

# Reducing Barriers for Refugees Accessing Choice Based Lettings Schemes

An Evaluation of the Refugee Housing Association's  
Choice Based Lettings Project

A Report to the Refugee Housing Association  
October 2005

**Refugee**  
Housing  
Association



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# **1. Executive Summary**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The Choice Based Lettings Project (CBLP) was joint-funded by the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and the Refugee Housing Association (RHA). The project was designed to assist refugees in Brent and Camden with new housing allocation systems which are now operating in the two boroughs and across a selection of other London local authority areas. Choice Based Lettings systems (CBL) replace the Central Allocations System (CAS) of social housing. Potential tenants have to bid for properties that they are eligible for, rather than simply wait to be allocated accommodation by the housing department or registered social landlord. Under CBL potential tenants have to bid weekly or bi-weekly using the internet, telephone, text messages or coupons sent through the post.

A needs assessment conducted prior to the project start indicated that refugees were not accessing the system because of a lack of understanding of what CBL is and how it works, language and education problems, a lack of computer literacy, lack of connections to local resources such as libraries, less ability to make informed choices about local areas, , unrealistic expectations and financial health or other social difficulties.

This evaluation was commissioned by RHA from Transparency Research with the aims of ensuring the project's objectives were met, identifying strengths and weaknesses, developing a best practise model, reporting to funders and stakeholders, and contributing to future fundraising. The methodology of evaluation included quantitative research but focused on qualitative investigation. Quantitative research demonstrated poor response rates; however there were 17 respondents to interviews.

The project is funded by the ERF for one year, from January to December 2005. The evaluation was conducted in August 2005 to facilitate the inclusion of the report's findings in the ERF self evaluation report to be submitted in October 2005. At the time of writing, the project has another 3 ½ months to run.

## **1.2 Project Objectives**

The project's primary objective is to increase refugee access to CBL systems in the London Boroughs of Camden and Brent through the use of refugee volunteers recruited by six Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) (three in each borough) who would assist clients with bidding. Additionally the project aims to increase refugee use of mainstream services such as one stop shops (OSS) and libraries through increased use of CBL systems. This evaluation concludes that the CBLP largely met its objectives. There were initial difficulties in recruiting a Development Worker and partnering RCOs resulting in delays in the recruitment and training of participating volunteers and clients.

The work plan of the CBLP was to help the six RCOs recruit, manage and train three volunteers each. Each volunteer would be trained in CBLP and then proceed to help service users bid for properties. Overall the objective envisaged that 70 service users would be helped and 140 hours of volunteer time would be spent with service users.

Due to a number of factors the project only recruited four RCOs (three in Brent and one in Camden) and 11 volunteers, with currently 43 clients assisted. However, it is *on-target* for assisting 70 service users, and likely to be substantially *over target* for the amount of time spent helping services users.

The research indicated that the service delivered by volunteers and RCOs was generally of a high quality and service users are more confident with bidding. However, the research also highlighted considerable disillusion with CBL systems themselves, i.e. Locata and Home Connections. Nonetheless, continued use of the system will eventually lead to improved housing outcomes for refugees.

### **1.3 What Worked Well**

A number of practises, impacts and outcomes of the CBLP highlighted what worked well. This included greater awareness of housing related issues (i.e. knowledge and information) within RCOs, resourcing RCOs for insurance and volunteer policies, the training of volunteers and staff, improved networks and contacts in the sector including with statutory bodies, the increased capacity of RCOs, and the fact that delivery via RCOs was a highly effective method of provision as refugees were more likely to approach RCOs in the first instance for housing advice.

### **1.4 Where Improvements Could be Made**

Equally, the research has highlighted where improvements could be made.

- Partner RCOs were not identified in the early stages of the project's development which made recruitment of partners difficult and had knock-on effects on the whole project.
- Alternatives to CBLS should be promoted more, as well as consideration of how the current systems work.
- Within RCOs there was a need for increased housing knowledge generally, and training in CBLS should have been part of a wider housing training program.
- RCOs are also often very small organisations reliant on one or two staff or volunteers which can make them vulnerable to disruptions when staff are ill, on leave or under pressure.
- RCOs need capacity building to deal with such problems. In one instance not enough service users were coming forward about CBL related problems, an advertising strategy would have helped to raise the profile of the project.

## **1.5 Additional Issues Highlighted by the Research**

The research also raised other concerns:

- Housing was highlighted as a serious issue for many RCOs, and additional training and resourcing will be needed to deal with other problems.
- The CBL systems themselves were the source of considerable frustration and disillusion amongst service users who had high expectations of these systems, which often will take years to allocate housing due to general housing shortages.

## **1.6 Best Practise**

In terms of refugees accessing CBLs, the research identified a number of best practise elements which evolved from both what this CBLP had done well and also where things could have been improved. These are:

- Conducting a needs assessment of refugees knowledge and access to CBL.
- Delivering the project through RCOs with central co-ordination by RHA the Development Officer.
- Planning well in advance with RCOs and identifying their resource needs,
- The provision of high quality training, using personnel from LOCATA (Brent) and Home Connections (Camden), local Library staff, as well as specialist volunteer bureau trainers.
- Networking organisations with each other.
- Managing the expectations of service users.
- Meeting service users' language needs through use of same language volunteers,
- Integrating housing training for volunteers,
- Working with the statutory sector
- Properly evaluating the project.

## **1.7 The Strategic Position of CBLP**

Policy-wise, the CBLP sits within European Policy as an *integration* activity. Within national policy the CBLP is an *access to services* activity that is dealing with the crucial area of housing access for refugees.

Within the refugee sector, the effect of the CBLP is a lot more hands on, and had some impact on the profile and perception of housing in the refugee sector. Firstly, the project filled a gap in service provision, and prevented bad experiences in the housing sector being transmitted across communities as gospel. CBLs is now more widely known amongst RCOs and community members are now using the system more. The improved networks as a result of the CBLP have had positive effects and are likely to continue to do so. Furthermore, the CBLP has also had discussions with Sunrise and is likely to be incorporated into future intensive integration training for refugees leaving the care of NASS.

## **1.8 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The research concludes that despite a slow start, the project is on target for meeting its core objectives and has delivered a high quality and much needed service. Recommendations include continuation of the project with reference to particular difficulties to overcome and an emphasis on using the best practise model for other potential CBLPs.

## **2. Introduction**

In 2004 Refugee Housing Association (RHA) received funding from the European Refugee Fund (ERF) to run the Choice Based Lettings Project (CBLP). This was a joint funded project with the other funder being RHA itself.

The evaluation was commissioned from Transparency Research to establish the extent to which the project met its objectives, the strengths and weaknesses of the project, a best practise model of working future CBLPs and its overall strategic position within the refugee sector. This report considers these issues.

### **2.1 Background**

RHA was established nearly 50 years ago and has historically been involved in the provision of housing and support for refugees and asylum seekers. The CBLP is a year-long project designed to assist refugees with bidding for housing in their local authority areas, in particular, Brent and Camden.

Brent and Camden were chosen because both have adopted Choice Based Lettings systems (CBLs) and had both hosted the “Welcome to Your Library” pilot project. Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, “Welcome to Your Library” was designed to lead the way in improving access and quality of services in libraries for refugee and asylum seeker populations.

### **2.2 Choice Based Lettings Schemes (CBLs)**

Choice Based Letting is the housing allocation system that has replaced central allocations systems (CAS) within social housing. Under the CAS, tenants and potential tenants were awarded “points” depending on their particular circumstances, and when a property became available they were offered the property. If they refused the property they would normally be suspended from the system in accordance with the one-offer only policy. CAS often took many years for prospective tenants to go through. CAS are gradually being replaced with CBLs. Brent is part of Locata, which is run across Brent with Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon and Hounslow local authorities as well as local Housing Associations. Camden uses another system called Home Connections. Locata bidders can bid in their own borough and for some “cross borough” properties (usually hard to let properties), and some households are eligible to bid for housing association properties. Home Connections users can currently only bid for Camden housing department properties.

