisation 6

"Good to know that there are other organisations out there. I've definitely learnt from other organisations and the kinds of work they're doing. Would definitely seek alliances in the future."

Organisation 5

"For me it's like learning about other organisations existed...I haven't heard of some the organisations and the fact that we came here and learnt about each other. We're still in touch with each other and we would like to work with each other."

Organisation 5

"It was good to meet others working on the same field. But honestly since our last day here I've not been in contact with any of the communities here. No contact really."

Organisation 1

"I wish I had but I know very little about what they're doing and we were the larger organisation there and we'd already been through the processes that they're going through."

Organisation 4

The responses illustrate that some of the learning was at a very basic level in terms of finding out about the existence of others. Bringing together a diverse range of RCOs with varied experiences will result in some learning more than others, depending on the pre-existing knowledge and remits of the participants. Some campaigners were more positive about the potential for joint-working than others. Although some participants had not been in contact in the time between the training sessions ending and the focus group taking place, other organisations had made links and had contact with each other. Some campaigners thought that there should have been more support for them to enable organisations to maintain contact and work together.

"I think for me it would be the weakness of this, only the little bit weakness, because the focus point of all this work, we didn't focus on networking. We learn a lot about how to do a campaign or to organise campaign activities but not how we can work together."

Organisation 2

There was some disagreement among the focus group participants about whether networking had been covered in the training as there were discussions and guidance about making alliances for campaigning purposes. What became evident from the discussion was that participants were not fully aware of each others' campaign focus as they had not come together since the training finished. This meant that it was not obvious to the campaigners where alliances could be made across the group. Participants pointed out that contact details had been swapped between participants but there was a view that this was not sufficient to support joint working. There was a suggestion that mentors or a member of the REP team could share information with participants to facilitate links between organisations.

"Exchanging information. If we are working in a network you have to get a channel for communication. For example, when we did research I have to know how we can distribute that information to others and they can maybe use it for them, the information, the evidence from that research. But if there is no channel there is no how we can distribute that information, it will be very difficult and I will have forgot everyone...I say is not enough as networking is not an exchange of addresses. You have to know, there should be someone, for example one mentor who is in charge of that. To check if everyone exchanges information. How to push."

Organisation 2

"That's a good idea actually. There could be someone especially dedicated to do this work or task and how it should be best implemented for all organisations."

Organisation 8

An example was given of an organisation securing a meeting with an MP but even though they were clear about the specifics of their campaign topic, they were not prepared to answer broader questions on destitution as was not their particular expertise. In this context they identified others in the group who would have been better equipped to answer these and it would have been good to have worked together. Had the campaigners known in advance that the particular line of questioning was going to be pursued by the MP, they perhaps would have linked with other groups prior to the meeting (or attended together). However, this was an unexpected focus of discussion so it is more difficult to see how they could have drawn upon others' expertise, apart from knowing in general about their campaigns and the evidence they have been producing.

In terms of information-sharing more broadly, some campaigners noted that it had been useful to receive information about upcoming events that were relevant to them, and policy updates from the Refugee Council. Given the lack of capacity for RCOs to find out all that is happening in the sector, these were useful resources for the campaigners.

Suggestions:

A member of the project team, or a mentor, should be made responsible for ensuring that organisations share information with each other.

The Refugee Council should pass on relevant information about policy and events relevant to their campaigners.

Organisations could be brought together after the training has finished and campaigns are being developed so they can explore opportunities for collaboration.

6. Mentoring

During the project, the campaigners were asked about the types of ongoing support they would like to receive once the training sessions had ended. They were given a list of options (mentoring, extranet, surgeries, further workshops, peer group meetings) and mentoring proved to be the most popular option.

When the training sessions had ended, each organisation was allocated a mentor whose role was to support the campaigners with the development and delivery of their campaigns. All of the mentors worked for the Refugee Council, and through monthly meetings were expected to:

- Support the campaigners develop an action plan for their RCO, with the assistance of the REP Coordinator.
- Support the campaigners in the delivery of the action plan.
- Support the campaigners to monitor and evaluate their RCO's campaigning progress.

The mentoring element of the REP started in October, although not all partnerships were able to hold their first meeting in that month. The mentors received support from the REP Coordinator.

When campaigners were asked at the end of the project whether, on reflection, they thought that mentoring was the right choice and what they thought of it, the response from the majority was positive.

