

Evaluation Report Summary

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Introduction

1. Leaders Together is a mentoring scheme set up by TimeBank. It aims to increase the capacity of grassroots Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs) by matching their leaders with senior professionals from the mainstream voluntary sector for one-to-one mentoring relationships. The pairs commit to meeting for a total of 24 hours over a six-month period.
2. The project began in July 07 and is currently funded by the London Development Agency to run until December 09.
3. The aim of this evaluation is to assess project outcomes and provide feedback from the participants' perspective. The findings are based on: face to face interviews with five pairs, both at the start and conclusion of their mentoring relationships, an analysis of a further 15 mentor self-evaluation forms and 13 mentee evaluation forms, that is a total of 20 mentors and 18 mentees, emails between participants and the coordinator, and interviews with the project coordinators.
4. The completion rate of the final evaluation form is high, standing at 18 out of 24 for mentees (75%) and 20 out of 24 for mentors (83%). At least one of the two participants from each pair that completed 6 months filled in an evaluation form. The project also obtained informal feedback from some of the individuals who did not complete the project.

“ Sometimes I would email my draft procedures and she would check and get back to me with comments. ”

(mentee)

Project outputs

5. At the end of April, the project had made 46 matches. The project is on track to meet the target number of 60 matches.
6. The project set a target of 24 hours of contact time in six months. However, a number of pairs struggled to meet for this amount of time. This is perhaps something that should be modified in the future when working with busy senior professionals.

“ Mentoring has benefited my job as grant giver – it was a reality shock. It very healthy to have first hand experience of the problems faced by RCOs. ”

(Mentor)

7. It is important to note that pairs also communicated by phone and by email. E-mails were especially helpful when editing texts, such as business plans, policy statements and fundraising documents. This virtual communication should be included in the overall time spent together.

Project outcomes

8. Nearly all mentors who completed evaluation forms were satisfied with their personal outcomes. They stated that they had developed their mentoring skills and learned more about RCOs and the lives of refugees.

“ I have been able to improve setting up of boundaries. Dependency hasn't happened. ”

(Mentor)

9. Many mentors also gained tremendous personal satisfaction. They drew inspiration from their mentee and were delighted by the opportunity to make a significant difference to their mentee's professional life and by implication to the organisation the mentee ran.

“ I am full of admiration about how he built a life and how he started something from nothing. How motivated he is to do something for his community. It gives me a perspective on the challenges for my organisation and for me as an individual. ”

(Mentor)

10. All mentees who completed the final evaluation were similarly pleased with their outcomes. Mentees were inspired by their mentors' professional success, and hugely valued greater insight into the mainstream voluntary sector and new sources of funding and support, such as Business Link, NCVO, the Diana Memorial Fund, and UnLtd.

“ The work ethos is different [between the RCO and mainstream sector]. The mainstream give a lot of importance to paper work and to keep everything up to the target. When it comes to BME groups, there is a less record keeping. They do a lot in the field, which is a great achievement. Everything is there, but when it comes to record keeping they are not so good. ”

(Mentee)

11. In addition, mentees felt that they had developed an impressive range of management skills. These include clearer strategic focus, better policies and procedures, better communication with staff and more rigorous HR processes. Many valued help received with fundraising, both on specific applications and for developing a strategy.

“ He let me be aware of the standards required to meet fundraisers demands. [He taught me how to] identify the need, justify it and then go for funding, rather than the other way round. Not: ‘ah here is an application, let’s go for it!’ ”

(Mentee)

12. As well as specific hard skills, mentoring offered a significant boost to mentees’ confidence as leaders - 17 out of 18 respondents reported increased confidence.

“ [My confidence has improved] a lot. If you can prove that there is a need for what you do, then getting the money is no big deal. E.g. I need more space, and I am confident to pick up the phone to the council and say we need more space and this is why – i.e. giving evidence of need. ”

(Mentee)

13. Mentees all felt that their RCOs are operating more effectively and efficiently as a consequence of their own personal development. The main area of improvement was in their newly development management skills. Several RCOs also benefited from mentors’ input into governance issues and in dealing with difficulties within management committees in particular.

“ He put a lot of emphasis in terms of the structure of the Management Committee, whether members are active and whether they support the staff and volunteers. ”

(Mentee)



“ The guidance I’ve received throughout my career has had a huge impact on my personal development and I hoped I could do the same for someone else. ”

Andy Gregg, Chief Executive of London Advice Services Alliance and Leaders Together (mentor)

Andy Gregg and
Alba Arbelaez

“ My mentor has been great. Not only do Andy and I get on well but we have similar skills on some level which helps with the process. Mentoring is not about doing everything for a mentee but guiding and being there to discuss ideas. ”

Alba Arbelaez Head of the Latin American Welfare Group and Leaders Together (mentee)

“ I was not clear about why to collect evidence or how. Now we are documenting what we are doing. E.g. what support are we giving to year 9? What grades did they have? Before we just said: they are fine. But now we look at how that ‘fine’ is measured. ”

(Mentee)

14. A few mentees were contacted six months after the end of their mentoring. This anecdotal evidence suggests that the learning and confidence boost gained lasts beyond the official end of the mentoring process. In addition, in all but one of the six cases, the pair met or spoke on an ad hoc basis after the formal end of their relationship.