Choice-based systems still allocate tenants’ and potential tenants’ points according to their circumstances, however, these points are then translated into bidding points or into a banding. Properties are advertised in various media and users of the system can then use their points to “bid” for properties which match their households eligibility criteria (normally based on the number of bedrooms required). The top four or five points-bidders with the

highest needs assessment are invited to view the property and are then able to refuse or accept as they see fit. Refusing a property does not lead to loss of points, position or priority on the local housing register in most cases. The key advantage in this system is that tenants can choose a property in a particular area or block of flats that they want to live in. This differs from the old system where applicants can not choose their property. A key disadvantage is users have to bid regularly (i.e. weekly or bi-weekly) to stand a chance of being invited to view a property, rather than the one-off process that applied with the CAS. Unlike CAS, if you do not bid for a property you are not considered for it, even though it might be suitable. One problem which afflicts both CAS and CBL is the chronic shortage of suitable housing stock across London, and in practise while one may have been on a waiting list for years before being offered a place, one may now have to bid for years before gaining a tenancy.

The bidding system itself uses various ways to record bids. Both Locata and Home Connections use telephone<sup>1</sup>, mobile phone text messaging and the internet. Locata also uses coupons, allowing people to use the post to bid for properties. These services are available in various languages. Locata is available in English, Albanian, Arabic, Cantonese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Mandarin, Polish, Punjabi, Pashto, Russian, Somali, Tamil, Thai and Urdu. Home Connections is available in English, French, Somali, Bengali and Chinese.

### **2.3 The Need for the CBLP**

A needs assessment conducted by RHA prior to the launch of the CBLP suggested that CBL was not known widely in the refugee community and that refugees were not accessing the system. Problems included technical issues such as the reliance on the internet as a means of delivering the system (although other methods are used, the internet is the primary means of access) and language difficulties. Staff at RHA sent out about 20 questionnaires to refugee community organisations (RCOs) across London to explore the situation, which confirmed that refugee communities were not using these new housing allocation systems. The main issues were:

- Lack of understanding of the system – participants have to be active in bidding to be allocated housing.
- Languages and education – although information is available in translation it has to be found on the internet or has to be requested if it is not a chosen key language. Housing language can also be complicated, and some refugees have had no formal education.
- Computer literacy – many refugees have not had prior access to computers.
- Lack of connection to local services and internet provision – few had a computer at home or knew where to access one.
- Time allowed for bidding – For a bid to be value, bids must be placed on certain days each week or fortnight.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Locata uses a premium rate number charged at 25p per minute, Home Connections uses a local number.

- Knowledge of the local area – refugees new to areas are less able to make informed choices.
- Unrealistic expectations – placing an unsuccessful bid often discouraged refugee users from bidding again.
- Financial, health and social difficulties – refugees also often have complex other needs which mediate their ability to negotiate CBL schemes.<sup>2</sup>

The CBLP project was conceived as a scheme to build RCO capacity by helping them involve volunteers to inform and educate community members about the Locata and Home Connections schemes. RHA would support RCOs to do this through staff and volunteer training on CBLs and volunteer management. Volunteers would, in turn, assist service users with bidding for housing and using the new system. In this sense the CBLP is a very simple project.

A highly simplified example of the work plan is:

- Recruit Development Worker
- Development Worker recruits 6 RCOs in Brent and Camden
- RCOs recruit 3 volunteers each
- Volunteers trained by RHA and other organisations (where necessary)
- Service users assisted to use the CBLs by volunteers

Within this, of course, would be a great deal of liaison, planning, partnership working, networking and data collection.

## **2.4 The Evaluation**

Transparency Research was commissioned by RHA to undertake an independent evaluation of the CBLs project. In particular, the evaluation was undertaken in order to:

- Ensure objectives of the project are met,
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the project,
- Develop a 'Best practise' model for refugee access to CBLs,
- Provide a report to the funder,
- Contribute to securing future fundraising,
- Report to stakeholders.

## **2.5 Methodology of Evaluation**

There was dual focus to data collection: qualitative data and quantitative data.

Quantitative data included information collected from service users and volunteers. Service users and volunteers completed identical questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the evaluation period. This was to identify a baseline and measure changes as a result of participation in the project. Response rates were low; however, 14 volunteers and six refugee clients returned survey information.

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<sup>2</sup> Application for CBLP to the European Refugee Fund 2004.

Volunteers and staff also provided feedback on training in the form of course evaluation questionnaires, which were provided as MHP standard forms. There were 23 forms returned from 4 courses. Data was stored and analysed using MS Access. Copies of the surveys are reproduced in the appendices (see Section 8.1 on page 33).

However, as per the original brief for the evaluation, the focus of the evaluation was qualitative. Transparency Research conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals from the organisations involved. The interview schedules were agreed between Transparency Research and staff at RHA. Respondents included RHA staff, RCO staff, volunteers, service users and RCO fora. In total 16 individuals were interviewed. 13 of these took place face-to-face at respondent's workplaces, RCO premises or peoples' accommodation and three took place over the telephone. An additional response came as a written reply to interview questions due to the interviewee being too busy for verbal interview. In total, then, there were 17 respondents. Interpreters were used where necessary. The response rate was slightly less than intended as some potential respondents were unavailable or had left their posts. All service user and RCO interviews were conducted with respondents being first made aware of the confidentiality of their responses, although all were happy to be recognised as actually being interviewed. The interview schedules are reproduced in Section 8.2 (page 37) and the respondents are accredited in Section 8.3 (page 43).

## **2.6 The Timetable of Evaluation**

Quantitative information was collected by RHA staff from February 2005 onwards and returned to Transparency Research periodically. The interviews were conducted in late August and September 2005. The evaluation covers the period February 2005 to September 2005.

Given the resources applied to the evaluation, the evaluators feel that this is a thorough investigation of the CBLP and can be treated as a good appraisal of the project. However, it needs to be noted that this *is not an end-of-project evaluation*. Due to requirements from the ERF and the fund evaluators, this evaluation has taken place while the project is still continuing its work. This has particular relevance when considering the outputs and outcomes as these can only be quantified absolutely at the end of the project's life cycle. Nonetheless, what follows is an accurate representation of progress to date. The timescale of the project is discussed in Section 3.4 (page 18).

### 3. Meeting the Projects Objectives

#### 3.1 The Objectives

The CBLP had a number of objectives. These are directly related to the needs uncovered by the needs assessment detailed on page 8. These are best examined in the following table:

**Figure 1: Table: Objectives, Activities and Targets for the CBLP.**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Target</b>
Increase refugee's access to CBLS	Recruitment of Development worker	Qualified worker in post
	Recruitment of 6 RCOs	6 RCOs recruited
	Briefings given to RCO staff by CBLS providers	6 RCOs attending CBLS briefing
	CBLS bidding	70 Service users assisted in making bids (whole project). 140 Volunteer hours spent bidding with service users.
	Production, translation and distribution of housing vocabulary sheets	Housing vocabulary sheets translated into 6 community languages and distributed to RCOs, libraries, OSS and CBLS providers
Increase awareness of refugee issues amongst CBLS providers and OSS employees	Design and delivery of briefings on refugee issues in accessing CBLS	Briefings delivered to 2 CBLS teams, 2 OSS teams and participating library staff
	Referral of service users to RCOs by CBLS providers	At least 35 service users referred direct.
Build capacity of RCO and RHA staff in volunteer management and recruitment	Delivery of training on volunteer recruitment and management to RCO/RHA staff by external consultants.	Volunteer recruitment/management training delivered to 6 RHA and 6 RCO staff
	Volunteer recruitment and management by RCOs	18 Volunteers recruited (3 per RCO) and supported by RCOs
	Matching of service users with volunteers by RCOs	At least 70 service users appropriately matched with volunteers by RCOs
Enable RCO and RHA volunteers to support vulnerable refugees in accessing CBLS	Design and delivery of project training for volunteers	Delivery of project training to 18 volunteers
	Production and distribution of volunteer information pack	Volunteer information pack distributed to and used by 18 volunteers
	CBLS bidding (volunteers assisting service users)	70 service users assisted in making bids by volunteers over the life of the project. 140 volunteer hours spent bidding with service users.
	Production, translation of distribution of basic housing vocabulary sheets	Housing vocabulary sheet translated into 6 community languages and distributed to RCOs, libraries and OSS and CBLS providers.
Create sustainable working relationships between RHA, RCOs, CBLS, One Stop Shops OSS and libraries	Partnership group meetings	2 Partnership groups established with membership comprising representation from RHA, RCOs, CBLS providers, volunteers, libraries and service users.
		Partnership group meetings held quarterly throughout project

		lifespan.
	Referral of service users to RCOs by CBLs	35 service users referred direct.
Develop a best practise model for successful inclusion of refugees in CBLs	Partnership group meetings	2 Partnership groups established with membership comprising representation from RHA, RCOs, CBLs providers, volunteers, libraries and service users. Partnership group meetings held quarterly throughout project lifespan.
	Identification and collection of relevant project data	Identification of data to be collected and design of feedback/monitoring forms with external consultant for 2 days at project start Establishment of systems for the collection of evaluation data over the project lifespan Collection of relevant evaluation data over the project lifespan.