"He was there all the time we need him. He always came to our appointment...at the end he guide us [about which subject to focus upon]...He overall did his job as we were expecting him to do so. Happy with his work."
Organisation 2

"Yes. It was good. He gave us the right guidance and led us to get the right sort of information we need. We have had a meeting and that meeting was to put down some areas that we need to cover and then we came back together in the next meeting and talked about how far we have gone. So it was the right guidance in terms of achieving our objective."
Organisation 4

"Yes, definitely. I think it was the right support. It gave us time to spend with an expert to give the 1-2-1 support. It was an opportunity to get real guidance on the issue we wanted to tackle."
Organisation 4

"When we have ideas, she explores our ideas and she would say which would work better. If we do this she might suggest some other ways."
Organisation 5

"Definitely agree that the mentoring was good. [Our mentor] has been really helpful."
Organisation 5

"I think it was the right choice for us as an organisation. We have had one mentoring session. Having somebody to bounce off ideas has been useful. The support has been 1-2-1 and I do feel confident to pick up the phone and talk to my mentor."
Organisation 6

"I had a positive experience. She was really brilliant. We first met in January and we discussed the things we need to do and then the following month we book and appointment and she came and we discussed what we had done and what we didn't do. And we moved onto the next plan. So she was really brilliant and we can contact her anytime if we need her support or advice."
Organisation 7

The campaigners quoted above appear to have valued the individual support and guidance on the specific campaigns they were developing. Mentors have been somebody who they could bounce ideas around with, and also provide some expertise and structure.

However, the perception of the value of mentoring in the REP was not entirely positive. Two campaigners felt that they had not particularly benefitted from having a mentor.

"What I think for me is that I did not get anything of value from my mentor...[my mentor] did not give anything for me...my mentor didn't have the qualifications, the right qualifications for the job to give to me...was not good for me in that subject."
Organisation 8

"I said no because...I only met [the mentor] twice...We discuss about the plan. We had to review the approaches and we were due to meet again at the end of January and [the mentor] never called me and I never called [the mentor] and I'm overdue...at our last meeting we agreed that [the mentor] would be sending me a list of other RCOS and also associations which never happened...I was expecting [the mentor], as agreed, to send me some information and jointly moving forward so I'm also observing the level of commitment in this."
Organisation 1

These campaigners were disappointed because they felt that their mentor did not have sufficient expertise to guide the organisation's campaign, and because an individual did not follow through on promises of support. In response to the first problem identified above, another campaigner suggested that it may be beneficial to use mentors from further afield.

"...maybe in the future, it's better to look maybe sometimes the mentor maybe out the Refugee Council. If you found some mentors who have more experiences and are very skilled in campaigning or whatever, it's better maybe to contact them because if you look for only people from Refugee Council maybe sometimes you can find some who don't have some experience and it'll be the same problem."
Organisation 2

Drawing upon mentors beyond the Refugee Council would also relieve the pressure on the particular members of staff who were participating. This would perhaps make future working more sustainable.

Suggestions:

Ensure that mentors have the relevant expertise to be able to provide appropriate support and guidance to campaigners.

Put a review system in place to ensure that mentors follow up on the actions they agree to do for campaigners.

Consider recruiting mentors from beyond the Refugee Council to broaden the pool of expertise available and help with the sustainability of future projects.

Mentors' perspectives

At the end of the project, mentors were asked for their perspectives on the mentoring aspect of the REP. Seven of the eight mentors gave feedback about their involvement in the project.

Mentors were asked what attracted them to become a mentor for the REP. The responses illustrated a variety of motivations for their involvement, but for those who did not work regularly with RCOs, the desire to work directly with these organisations featured highly.

It appealed because I admire the work of community organisations meeting a real and immediate need and wanted to be able to offer support and share my experiences, as well as learning more myself.

Wanted to find out more about how RCOs work, what they do etc.

The idea of working directly with an RCO. I saw being a mentor as a partnership rather than only teaching them things.

I thought it was an important project for both the RCOs and the Refugee Council. It would give me a better insight into the work of RCOs as I was new to Refugee Council.

Mentors who had much experience of working with RCOs prior to their involvement in the project mentioned factors that had influenced their decisions to become a mentor.

I had been enthused by my contact with the project on the training modules.

Really wanted to help the organisation to develop skills to campaign for members of their community.