“ I have adapted some elements of [my mentor’s] management style. For example, in terms of now having meetings with staff on a weekly basis. Also in terms of support and supervisions to volunteers - we have more frequent meetings now. ”

(A mentee, 6 months after completing mentoring)

15. One anticipated outcome does not appear to be met: only one mentee stated that she had created new links in mainstream VCS networks, forums and partnerships. Given the relatively short period of mentoring, and the time commitment it entails, perhaps it was unrealistic to expect mentees to forge new networks and relations during the course of their mentoring.

16. A number of mentees started mentoring relationships when their organisations were in acute crisis mode. The resulting mentoring focused on crisis management and survival, and did not tackle some of the longer-term development objectives. Both mentors and mentees remained satisfied with the mentoring relationship. However, the mentors concerned did express some disappointment at not having had the chance to work on professional growth with their mentee.

“ Perhaps [the project] should have more understanding of the refugee organisation, to make sure that it really will be a useful experience. If people are in really grave difficulties, perhaps they can’t really benefit. That is then frustrating for the mentor. ”

(Mentor)



“ I have been privileged to have an insight into Ahmad’s life and I genuinely feel humbled when I talk to him. In comparison I as an individual and the organisations I have led have had an easy life. I don’t think you can ever underestimate the buzz you get from being able to help someone else, even in a small way. ”

Jackie Ballard and Ahmad Mall

Jackie Ballard - RNID Chief Executive and Leaders Together (mentor)

“ At our first meeting Jackie listened carefully to me and assessed my needs. From this she gave me some advice on management issues and at our ongoing meetings we have discussed other queries I’ve had around this and topics such as fundraising. ”

Ahmad Mall from Afghanistan Association Paiwand and Leaders Together (mentee)

17. A small number of mentors, while still benefitting from the experience, found their relationships demanding. In a couple of instances, this related to mentees attempting to use them as free fundraising consultants. In other cases, mentors struggled with their mentees' lack of time-keeping when they met and lack of sticking to agreed deadlines when working together.

“ It has been challenging. When I first met her, her chair came, and he thought I was a volunteer fundraiser. I had to explain that was not my role. ”

(Mentor)

“ It was challenging working with someone who was not very structured. Punctuality and keeping to meeting dates agreed was an issue. P. did not recognise I was taking time out of a work schedule and that I could not just adjust my time or meetings to suit him. ”

(Mentor)

18. While this evaluation has ascertained what outcomes have been met, it has no evidence on the amount of improvement for specific participants. A more detailed evaluation would be required to ascertain the precise distance travelled in the areas in which the participants benefit.

Project operations

19. Out of 38 respondents 28 rated the coordinators as “very helpful” and 10 as “OK”. Most respondents who rated “OK” had chosen not to pro-actively access support. Those that did contact coordinators found them approachable, efficient and friendly. Mentors and mentees also rated highly the social and networking events that they attended.

“ We didn't need much support, but response was fast when we did. ”

(Mentee)

“ The opportunities to get together socially were very nicely done and were very effective. You picked up from others how their mentoring was going and that was stimulating and challenging. It sets the standard quite high. ”

(Mentor)

20. Training received excellent feedback. An analysis of 3 training sessions showed that the vast majority of participants rated every aspect of the training 4 or 5 out of 5. Several mentors suggested that a follow-up training session, a couple of months into the mentoring, would be helpful to address real-time issues.
21. Nearly half mentor respondents stated that they would have appreciated more opportunities to share with other mentors and discuss mentoring issues. Some favoured an online forum, others would have liked a regular – albeit not too frequent – mentor support group.

Recommendations

22. The project may choose to set some criteria for potential mentees to join the programme. This would help eliminate from the start participants who are not fully committed to the process, and hence reduce drop-outs. It would also enable coordinators to prioritise participants whose professional and personal circumstances are stable enough to enable them to benefit from high-level mentoring. Otherwise, there is a risk of under-utilising the high-level calibre of the project’s mentors and diluting the project outcomes. Mentees who are not taken on could be invited to reapply once their circumstances change and be referred to another mentoring service that is less specialised.
23. The coordinators are keen for the pool from which mentors are drawn to be extended to the statutory sector and to independent consultants with relevant management experience. Mentors from the public sector, such as local government, could be particularly helpful for mentees who hold or hope for local council contracts. This would create a greater selection of mentors to choose from and enable more tailored matching.

24. There is scope to shorten the procedures for registering and training mentors, which are more onerous than necessary according to one of the coordinators.
25. The project should consider regular mentor meetings and the feasibility of setting up a Facebook group or other online forum to facilitate peer support. In addition, providing an additional training session once mentoring is underway will enable mentors to deal as a group with issues that arise once they start mentoring. Shifting a training session to a later date will also help to decrease the time investment mentors need to put in at the start, as suggested in point 28 above.
26. With Leaders Together, TimeBank has created and is refining an effective model of peer-to-peer mentoring between voluntary sector leaders, specifically leaders of the mainstream sector with leaders of small Refugee Community Organisations. Given the success of the model, the evaluator recommends that TimeBank consider expanding the project to provide high-level mentoring to the leaders of other grassroots organisations.



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