### 3.2 The Extent to which Targets were Met

Here we report on those targets and the extent to which they were met. Analysis of performance follows in Section 3.4.

**Figure 2: Table: Targets and Evaluation of Extent to which Targets were Met.**

Target	Evaluation
Qualified worker in post	Development Worker was in post by 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2005.
6 RCOs recruited	4 RCOs recruited
6 RCOs attending CBLs briefing	4 RCO staff plus 3 RCO volunteers attended. 6 RHA staff also attended.
70 Service users assisted in making bids (whole project). 140 Volunteer hours spent bidding with service users.	Currently 43 assisted, and 172.5 volunteer hours spent (but see footnote 5)
Housing vocabulary sheets translated into 6 community languages and distributed to RCOs, libraries, OSS and CBLs providers	Currently in print. Translations into Arabic, Albanian, Somali, Farsi, French and Spanish, and available as PDF document.
Briefings delivered to 2 CBLs teams, 2 OSS teams and participating library staff	Briefings delivered to West Hampstead and Brent Library managers.
At least 35 service users referred direct.	Cancelled: Referrals not possible from CBL providers.
Volunteer recruitment/management training delivered to 6 RHA and 6 RCO staff	Volunteer training delivered to 2 RCO staff. RHA volunteer strategy developed past these goals and RHA and RCO staff now have significantly different needs.
18 Volunteers recruited (3 per RCO) and supported by RCOs	Currently 11 are recruited.
At least 70 service users appropriately matched with volunteers by RCOs	Currently 43 matched.
Delivery of project training to 18 volunteers	Currently 11 volunteers trained.
Volunteer information pack distributed to and used by 18 volunteers	Information pack distributed to all 11 volunteers.

2 Partnership groups established with membership comprising representation from RHA, RCOs, CBLS providers, volunteers, libraries and service users.	This took the form of a quarterly forum with RCOs, RHA and volunteers attending.
Partnership group meetings held quarterly throughout project lifespan.	Currently two have taken place and one is scheduled.
Identification of data to be collected and design of feedback/monitoring forms with external consultant for 2 days at project start	These were agreed and completed with Transparency Research.
Establishment of systems for the collection of evaluation data over the project lifespan	
Collection of relevant evaluation data over the project lifespan.	
<b>ADDITIONAL ITEM:</b> Library inductions provided by Brent and Camden library service for volunteers.	This extra activity took place in addition to the project target outline.

### 3.3 Survey Responses

#### 3.3.1 Profile of Volunteers

Eleven individual volunteers provided limited demographic information. Four were female and 7 were male. The average age was 34. Three were from Iraq, three from Somalia and one each were from Bosnia Herzegovina, Nigeria, and Kosovo. Two did not indicate their country of origin. Of their housing there was less information, although two indicated they were in council housing, three in the private rented sector and one in temporary accommodation.

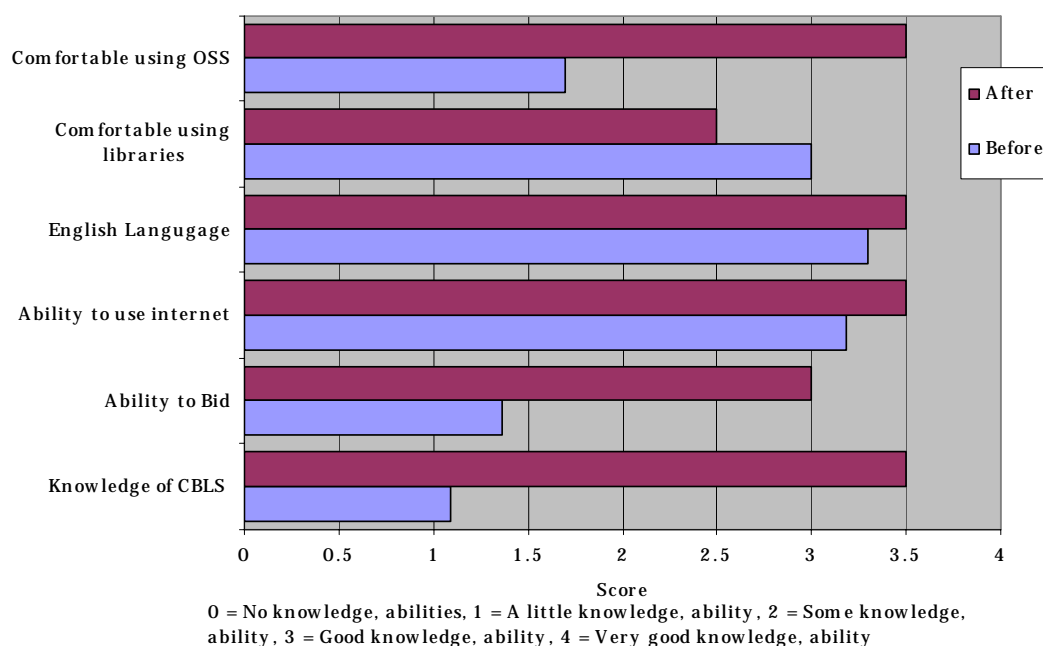
#### 3.3.2 Volunteers' Knowledge and Abilities

Key data on changes in volunteers' abilities and knowledge were recorded in survey forms that they were asked to be completed both before and after being involved in the CBLP. Volunteers were asked to assess their abilities and knowledge with regard to CBLS, bidding, using the internet, English language, and using libraries and one-stop-shops (OSS) by indicating on a scale. The scale was as follows, with ability or knowledge increasing from left to right.

No abilities, knowledge	A little ability, knowledge	Some ability, knowledge	Good ability, knowledge	Very good ability, knowledge
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Eleven volunteers completed forms prior to receiving training in CBLS, unfortunately only two completed forms later on in the project. Nonetheless, the results indicate significant improvement in the knowledge or abilities. This is summarised in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Volunteers Self-Assessed Abilities and Knowledge Before and After Training (Mean Scores).**



The above figure shows there was significant improvement in knowledge of CBLS, ability to bid and use one-stop-shops (OSS). However, given the response sizes, these results have to be treated with a degree of caution.

Volunteers and RCO staff were also asked to evaluate their experience of training sessions run by RHA. These included training on the two CBLS systems and using the Library, and for RCO staff training on using volunteers.

Respondents were asked the extent to which their objectives had been met, the personal relevance of the training, and the effectiveness of the style, method, pace and materials used in the actual training. These were assessed as marks out of four indicated on the scale below. They were also asked to indicate if the training was of “Great Benefit”, “Some Benefit”, or “No benefit” to them.

Very effective, very good, totally	4	3	2	1	Not effective, not at all, none
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**Figure 4: Table: Training evaluation: Mean of participants rating (out of 4, where 4 = Very good, totally, very effective )**

Evaluation Measures	Training Sessions			
	Home Connections Briefing	Locata Briefing	Library Training	Volunteer Training
Extent to Which Objectives Met	4.0	3.7	3.2	3.4
Relevance	3.8	3.0	3.2	4.0
Style	4.0	3.6	3.3	3.8
Method	3.8	3.7	3.0	3.5

Pace	4.0	3.4	3.5	4.0
Materials	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.3
% Great Benefit	75	43	100	25
% Some Benefit	25	57	0	75

Figure 4 records the average results, which indicate that overall the courses were very well received, relevant, and achieved their training objectives with all the marks at 3 or above and many at the maximum score of 4 out of 4. No respondents indicated that their training session were of no benefit, all of them regarded them as great or some benefit.