I thought I could help the organisation not only in developing their campaign plans but primarily to help the organisation to recruit more members and volunteers and to connect back to their community and get more support for their campaigning initiatives.

The mentors described the types of work they had done with their mentees, both during face to face meetings and actions outside of those times. This included:

- Thinking about the scope of a campaign and pinning down what campaigners wanted to achieve.
- Discussing how a campaign can complement existing initiatives.
- 'Thrashing out ideas'.
- Helping to focus down activities.
- Assisting in the development of campaign and funding proposals.
- Identifying 'next steps'.
- Discussing the content of case studies.
- Providing information about Prospective Parliamentary Candidates and previous election results to establish competitiveness of a seat.
- Weighing up the pros and cons of campaign.
- Encouraging campaigners to do background research so they were prepared to answer questions thrown at them.

- Working out who has the power and think strategically and outside of their borough in terms of support for the campaign and who to call upon.
- Discussing the development of a research proposal.
- Identifying what outputs will come from a campaign.
- Discussing ways of campaigning with limited support and resources.

Mentors were asked to identify what they felt had gone well in their mentoring relationships. Several mentors felt that it was good to use their expertise (both personally and as part of a large NGO) to help support smaller organisations develop campaigns.

I have been able to advise them on how to work with RCOs. My general understanding of policy and the sector has been useful for them.

Felt I could use my experience to guide them.

Hopefully it worked well having someone from the Refugee Council coming. I have been getting them to think more strategically outside the borough and the existing relationships so they can step up a gear.

Mentors also appear to have enjoyed the time they have spent with the campaigners, and were positive about the interactions.

Personal contact went very well and was interesting to hear how they started and the issues their community faces. There was an ease around how issues were raised – a dialogue.

It has been positive to have time together to help develop ideas.

Been very welcoming, friendly and willing to listen to our ideas.

I got a real sense of us building something together that was better because of our collaboration.

I appreciated his enthusiasm to get something done even with little support from the community.

One mentor mentioned that the support received from the REP Coordinator prior to the meetings was invaluable. When mentors identified things they had thought had not gone so well, the main problems identified related to the difficulties encountered when trying to meet up due to busy schedules, and the time scales allocated to their involvement being too short.

The time has been short as we have only had a couple of meetings. I would be happy to do something like this again, but ideally over a longer timescale.

It's been difficult to organise a meeting with them – meetings can get cancelled. Lack of capacity for them – in principle they are committed.

Trying to fit into my diary.

I think I would try to avoid being a mentor again – not that it's been awful but my job is just too busy.

When you visit you see how busy they are – getting constant phone calls and apologetic, important day job.

They may not get everything together in time for the election.

Timescale has been tight. Started on 30th October and it's now early March. My involvement hasn't gone on for long enough and they're now in a position to go ahead but data gathering took too long... Personally I think it needs to be a longer term thing. Five months is not enough given the level of involvement that is realistic.

I was really busy and didn't contact them, when I contacted them after a gap of about 6 weeks, they didn't take me up on the offer of a meeting - so I suppose that says two things, one that it is a pretty hefty time commitment with someone in a busy role, and two, it was quite a one-sided relationship – I had to chase them, when they could have got in touch with me at any time.

Communication with him was very hard. It was not easy to get him, even when I was offering to travel to his office. And then he suddenly [went away] without letting me know.

The last two quotes above show some frustration on the part of mentors about the ways in which campaigners were communicating with them, and a feeling that mentees should be responsible for taking things forward as much as mentors were. These problems suggest that it may have been beneficial to organise meetings and be clear about expectations from the outset, so people keep their diaries free and know what their responsibilities are.

Suggestions:

The period of the mentoring relationship should be extended so there are more opportunities for interaction.

At the beginning of mentoring relationships, both sides should agree expectations and future meeting dates.

Some mentors highlighted how much they had enjoyed being part of the project. It has also made them think about how the Refugee Council can work with RCOs in the future on campaigning activities.

It has been a pleasure and I have thoroughly enjoyed my contact with [the organisation] and I know that it does not stop here!

I have really enjoyed it and they seem to have appreciated the meetings. It would be interesting to think about what support organisations may need. I would be really keen to think about how things like the REP can fit in with the wider package of support Refugee Council can offer e.g. through our website, but am aware that there are resource implications.