The interviewees universally reported that the training was useful. However, for some of the organisations involved it had raised more issues than it dealt with and they experienced increased demand in housing related queries, leading to them considering their need for more comprehensive training in housing. All RCOs thought that volunteers were adequately supported by RHA despite one misunderstanding.<sup>3</sup>

Overall the surveys indicate that the volunteers and RCO staff benefited from the training, and this is backed up by the qualitative research. Staff felt volunteers were adequately trained and supported by RHA.

### 3.3.3 Profile of Refugees

Four individual refugees provided limited demographic information. All of them were female and the average age was 35. Two were from Somalia, one was from Kuwait and one Eritrea. One was in council housing and three were in temporary accommodation.

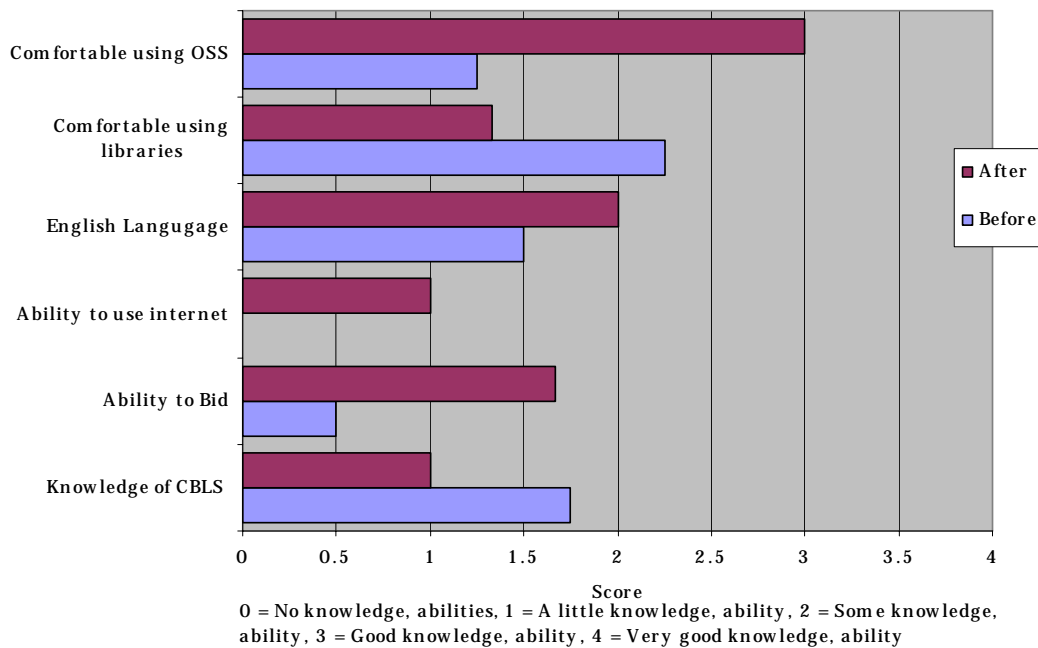
### 3.3.4 Refugees use of CBLs

Refugees were given the same form as volunteers to assess their knowledge and abilities using CBLs. Responses were less reliable as only 4 filled in the form before being assisted by a volunteer, and 3 after. Nonetheless the results are given in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Refugees Self-Assessed Abilities and Knowledge Before and After Assistance (Mean Scores).**

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<sup>3</sup> In short, volunteers cannot claim journey costs when they have already bought a travel card for the entire week. This was not entirely clear to one informant.



The responses here are somewhat contradictory and may suggest there may have been confusion over what was meant on the form – for example, knowledge of CBLs is seen as going down which is at odds with the ability to bid going up! Although the survey form was designed to be short and simple (two sides of A4), there may be design issues. The form itself – while designed taking into account both data needs and respondents abilities - was not piloted and inclusion of this process within evaluation may have significantly changed the way it worked. Service users may also have needed additional help or encouragement in using the form or interpretation which was not readily available. In order to establish identical baselines on knowledge and ability the same form was used for both volunteers and service users, which may have also lead to confusion. Future evaluation should take these issues into account and plan appropriately.

The qualitative evidence is far clearer in what the service users gained from being assisted with CBLs.

Contact between the RCO and the service users was the way that most had heard about the CBLP, whereas one had received letters from the council saying that she now had to bid on the system, but was receiving help from the RCO concerned. In terms of reaching refugees the evidence suggests that working through RCOs is a very effective method.

While none of the informants had managed to change their housing, all reported that they were more familiar with the CBLs system. Language was a persistent problem for some of them, and some had been matched with a volunteer that did not share a common language with them. Surprisingly,

while this caused one error,<sup>4</sup> the interaction between the volunteer and the service users was described as fine, and the service users were using the volunteer's assistance weekly and were continuing to bid.

However, one RCO staff member reported that literacy and numeracy were pressing problems amongst the service users and that while they may sit at the computer and be able to bid, they did not sometimes understand what they were bidding for.

The remainder of service users felt their volunteers were knowledgeable and helpful dealing with CBLs. While some service users were not 100% confident in using the system they felt that in time they would become so.

All the service users had high expectations of using the system and it appeared that many expected it to solve their housing problems overnight. There was considerable disillusionment with the service from Locata and Home Connections. One RCO staff member noted that as far as they were concerned the CBLs systems were failing their service users, whereas another recorded that managing expectations and keeping their CBLs profile (number of people staying with them, current housing conditions etc.) up to date was a primary concern.

Despite the disillusionment, all the service users felt that they had gained through using the CBLs in so far that they now knew the system, and knew what to do to improve their housing. Without it, they felt they would simply be in their current situation. For many of the service users they were still learning the system but they felt that they would get better in using it. All service users also felt that there was no alternative to Locata or Home Connections, so in a sense they had to understand this system as it was the only one available!

All service users wanted to emphasise their current levels of housing need. This included four people in a one bedroom property (two adults and two children), eight people (two adults and six children) in a two bedroom property, and accommodation that is highly unsuitable for a hyperactive child. All service users expressed their frustration with the current system and this was reiterated by RCO staff who indicated specific issues:

- CBLs were slow to update information on housing need or circumstances of applicants,
- CBLs were not responding to housing need (in particular overcrowding),
- Amongst refugee communities change in family structure is very frequent which includes partnership breakdown *and* often reconciliation, and additional children being born.

The practise of using CBLs by service user informants, in their own experience, has not been heartening. However, it is clear that the aims of the project are being met with all informants saying that they were bidding and

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<sup>4</sup> The volunteer helped two service users bid for a property up several flights of stairs which neither of them wanted. They were unable to communicate "stairs" between them; however this problem has now been resolved!

using the system, and were continuing to do so. Bidding by service users is taking place weekly or bi-weekly in most circumstances.

### **3.3.5 Quantifiable Targets**

The qualitative evidence suggests that the CBLP is progressing towards its main targets, although it has in practical terms been necessary to reduce those quantitative targets dependent on recruitment of RCOs. In terms of the quantitative outputs the progress is as follows:

- The target of recruiting six RCOs is currently at four, with Brent Women's Advisory Resource Centre, Help Somalia Foundation, Iraqi Welfare Association and Bosnian Resource and Information Centre Kosovo Support recruited. No more RCOs are being recruited. This has some "trickle-down" impacts.
- The target for volunteers is 18 to be recruited, trained and given volunteer information packs. Currently 11 have been recruited, trained and given packs. This is roughly in line with the number of RCOs recruited (three per RCO).
- Six RCO staff were to be trained in volunteer management and retention. Currently two have attended.
- The number of service users bidding has a target of 70, this is currently at 43. Time taken to bid with service users is already over target with 172.5 volunteer hours spent<sup>5</sup>. In total there have been 57 meetings between volunteers and service users to date.

Despite the lower number of RCOs recruited, the key beneficiary group of refugees would appear to be on-target for being assisted with only four RCOs delivering the project.

### **3.4 Analysis of Over or Under Performance**

It needs to be noted that the CBLP timetable has been under considerable pressure. The 'official' timetable was 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005. In the first instance, the Development Worker required quite specific skills and it took three attempts to recruit a suitable candidate. As considered in Section 4.2, it took substantial time to get RCOs on board to deliver the project. Although the Development Worker was in post by 31 January 2005, working with volunteers did not start until May 2005. Thus the actual work started five months into the project timetable. Effectively, at the point of evaluation the project has been working for 4 ½ months with 3 ½ months to completion.