I learnt a lot from the REP. One lesson is that there is huge potential in RCOs to campaign, but this potential needs to be developed. The Refugee Council can be a strong campaigning organisation if it works with RCOs side by side. But I am also aware that this requires resources.

Suggestion:

Refugee Council considers the types of support it can give RCOs to campaign beyond projects like the REP, and also develop more campaigning with RCOS.

7. Funding

Each campaigner was given £1,000 to take part in the project. This money was given to each individual involved, so the amount received per organisation varied from £1,000 to £3,000. This money was provided to support the campaigns by compensating towards the time spent on the work by the campaigners and the cost of the campaigns themselves such as travel expenses, child care expenses, costs of campaigning tools, stationery, postages, telephone and fax, costs of printing, volunteer expenses, and organisational overheads.

For some of the participants, this was amount of money was not deemed sufficient to cover the work they were doing as part of the project.

"I had to use volunteers who had to travel so money was not enough and still not enough to cover everything. So we need more funding in order to move forwards with this, if we really want to."

Organisation 1

"The funding was insufficient."

Organisation 8

"As much as the grant was useful in terms of getting to the venue and things like that, in running a campaign it's not sufficient and we've subsidised the costs by using other existing work such as our AGM."

Organisation 6

A facilitator who was involved in delivering elements of the training suggested that a different model of funding could be adopted to help to ensure that funds are available to support defined campaign activities, and to reduce the risk of organisations signing up purely for monetary purposes rather than a commitment to campaigning. The suggestion involved giving organisations a smaller up-front payment and then being able to apply for funds from a central project pot of money on the basis of planned activities.

During the focus group, a discussion took place about whether participating in REP would help RCOs to gain their own funding in the future to pursue campaigning work. As a result of the way that the REP was structured, one campaigner feared that this was a model that funders would prefer to adopt whereby funding would be channelled through a larger organisation and distributed to smaller ones. Other participants disagreed that this was the case and that it was clear what was involved in the project when organisations signed up to be part of the project. REP was more than a funding opportunity – it was a project to develop people's skills through workshops and other guidance so they are empowered to conduct their own campaigns. In other contexts, RCOs may have been happy to pay for such learning. One campaigner suggested that a way for RCOs to gain recognition and increased funding for their participation in projects such as the REP would be for funding applications to be submitted by the Refugee Council jointly with the organisations who were going to be involved. It was also suggested that Refugee Council could support RCOs in making funding bids and talk to funders about the value of giving grants to RCOs.

Suggestions:

The amount of money given to participating organisations should be assessed to make sure it covers costs, or a different method of distribution could be developed.

The Refugee Council could consider submitting joint funding applications with named organisations for future projects.

The Refugee Council could support RCOs in applying for funding for campaigning work. This could be incorporated into the programme of support for organisations within the project.

8. Suggestions of other types of support

Campaigners who attended the focus group and those who were interviewed made a few suggestions of ways that may improve future projects along these lines. Picking up on a theme that has been mentioned previously in this report, some campaigners would like to know more about what others were doing so they thought it would be good for there to be ongoing contact between organisations facilitated by the Refugee Council after the training sessions finished.

"...if a representative of each organisation could meet once a month to share and discuss, networking."

Organisation 1

"It would be useful for the group to get together again periodically. I know that people move on and it can be logistically difficult."

Organisation 5

When questioned about the possible use of online resources such as an extranet, one campaigner was hesitant about the usefulness of such methods, but thought there may be potential if systems were in place from the outset of the project.

"Online resources can be easy to set up but not sure what the uptake would have been. It may have been good during the workshops phase. Perhaps something could be set up at the beginning so that people would get familiar with it and carry on using it at a later date. That would potentially be a good way to network without losing office time."

Organisation 5

However, feedback from some of those delivering the training sessions indicated that the participants had very different levels of confidence using online media, so this may not have been helpful for all participants. One organisation had engaged in work with another large NGO during the course of the project, and they felt that there would have been merit in the Refugee Council engaging more with that work so that the campaigning could have a greater impact. As it happened, the ongoing activities with the other NGO has allowed this organisation to access more support than they would have got had they only engaged in the REP.

During the collection of opinions at the end of the project, two campaigners specifically mentioned that the significance of the evaluation exercise itself. One thanked the researcher for providing the opportunity to give feedback and potentially help to shape future work, and another underlined the importance of receiving the report compiled as a result of the feedback.