Given these circumstances the project is very close to completing its 12 month targets within the 8 month timescale. Despite the lower recruitment of RCOs it is likely the more important service user targets will be met. Using a simple linear understanding of what has been achieved to date and extrapolating to what will be achieved at the end of the project, the performance against the

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<sup>5</sup> Although not all hours are spent with service users – some of this time is when people are available but not seeing anybody.

targets for service users is likely to be 76 service users assisted and 307 volunteer hours worked, slightly over target in the first instance and substantially over target in the second.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of quantifiable targets, while some are reduced (i.e. four RCOs rather than six, 12 volunteers rather than 18), service user targets appear to be on course. The housing vocabulary sheets have taken some time to get to printing stage, however most RHA energies during the intervening period would have been dedicated to developing the core service.

One element of the work plan which did not take place was the direct referral of refugees from CBLs providers to RCOs. This was for the simple reason that CBL companies are administrative organisations who do not direct contact with applicants as well as the fact that refugees are not identified as a category within housing register application forms in Camden and Brent.

Overall, this report concludes that the CBLP is *on target* for completion of essential project aims, notwithstanding an effectively reduced timescale. The report also concludes that the quality of work done with refugees is generally of a high quality. There are, of course, further wider impacts of the project and these are discussed in more detail below and in Section 6.

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<sup>6</sup> Service users in 4 ½ months is 43. If that is 9.55 per month, then over 8 months one would expect to see 76. Equally, hours spent is currently 172.5 hours. If that is 38.33 hours per month, over 8 months one would expect to see 307 hours.

## 4. Strengths and Weaknesses

This research was also charged with highlighting strengths and weaknesses of running the CBLP. Much of this information came from the qualitative interviews with stakeholders, as we asked everyone interviewed variations on “what worked well?” and “where do improvements need to be made?” Other elements of good and not-so-good practise became apparent throughout the research and are highlighted appropriately.

### 4.1 What Works Well, and Why

The **knowledge and skills** gained by volunteers and RCO staff have been highlighted by respondents as things which have worked well. The project planned for the training of volunteers and realised this as a need for RCOs to be able to deliver the project. The training was well received by all and provided enough skill and knowledge to the volunteers to be good at helping the service users, and also built skill capacity within RCOs.

**Networking – improved contacts** between RCOs, umbrella bodies, housing departments, CBLS providers, and RHA were cited often as key advantages. RCOs felt better connected to refugee fora, and housing departments and generally were better able to deal with housing queries than prior to involvement with the CBLP. RCOs now have names and faces to deal with rather than monolithic “departments”.

**Building capacity of RCOs.** RHA realised early on that RCOs needed additional capacity to be able to deliver the project. The initial plan was to support their working with volunteers through training and covering volunteer expenses. Later in the project it became apparent that further resourcing was needed including help with policies and procedures and awareness of legal responsibilities and these were included as additional project activities .

**Statutory organisations (and contractors) are more aware** of refugee issues in housing. It was felt that Locata and Home Connections were more responsive to refugee concerns than before, and greater connection between housing departments and RCOs had increased understanding.

**Personal Contact.** Approaching RCOs face-to-face more than via telephone, letter or email has been cited as a positive factor in the CBLP, reassuring RCOs of their progress and approach and helping forge good working relationships.

**Management** by RHA was universally felt to be very good by respondents, with good relationships established between RHA and RCOs.

The **needs assessment** of refugees was completed before commencement of the project and identified the barriers to refugee participation in CBLS. This enabled assistance volunteers provided to be appropriate and supported by relevant training.

**Using RCOs as a means to reach refugees is almost an essential requirement** of running projects such as CBLP. RCOs and other community organisations have advantages in grassroots networks, language and cultural knowledge. A mainstream approach would almost certainly have found it impossible to engage as many refugees without using RCOs.

**Co-ordination from a central organisation** worked well in addressing particular issues. Co-ordination from a central organisation gives the advantage of keeping focus in hand and providing additional resources and expertise when the need for these become apparent. An overview position is also advantageous in identifying broad policy issues, for example, while projects may encounter specific issues there may be problems in common that could be dealt with under a broader co-ordinating body.

#### **4.2 Where Improvements Can be Made, and Why**

There were of course other areas where improvements were felt could be made.

**Getting RCOs on board earlier** would have improved responses and take up by RCOs. RHA found that by the time they approached RCOs to deliver the CBLP many were interested but had already committed their time over the year. Earlier partnership building would have identified resource requirements earlier, have allowed RCOs to plan the CBLP within their work plans and allocate staff and volunteer time. The current structure of project funding for RCOs does not allow enough flexibility to take on new projects; more flexible approaches could limit these problems.

**Some organisations did not have appropriate cover** in place within their organisations such as volunteer recruitment processes, insurance, supervision and lone working policies. RHA set out to establish some volunteer policy support (lone working, volunteer placement, staff training, volunteer recruitment and management) although lack of insurance and volunteer policies was unexpected and raised extra costs. The financial cost of public liability insurance, that covered RCO volunteers, required for RCOs to participate in the project was not included in the initial funding application. Extra funds were applied for to cover expenses incurred by RCOs because of project participation from RHA Community Initiatives Fund which supports work by RCOs. Payments of £250 which covered staff, administration and additional insurance expenses were paid by the Fund to each RCO.<sup>7</sup>

There was a weakness in the project in that it did not provide information about **alternative housing options** and schemes alongside the promotion of CBLP bidding (despite knowing the reality of housing allocations, and that some service users accessing assistance would not gain housing even if bidding appropriately). Service users interviewed felt there was “nothing else” other than CBLP. This highlights the need to build RCO capacity in housing advice, which would present CBLP in context and as one option amongst many.

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<sup>7</sup> ERF Interim Report 1 July 2005.

**Managing expectations.** There was an extreme level of dissatisfaction with the CBL schemes themselves, which was not anticipated as a barrier to refugees accessing the projects services. Dissatisfaction with CBL schemes was a symptom of high expectations of the CBLs, which simply will not be able to satisfy the demand for social housing. The worry is that disillusioned service users will not feel encouraged to continue bidding. Continuing and additional work in this area is required to make it clear to service users that they are likely to have to continue bidding regularly over a period of years before being allocated appropriate housing.

**RCOs, especially small ones, are sometimes reliant entirely on the energy and dedication of one or two staff.** Where that member of staff is overstretched, goes on holiday, falls ill, or has to deal with pressing issues, delivery of the CBLP has been temporarily halted. Partnership working or deadlines are not always prioritised. RCOs need to have adequate strategies in these eventualities to maintain services and commitment to projects.

**Generating referrals.** Occasionally, generating enough service users has been a problem. This may be affected by the geographical area the organisation serves, or the needs of their particular community (for example, general level of English, age, length of residence in the UK). However, a planned strategy of advertising and broadening the CBLP would have been advantageous in the first instance, and a bank of possible advertising resources with the necessary funding would also have been useful.

There were some weaknesses with the evaluation. While qualitative research can be modified “on-the-fly” to fit needs (i.e. questions rephrased or triangulated), **quantitative research should be piloted** and survey tools designed to get higher response rates than the quantitative research presented here. Refugees in particular may need language support, explanation or encouragement to fill in forms.

### **4.3 Wider Issues Raised by the CBLP**

**The CBLP has highlighted housing as a serious issue** for some RCOs and in some instances raised more problems than it solved. However, recognising a problem is the first step towards solving it and the RCOs concerned have responded appropriately, and continued work with RHA as a specialist housing provider may provide the way forward for some organisations. There is a **need for increased housing knowledge** amongst RCOs. Not all queries are related to CBLs – there are many issues including landlord and tenant problems and repairs. RCO volunteers and/or staff felt that they should be able to provide support over a series housing issues and such CBLP training should be incorporated within broader continuing housing training.

A corollary to this is that **RCOs are often managing crises** or find themselves spending all their time advocating on behalf of service users. RCOs

need to actively progress towards becoming service providers, and there is a need for training and capacity building across the sector.

The greatest dissatisfaction was expressed with housing departments, Locata and Home Connections themselves, both by RCO staff, volunteers and service users. Some felt that allocations were difficult and the current points system did not adequately reflect housing need. While there was little bad to say about their knowledge of the system or ability to use it, **the CBLs system itself came under consistent criticism.**

The **disillusion in CBLs should also be considered by the CBLs providers.** Perhaps there is a means of automating bidding for service users based on criteria they choose to make sure that they “keep their hand in” through disillusion or other reasons they may choose not to bid (ill health for example). Although this would remove some elements of choice, clever use of criteria and other systems could provide a scheme preferable to people simply giving up on CBLs.

## 5. Towards a Best Practise Model

### 5.1 What is Best Practise?

Best practise is not a clearly defined phrase which points to specific forms of behaviour. However, it has been used to determine those practises, policies, or procedures which are either ethically correct or highly efficient in producing desired outcomes. In this evaluation through looking at what works and what does not, we attempt to derive some elements of best practise in a CBLP

### 5.2 A Tentative Best Practise Model for Successful Inclusion of Refugees in CBLs

**Needs Assessment of refugees in the local community.** Identifying the needs of refugees in particular areas is crucial to successfully enabling refugees to access CBL schemes. Identification of specific needs as well general ones. For example, established refugee communities may have fewer needs than newer ones, and different communities have specific cultural practises which may mediate any intervention.

**Delivered through RCOs.** The delivery of the service through RCOs provides numerous advantages including saving on duplication costs. RCOs have the advantage of immediate and tangible connections, trust from community members and advantages in terms of familiarity with language and culture. In terms of access to CBLs, RCOs are best placed for identifying specific need and delivering the right training and knowledge to refugees.

**Co-ordinated from a central organisation.** Refugees often have multiple issues that require attention and the role of co-ordination in delivering CBL is important. There is a danger that certain RCOs may encounter difficult or further issues that they are unable to deal with without additional help or advice. Co-ordination from a central organisation gives the advantage of keeping focus in hand and providing additional resources and expertise when the need for these becomes apparent. An overview position is also advantageous in identifying broad policy issues, for example, while projects may encounter specific issues there may be problems in common that could be dealt with under a broader co-ordinating body.

**Planned well in advance.** RCOs and other potential partner organisations need time to incorporate new schemes into their work plans and allocate staff and resources. Refugees need RCOs that have the training and capacity to deliver CBL systems, and RCOs should be involved in planning stages of future projects involving partnership in order to best meet these needs.

**RCOs are resourced** – in a number of ways. RCOs require a wide variety of resources. For example, there may be the need for supporting measures including making available policy, insurance and practical assistance in organisation and management, providing assistance with recruiting volunteers and providing the training. This should also include potential financial resourcing for expenses, costs incurred in organisational

development and project participation. This may include further resourcing in terms of funding RCOs on housing advice or advocacy work more generally.

**High quality training.** Whether the service is provided by volunteers or paid staff, training is essential to ensure that volunteers will be able to assist service users in bidding.

**Networking.** Organisations are more able to respond to service user needs or queries, find the right point of contact in other organisations, plan collaborative work and make representations in a networked environment. Networks should be encouraged in every relevant direction, for example, not only other RCOs and for a, but also libraries, OSS, and other statutory service providers. Refugees accessing CBL may need to deal with council housing departments or other agencies and a well networked RCO can facilitate this.

**Advertising strategy.** Where there is identified need but service users are not taking it up an advertising strategy needs to be implemented to increase uptake. Simply put, refugees need to be aware that CBLs exist, and assistance with them is available.

**Managing service user expectations.** It has proven very important to manage refugees' expectations, especially in areas where demand for social housing outstrips supply significantly and the prospect of being re-housed only comes after years of bidding. Maintaining morale and a consistent, regular and valid bidding pattern amongst service users is highly important to the long term success of CBLPs.

**Language needs.** Refugees often have language needs and many with primary childcare responsibilities are likely to take considerable time to acquire functioning English abilities. It is therefore very important that information is provided in the most accessible format possible for them to be able to take part in CBLs effectively.

**Skills in CBLs integrated with other housing skills.** Additional training in other areas of housing should be made available to those volunteers interested in order to expand their service over time and provide refugees with more comprehensive housing advice. There is a possibility of bursary places on larger organisations' training courses as means of facilitating this.

**Integration with statutory sector.** With RCOs more able to approach statutory sector bodies and work with them there is likely to be improvement in their ability to deliver services and refer service appropriately. Refugees themselves will also become more integrated towards mainstream provision.

**Evaluated and Researched.** Ongoing research and evaluation can identify emerging issues, assess performance and calculate benefits. By examining management, processes, policies and procedures and impact upon service users, volunteers, and staff, the long term impact of projects can be assessed. The fact that funders will often require evidence that their funding is spent in accordance with their priorities means that collecting research and evaluation

is now integral to project management. RCOs should also be resourced or trained to better equip them to deal with the information that they need to draw out of their activities. Long-term evaluation should also be considered to assess the long-term impact on housing amongst refugee groups and whether or not CBLS is addressing the needs of refugee communities (in particular overcrowding and change in household size).

## 6. The Strategic Position of the Project

### 6.1 European Refugee Fund Policy

The CBLP is joint-funded by the European Refugee Fund (ERF). The ERF was set up in 2000 for an initial five year period to assist member states in receiving asylum seekers, refugees and other displaced persons from third countries. The fund was conceived as having three main objectives. These were:

- To enable suitable reception arrangements for refugees and asylum seekers, including ensuring fair and effective asylum procedures in order to protect the rights of the person seeking protection
- To support the social and economic integration of refugees, insofar as this contributes to social and economic cohesion
- To create or improve conditions under which refugees can make an informed decision to leave EU territory, should they wish to do so.

In accordance with this there were three main types of activity the ERF could be used to finance, that on *reception*, that concerning *integration* and that concerning *voluntary return*. There was also provision within the ERF for innovation, which has historically included awareness raising, information and networking activities. The CBLP, however, sits firmly within the activity of *integration*.

The integration of refugees within ERF parameters is for those people whose stay in a member state is likely to be of a lasting or stable nature. Integration activities include assistance with housing, helping refugees adjust to the host society, helping refugees empower themselves. Project funded under this objective also include integration activities such as language tuition, job search and training and job creation activities.<sup>8</sup>

The ERF is administered in each member state by a state-appointed national authority. In the UK, this is the Home Office, which also administrates national funds for refugees and asylum seekers (the Challenge Fund and Purposeful Activities Fund).

### 6.2 Home Office Policy

Home Office Policy is broadly similar to EU policy in its core objectives and is covered in some depth in the *Integration Matters: The National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, itself based on the 2000 policy document *Full and Equal Citizens*. The strategy is concerned with integration, not voluntary return or reception of asylum seekers, and considers itself only with refugees and not asylum seekers, i.e. those who have been recognised as refugees and granted

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<sup>8</sup> DG Justice and Home Affairs Mid-term Evaluation of the European Refugee Fund Final Report Part A: Synthesis Report, December 2003, PLS RAMBOLL Management.

Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection, rather than those who's application is awaiting decision.

According to *Integration Matters* three factors contribute to refugees' successful integration. These are:

- Refugees can achieve their full potential as members of British society
- Refugees contribute to the community
- Refugees can access the services to which they are entitled.<sup>9</sup>

Activities which contribute to refugees achieving their full potential often have the goal (distant as it may be in some cases) of employment. Examples include English language training, job training, qualification or re-qualification, work experience and an open and fair response from employers.

Contribution activities includes supporting RCOs, combating negative stereotypes, encouraging refugees into voluntary work, dealing with racism and working with host communities.

Access to services activities includes helping refugees access housing, education, social and health care. Clearly, the CBLP is an *access to services* project.

However, it needs to be noted that housing is persistently mentioned within *Integration Matters* as a crucial element of integration. "Stable and safe accommodation", it notes, "is an essential pre-requisite to integration without which refugees are much less likely to be able to focus on achieving their full potential and contributing to the community."<sup>10</sup>

Thus in terms of European and national policy, the CBLP sits as an *integration* activity that helps refugees *access the services* to which they are entitled. Moreover, it deals with a specific part of integration policy which is essential to other elements of integration, and thus can be regarded as a central to government efforts within this area.