Suggestions:

Refugee Council to facilitate ongoing meetings of campaigners after formal training sessions have ended.

Explore the potential of using an extranet or other online support. This should be put in place from the outset of the project so people get used to using it while there is still regular contact between organisations.

Ensure that participating organisations receive this evaluation report.

9. Future campaigning

One of the primary aims of the REP was that the campaigners felt empowered to carry out campaigning work as a result of the training and support they received. Previous discussion in this report indicates that most campaigners felt much more confident in undertaking this kind of work, and felt a lot more knowledgeable about how to conduct campaigns. As the project drew to an end, many of the participating organisations' campaigns were still in their infancy. Campaigners were asked if they would be carrying on the campaign they had started during the project.

"Yes, because we have got skills and when you learn skills it is to use them in your life so I think we will be using them in our day to day work if there is something that we want to campaign for." Organisation 2

"Yes, definitely. It's given us a lot to take away, a lot of information." Organisation 4

"Definitely carrying on what we're already doing. Got some good contacts and leads on things that are going on...One of the great things about working for a small grassroots organisation is that you identify the needs of your community...In the future we may do more individual campaigns. It is possible that we wouldn't be working on such a large issue on our own – if we did that we'd need to join with other organisations with more resources to help achieve policy change." Organisation 5

"You can use it in other issues as well now we know the processes." Organisation 5

"Going to carry on campaigning. Building a coalition of RCOs and grassroots organisations to campaign and overcome destitution." Organisation 6

Some of the campaigners saw the REP as the first step in their own work, but also thought that the project could be built upon, and their involvement could be expanded to help them support other RCOs.

"Of course we'll continue to campaign but after that, because of the basic way we start at the moment, it's better to continue in our relationship and you put more RCOs in the group, it would be very helpful."

Organisation 2

"And I'm also thinking about capacity building, how to help us to train others. How to fund us. Give us money to train others. There are many in the community, many groups."

Organisation 1

"...and to convince other organisations...we have to convince other organisations so when they say 'you're working with Refugee Council, oh you waste your time' [we can say they are wrong]."

Organisation 2

Suggestions:

Consider having these organisations as a group of refugee campaigners that gets added to with other RCOs as other projects develop.

Consider working with these campaigners to help deliver future capacity building to other organisations.

Support these campaigners to be champions of this type of project.

10. RCOs' involvement in campaigning

The REP provided an opportunity to assess whether RCOs consider campaigning to be something that they should be actively involved in, and to identify the barriers to running campaigns faced by RCOs.

REP participants were asked whether they thought that RCOs should be involved in campaigning on issues relating to their communities. Most agreed that it was, as illustrated by the quotations below.

"Yes, if the need is there and we see an opportunity to make an impact on the issues that affect our community. We would do it however it would present itself. If it was an issue in our community we'd do it, but also if you asked us to jump on board a campaign that affected all refs we'd jump on that...It's very important.

Organisation 4

"Yes because it is their issues and they are the ones that are suffering from it so it would be effective to do it themselves."

Organisation 7

Although it was deemed to be an important activity for RCOs, participants acknowledged that there were many barriers to their participation in campaigning activities, some of which are related to the fact that they are refugees.

"Campaigning is something people should definitely be doing. Sure they're willing to do things but the barriers are that they don't have the capacity in terms of the resources, knowledge, mentoring training and things like that."

Organisation 6

"I think the main barriers are the workload and the energy that you have to put into a campaign to make it remotely successful."

Organisation 4

"I think knowing the process itself, can be intimidating and because the language is not our first language or we don't have personal experience on the topic maybe."

Organisation 5

"Another barrier I can see is accessing doors, people who may influence policy to bring about change. That's a very important barrier."

Organisation 2

"And a big barrier for me, not for everyone, is a lack of trust. You can learn everything, you can be a genius but if they don't trust you, they can't hear you. And for all of these things is a lack of trust."