### **6.3 The Strategic Position Within the RCO Sector**

The strategic position of CBLP within the RCO sector is a lot more hands-on and grassroots than its involvement with EU and UK policy. There was scope within the evaluation to consider the impacts of the CBLP on the profile and perception of housing within the refugee sector.

In the first instance our respondents in RCOs felt that a gap in service provision was being filled by the CBLP. As the needs assessment indicated, refugees were not accessing CBLS, and this project provided RCOs with an extra skill to advise their service users. It was also felt that sometimes bad experiences are passed from person to person within the refugee community, i.e. one person having a bad experience with housing would influence others

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<sup>9</sup> *Integration Matters: A National Strategy for Refugee Integration*, Home Office, IND Corporate Communications March 2005, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Integration Matters*, p. 25.

in a similar negative attitude. This project trained service users in an appropriate way to access housing and prevented this. It was also felt that some RCOs and service users had gained valuable confidence in approaching and using public services.

Other impacts in the sector are more wide-ranging. Prior to the project not many RCOs had heard about CBLs. Increased knowledge amongst RCOs means that service users are now using the system and there has been a change of attitudes in some organisations. Long term impacts will, if people continue bidding eventually mean that housing outcomes improve.

The RCO sector also works more positively when approached in a more personal way. Letters and emails are less successful than phone calls and face to face contact. The benefit of this is that it creates a more approachable and effective working relationship between parties, and contributed to the successful growth of networks.

The CBLP has raised wider issues for RCOs in terms of providing housing advice and services and raised the profile within the community. Alternatives to bidding for accommodation in London where people have few bidding points or are in a low band should be sought out where possible.

Improving networks in the sector has been a definite positive outcome of the project with organisations more linked to refugee umbrella organisations and each other. Partnership between grassroots organisations is likely to be a long-term outcome amongst RCOs.

There will be further impact if use of CBLs leads to changes in policy decisions in as far as access and allocations are determined. The project has highlighted dissatisfaction with housing and housing services. The stronger networks created as a result of the CBLP may eventually lead to consolidation of political pressure.

The CBLP has also had discussions with Sunrise – the integration program for successful asylum seekers – and it is likely to be incorporated in future intensive integration training for refugees leaving the care of the National Asylum Support Service. RHA is part of the West Yorkshire and Humberside Sunrise pilot and works with Sunrise pilot providers in London.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Conclusions**

#### **7.1.1 On CBLP Targets**

- The CBLP got off to a slow start due to recruitment problems. At the time of evaluation, the project has been running for 4 ½ months with 3 ½ months to completion.
- The CBLP is not likely to meet its targets for the recruitment and training of 6 RCOs and 18 volunteers, however,
- The CBLP *is* on course for meeting its core targets. It is likely that over 70 refugees will be assisted with CBLP, and well over 140 hours of time will be spent by volunteers assisting refugees.
- The service delivered to refugees has generally been of a high quality and has achieved its goal of informing them about CBLP.
- Working relationships between RCOs and RHA have been productive, and indeed there has been better networking all-round between RHA, RCOs, statutory bodies and refugee fora.

#### **7.1.2 On CBLP Practise**

- The CBLP is an innovative project which has generated a lot of learning.
- Not everything worked according to plan, but this has highlighted important areas of what works, and what does not, and allowed the creation of a best practise model.

### **7.2 Recommendations**

#### **7.2.1 On RHA's CBLP**

- That continuing the work of the CBLP continues in one form or another – by training RCOs in CBLP housing outcomes for refugees are in the long term likely to improve.
- That service users may need continued encouragement to continue bidding once help from volunteers ceases.
- That service users with low bidding points or in a low banding should be realistically counselled about their prospects and potential alternative.
- That further research is conducted on the long-term impacts of the CBLP.

- That training in CBLP is complemented by broader training in housing issues.
- That RCOs are properly resourced to deliver the CBLP and other housing related services.
- That in the future RCOs should be included in the planning stages of projects which potentially involve them.
- That RCOs should be encouraged to make more use of community resources (such as libraries, one-stop-shops) to deliver services more effectively.
- That service users are introduced to community resources.
- That stakeholders involved in Sunrise takes full note of learning from this CBLP.

### **7.2.2 On CBLP Practise Generally**

(from Section 5.2)

- Before a project is commenced, a needs assessment of refugees should be undertaken to identify all the relevant issues that refugees need help with.
- Projects should be delivered primarily through RCOs. RCOs have immediate and tangible connections with their communities, have established trust and are familiar in terms of culture and language.
- Co-ordination should take place centrally.
- Activities should be planned well in advance and partnership networks also established early.
- Resource implications should also be identified early on in the project's lifespan, and contingency made for unforeseen circumstances.
- Where necessary, training should be delivered professionally to a high standard.
- Contact between partners should frequently be face to face. This fosters better working relationships and trust between organisations.
- Resourcing advertising the service to potential service users needs to be implemented in the planning stage and executed early on.
- Managing service users' expectations to be realistic is crucial in establishing a long-term bidding pattern.

- Language needs of refugees need to be considered in all stages of the project.
- Training in CBLs needs to be integrated with training on broader housing issues of relevance to service users.
- RCOs should be more integrated with statutory sector bodies and find it easier approaching them.
- Projects should be researched and evaluated and survey forms need to be piloted.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Copies of Surveys Used in the Evaluation

#### 8.1.1 Volunteers and Service Users Survey

##### REFUGEE HOUSING ASSOCIATION – CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME EVALUATION

<b>Question 1. Person filling in form. Are you a...</b>	...Volunteer assisting Refugees <input type="checkbox"/> GO TO Question 2
	...Refugee accessing housing <input type="checkbox"/> GO TO Question 3

<b>Question 2. Have you been trained in CBL? (Volunteers only)</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If yes, when (DD/MM/YY): __ / __ / __ GO TO Question 4

<b>Question 3. Have you received assistance to bid? (Refugees only)</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If yes, when (DD/MM/YY): __ / __ / __ ... GO TO Question 4
	If yes, from whom:

Name: .....

Today's Date: .....

Please tell us about your knowledge and abilities as below. Tick one box only per row.

Question	No knowledge	A little knowledge	Some knowledge	Good knowledge	Very good knowledge
<b>4. Your knowledge of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for accessing housing</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No abilities	A little ability	Some Ability	Good Ability	Very good ability
<b>5. Your ability to bid for properties on the CBLS</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Your ability to use the internet</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7. How would you rate your English language abilities?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Very much
8. How comfortable are you using library services in London?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. How comfortable are you using one-stop-shops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(If you are accessing housing)

From which Organisation is your volunteer from:.....

Please tell us the following information:

10. Gender	
11. Age	

12. Number of people living in your current housing	
13. Number of people applying for accommodation with you? (i.e. how many people will move to your new house if you get it?)	
14. Number of bedrooms in current housing	

15. Do you have central heating?	YES/NO
16. Do you share your bathroom/toilet with non-household members?	YES/NO

17. When did you first apply to be on the housing register	DD/MM/YY
18. When did you make your first bid to CBLs?	DD/MM/YY
19. How many bids have you made?	

20. Current Housing	Temporary	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Housing Association	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Staying with Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Private Landlord	<input type="checkbox"/>
	NASS	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (describe)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	.....	

21. Please tell us either (a) In which housing priority band have you been allocated? A B C D or (b) How many bidding points do you have?
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22. How many bedrooms are you eligible to bid for? .....
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23. Have you ever received refugee status or ELR/ILR in the UK ? YES/NO
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24. Please tell us your ethnic origin:

White – British	<input type="checkbox"/>
White – Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>

Black – Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black – African	<input type="checkbox"/>

White – Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Somali	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Black – Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other ethnic group (please describe)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed – White and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....	
Mixed – Other mixed background	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Asian – Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>25. Please indicate your country of birth</b>	
Asian – Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>	.....	
Asian – Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Asian – Other background	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Information gathered in this research will only be used to evaluate the Refugee Housing Association's Choice Based Letting Project.

### 8.1.2 Course Evaluation Surveys



#### COURSE EVALUATION FORM

We are always interested in gaining your views on training courses. This information helps us to improve and update the training that we provide. Please complete the form and put it in the box provided or send it to the Training & Development team at Cambridge House. All information will be treated in strictest confidence. Many thanks.

**COURSE** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

**VENUE** \_\_\_\_\_

#### Pre-course

1. Were the course aims and objectives clearly detailed on the intranet?  Yes  No

If no, please give details of how they could be improved.

2. How was your booking request handled?  Very well  Well  Satisfactorily  Poorly

If poorly, please give details.

3. Did you receive clear joining instructions for the course?  Yes  No

If no, please give details.

### Training Course

4. What did you hope to gain from this course?

5. How well did the course meet *your* objectives?  
(Indicate your view on the scale below by circling the number.)

Totally                    4            3            2            1            Not at all well

Give reasons:

6. How relevant were the topics covered to your own situation?

Very relevant            4            3            2            1            Not at all relevant

Give details:

6. Which parts of the course were most helpful to you?

7. Were there any parts of the course which were not helpful?

8. Could any of the topics have been left out altogether?            Yes            No

If yes, which ones?

9. How effective was the trainer?

a. Style            Very effective            4            3            2            1            Not effective

b. Methods            Very effective            4            3            2            1            Not effective

c. Pace            Very effective            4            3            2            1            Not effective

d. Material                      Very effective                      4                      3                      2                      1                      Not effective

10. Did you discuss your training objectives with your line manager before attending this course?

Yes                      No

If not, why not?

11. Please rate the benefit of this workshop to you in your work.

Great benefit                      Some benefit                      No benefit                      Don't know

12. Any other comments:

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

## **8.2 Interview Schedules**

### **8.2.1 For Service Users**

How did you first come into contact with the CBLs?

Did you have an understanding of CBLs before you began using the project's services? What CBLs information had you received prior to using the project?

Did you see any printed project information? Was it useful? What was good/bad about them for you? Who passed you the information?

How did the work with the volunteer go? What was useful to you?

How much contact did you have with the volunteer? Where and when? What type of contact (ie – telephone, face-to-face etc)?

Did you volunteer seem knowledgeable about the CBLs? Was it explained to you?

Do you feel you were matched well with your volunteer?

Have you tried to get new housing through the CBLS? (Have you been successful?)

How has the help you got from the volunteer helped you?

Have you tried any other ways of changing your housing?

What was your housing situation before you got into contact with the CBLS?  
What is it now? Better/worse

What do you think has gone well with your contact with the volunteer and the CBLS

What do you think needs to be improved with this?

If you *hadn't* come into contact with the CBLS or the volunteer, what do you think might be different today?

If the project is stopped, what do you think would be the consequence for people like yourself who would use the project?

If you were to highlight one good thing and one bad thing about the project, what would that be?

Do you feel more confident in making bids with CBLS? Do you feel you understand the system better?

Do you feel more comfortable accessing local services such as the library? Have you joined the library? Do you make use of library facilities for reasons other than the making bids?

Anything else you want to add about the project?

### **8.2.2 For Volunteers**

How were you recruited into helping with the CBLS? What motivated you to volunteer for the project?

How did you find the training? What was good/bad/could be improved?

What did you think of the volunteer information pack?

Could you describe how you were put into contact with potential service users?

Could you briefly describe what you actually did when you met up with service users?

Was there any follow up work done?

Do you feel there was adequate support for volunteers from RHA?

Did you feel the training helped you when you were working with the service users? Were there any unexpected gaps that you were unable to help with?

How many service users have you worked with? How do you feel you have helped them? Where do you think they need more help?

What contact did you have with the management of the project?

How do you feel the project has been managed? Good/bad/could be improved?

What do you feel would happen if the project stopped? What would the consequences be for the service users?

If you could highlight one good thing about the project and one bad thing about the project, what would it be?

Do you feel you've gained new skills through your involvement in the project? If so, what are they?

Has the project had any effects on the organisation you volunteer through? If so, what?

Anything else you want to add about the project?

### **8.2.3 For RHA**

About how you first got involved.

The original premise of the project – what was the need that was being addressed? (Why Camden and Brent and not elsewhere?)

Was there a needs assessment of potential service users? If so, what? If not, how was the need assessed?

How was the project originally planned? Where did the original idea come from? Who was involved?

How was the process decided on? Why did you want to assist refugees with volunteers rather than by other methods (indeed, were any other methods considered?)

Have there been any substantial differences in what services were planned and what has actually been undertaken?

There has been a lot of partnership working in this project. Exactly who have you been working with? Could you tell me the benefits to the project of working in partnership? Have there been any difficulties?

In terms of service provision to refugees, where did the CBLS sit – was it integrated into other services – was there a referral pathway so that refugees would follow a chain of provision (referral pathway)

What have been the benefits to refugees of using the service? Do you feel this has made a substantial difference to them?

Has there been other or wider impacts – the scheme being replicated or rolled-out to other areas? Is it a possibility?

The aim was to assist 70 refugees – has this been achieved? Have there been any other affects of the activity that you undertook (both for refugees and sectorally – i.e. better housing has had impacts on health, employment, or the activity has lead to changes in the way other organisations work?)

Will there be long-term impact of the project? Both on refugees and on other organisations? What sort of impact?

Do you feel there has been anything particularly innovative about the way this project worked?

Have there been any major difficulties in undertaking this project?

Do you have any thoughts on extending or continuing this project?

Anything else you want to add about the project?

#### **8.2.4 For Refugee Fora**

How did your organisation first get involved in the project?

Did you think it filled any particular gap in service provision for refugees?

Did you attend any partnership group meetings? Were these useful? What was good/bad about them?

Have you noticed any positive effects for your member RCOs as a result of their involvement in the project?

Would it be useful for the project to continue? Do you see a role for your organisation in any continuation of the project?

How much contact did you have with the staff involved in the implementation of the project? Do you feel this was enough? How do you feel RHA staff managed the project?

Did you see the project documentation (housing vocab sheets/volunteer info packs/RCO info packs/data collection sheets & completion instructions)?

What do you think was good about them/could be improved/could be done differently? How useful were they?

In your opinion, what were the things that worked well within the project?

In your opinion, what were the positive effects of the project, both for those involved in its delivery and for those using the service? Were there any issues that made delivery of the project difficult? How do you think these could have been resolved? Would this have needed extra resources and, if so, what would these be?

Will there be long-term impact of the project? Both on refugees and on other organisations? What sort of impact?

Do you feel there has been anything particularly innovative about the way this project worked?

Have there been any major difficulties in undertaking this project?

Do you have any thoughts on extending or continuing this project?

Do you feel the project has changed perceptions of housing within the refugee sector? How?

Anything else you want to add about the project?

### **8.2.5 For RCOs**

How did your organisation first get involved in the project?

Did you think it filled any particular gap in service provision for refugees?

Did you attend any partnership group meetings? Were these useful? What was good/bad about them?

Had you used volunteers before taking part in the project? Has having (extra) volunteers been useful to your organisation? Will you continue to use volunteers in the future?

Do you understand CBLS better within your organisation? Are you better equipped to advise service users about CBLS?

Do you have better contacts for housing queries than before you participated in the project? Do you feel more able to direct housing queries to the right point of contact?

Do you feel more confident in dealing with housing queries from your service users? What further training or information would help in this regard?

Did you have sufficient resources within the project? What could have been different?

What resources do you need to continue the project?

What were your expectations about demand for the service? Has client take-up of the service been lower or higher than you expected?

Has your organisation's involvement in the project generated an increased number of housing queries from service users? If yes, have you felt able to deal effectively with these queries? Were you previously aware that service users were experiencing these types of housing issues?

How much contact did you have with the staff involved in the implementation of the project? Do you feel this was enough? How do you feel RHA staff managed the project?

Did you see the project documentation (housing vocab sheets/volunteer info packs/RCO info packs/data collection sheets & completion instructions)?

What do you think was good about them/could be improved/could be done differently? How useful were they?

In your opinion, what were the things that worked well within the project?

In your opinion, what were the positive effects of the project, both for those involved in its delivery and for those using the service? Were there any issues that made delivery of the project difficult? How do you think these could have been resolved? Would this have needed extra resources and, if so, what would these be?

Do you feel there was adequate support for volunteers from RHA?

Do you have any thoughts on extending or continuing this project?

Would you like assistance in the future from RHA with fundraising /funding applications to allow the project to continue to run within your organisation?

Do you feel the project has changed perceptions of housing within the refugee sector? How?

Anything else you want to add about the project?

### **8.3 Acknowledgements**

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