Organisation 2

“And also one of the challenges, what I notice is that it’s a slow process. Lack of motivation from if I have to talk about our organisation, lack of motivation from our councillors, because they are the ones that hold the key for the MPs and again they are taking too long to help you because for them it’s not urgent. For you, you have a deadline, you want to move forward in six months but for them it’s not urgent...Also there is a lack of support, that’s what I’ve noticed really, from other RCOs in the neighbourhood. You approach them, you talk to them you need to collect case studies, data, the number of people who are intending to make fresh claim applications, ‘no it’s not part of our agenda’, we don’t deal with it. So lack of motivation.”
Organisation 1

“Campaigns take a long time to develop, even for large organisations, take a long time to develop. A campaign should not be expected for small organisations on the basis of the training unless there was ongoing coaching. Just having a year is not sufficient at all.”
Organisation 6

The participants highlighted that as well as there being general barriers to campaigning, the subject of destitution also created additional difficulties, particularly in terms of finding information about a population that is largely hidden.

“We’d like a figure of the number of people who are destitute asylum seekers. It’s another issue because we’ve tried to find out, to get statistics, the number of destitute asylum seekers even around London, it was still quite difficult to get that figure.”
Organisation 7

“You are talking about difficulties doing the campaign or barriers. I am thinking about how to get in touch with refused asylum seekers. You don’t know who they are, you don’t have their address. You have maybe to use your network of people you know if they have come across some of these people, go to this place and you will find some refused asylum seekers. So in our case we were referred [a particular agency] where people go to get something to eat so you have to go there and met them and ask them questions.”
Organisation 2

Suggestion:

The length of the project could be increased to ensure that there is enough time to cover the training and fully develop and launch a campaign.

11. Relationship with the Refugee Council

The REP was developed in order to increase the partnership work it conducts with RCOs, and as a contribution to the charity’s commitment to placing RCOs at the heart of the work it undertakes. The Refugee Council is the largest charitable organisation working with refugees and asylum seekers, and has sometimes been on the receiving end of criticism from smaller organisations due to a perception that it dominates the sector and attracts a disproportionate amount of funding.

At the end of the project, campaigners were asked if working on the REP had changed the way they felt about the Refugee Council. There was a mixture of responses with some saying that they did not really have an opinion before they joined the project or that they did not really know much of the Refugee Council’s work before participating. Others offered positive responses.

I think it's a positive start. If you give us a chance. Empowered us and you have given us the advice and whatever we need to be effective to help our own people so we are the refugees and this gives us a chance to deal with our issues. It's better because we are the community who are suffering, who are there and we can come with our issues and raise them, and this has guided us.

Organisation 7

"Yes, but them being involved along with us is empowering because we can't do it alone."

Organisation 5

"They can't do it and we can't do it..."

Organisation 7

"I think so. I think because the Refugee Council has campaigned alone on some of the issues and now getting RCOs themselves to be part of the campaign did work for me."

Organisation 5

"More contact with RCOs. I mean when Refugee Council is thinking to campaign about something we would wish them to get in touch with RCO and maybe ask if they can take part in the campaign."

Organisation 1

"I can say it's a good starting point. Like we have started this project so my advice is to carry on that way."

Organisation 2

"My point of view I can say before I have one experience. I went a long time ago to attend an event at Parliament organised by the Refugee Council and people, MPs and Lords. And in my view, what I have as a perception at that time Refugee Council brought only 2, 3, 4 asylum seekers for experience, and they put them to show them you can tell your story and then they are there any everyone is there saying 'oh no'. But now like this, some Refugee Community Organisations, they are part of that campaign, it will be better then to expose only some refugees in the corner and tell their stories. I think now it is good."

Organisation 2

"Involving organisations rather than bringing some group of refugees." Organisation 1

"To be fair, before we start the Refugee Council is the whale eating the small fishes. Everything is siphoned by them, everything is channelled through him, and he is doing everything...it's just that they should include us in the process of decisions and at the same time, with other main funders."

Organisation 8

Although this is only a small proportion of RCOs who operate across the country, the response from these campaigners indicates that this model of working can help to change negative perceptions of the Refugee Council through capacity building and partnership working. The fact that some campaigners talked of empowerment indicates the things may be moving in the right direction, and the project has had success in equipping campaigners with the knowledge and expertise to go it alone.

12. Conclusions

The feedback received from the campaigners involved in the REP has shown that all participants feel they have gained something from the experience. As a result of the training and support they received, participants are better equipped to plan and run campaigns, and most appear committed to doing so. This report highlights some specific learning that can be

taken forward in the development of future projects to ensure that those working in RCOs have the knowledge, information and contacts needed to run successful campaigns.