

Project Final Evaluation

For Projects funded by London Councils ESF Programme
2016-2020

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Evaluation conducted by* (name
and contact details of External
Evaluator):

Samantha Akita

Samantha.akita@gmail.com

Name of Project manager:

Martyne Callender

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1. Project Aims and Activities

Delivered by a partnership network managed by lead partner RedbridgeCVS, the Outreach East Project ran between September 2016 and June 2019. It aimed to improve the employability, health, parenting, life skills, social and financial inclusion of 785 economically inactive (65%) and long-term unemployed (35%) people from the target groups below living in the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge and Waltham Forest:

- Women
- Ethnic minorities
- Older people (50+)
- Disabled
- Lone parents
- Homeless and/or those recovering from alcohol addiction or substance misuse
- Those with a work limiting health condition

This was achieved through recruitment of participants and delivery of project outreach and targeted activities in settings easily accessible to the target groups, for example children centres, libraries, social housing units, in addition to traditional settings accessed by jobseekers like job centres and job clubs. At the heart of the project was a strong co-design partnership with employers to address their needs and London's skills shortages, as well as in work support for both employer and employee.

On completion the project had enrolled 480 participants of which 293 (61%) were economically inactive and 187 (39%) were long-term unemployed.

Activities:

The key activities driving the project were: marketing and recruitment, referral and eligibility checks, enrolment and needs assessment, action planning, information, advice and guidance (IAG), retention tracking and on-going support, training and/or work experience/volunteering, employment support (including job brokerage, supported jobsearch, work trials, guaranteed interview schemes, work placement, self-employment/enterprise) and in-work support to employees and employers).

Throughout their time on the project participants had access to support activities (such as job clubs, coffee mornings, mindfulness, taster exercise classes, celebration and community events, financial support), and IAG sessions delivered by accredited advisers

These activities were delivered by RedbridgeCVS and the project's contracted delivery partners; DABD, London & Quadrant (East Thames), Harmony House, Ellingham and Faith Regen Foundation. Other contracted partners were Adult Training Network, Gingerbread, St Mungo's, New Choices for Youth (NCY), Hope for Havering, Make a Difference at Maddies (MADAS) and HCT Group. These organisations withdrew from project delivery largely as a result of the many challenges faced by the partnership in the delivery of this project, which will be examined in this evaluation.

The project's unpaid referral partners were local authorities, specifically London Borough of Redbridge (Work Redbridge, Albert Road and Loxford children's centres) jobcentres (Seven Kings, Leytonstone, Walthamstow, Barking) Redbridge Volunteer Centre, Easy Consultancy, Reed in Partnership, Go Ahead Training, East Thames Customer Contact Team and priority 1 providers (Thamesreach, Shelter and SHP).

The project was funded through the London Councils Grants Committee and from the London Councils European Social Fund (ESF) and has contributed to the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) Growth Strategy for England 2014-2020 by delivering local, individualised support to people disadvantaged by multiple and complex barriers to work and sustainable employment and meeting the needs of employers.

Specifically, project activities contributed to the following aims of the ESIF strategy

- Access to employment for jobseekers and inactive people.
- Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
- Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination

The project

- Engaged economically inactive and unemployed people in activity, which improved their well-being and employability skills e.g. 1-1 personalised support, employability workshops, signposting to health services, work trials, to enable them to progress into work
- Fostered the financial and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups by improving their skills, financial literacy, language; offering vocational training to improve job prospects and providing opportunities for social interaction e.g. social events.
- Provided sustainable, advantageous employment opportunities; supported career progression through skills development and working with employers to make recruitment more accessible to disadvantaged groups.

2. Background

Established in 1990 Redbridge Council for Voluntary Service (RedbridgeCVS) is an umbrella body that works with over 260 voluntary and community organisations in the London Borough of Redbridge. Its mission is to promote a strong, effective and independent voluntary and community sector in Redbridge. RedbridgeCVS' work also extends to neighbouring boroughs such as Waltham Forest.

RedbridgeCVS is part of a CVS network in London, formerly named East London Network, and delivers a range of core services including:

- Volunteer Centre which supports residents to access volunteering opportunities within the local authority and voluntary sector organisations
- TB and HIV awareness projects targeting BAME communities, promoting preventative measures and encouraging the communities to access testing facilities
- Fundraising support to enable voluntary sector organisations to access 1-1 support to apply for funding
- EaST (Employment & Skills Team), formerly East Tenders, which supports disadvantaged groups to progress into sustainable work or training. This department led and delivered the Outreach East project.
- Fit for Fun, which enables local community groups and individuals to access free exercise classes for 20 weeks

RedbridgeCVS has successfully delivered 5 ESF/London Councils projects between 2010 and 2015 and felt best placed to tender for this 2016 – 2018 funding round, due to their track record, experience and learning from delivery of other projects.

RedbridgeCVS wanted to ensure they addressed gaps in provision in this project's delivery boroughs, compliment provision and work in partnership with other services to avoid duplication. In order to do this, RedbridgeCVS ensured they understood the priorities of these boroughs in the following ways:

- Telephone meetings with Regeneration borough leads e.g. Julie Khan (Redbridge) Jane Sherwood (Newham) Terry Regan (Barking & Dagenham)
- Reviewing the employment, enterprise and skills strategies of each borough
- Reviewing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments of each borough (JSNA)
- Conducted 2 focus groups with service users from previous projects that are resident in the boroughs
- Surveyed residents from the boroughs
- Spoke with VCS organisations such as Barking & Dagenham Somali women's association

Common issues identified

- Lack of pre-entry and accredited ESOL provision
- Lack of flexibly delivered accredited ESOL and functional skills to suit the needs of parents or carers
- People lacking basic skills, digital skills and ESOL
- Duplication of employment support provision
- Residents either not skilled or reluctant to work in growth sectors e.g. care, construction and hospitality
- Higher unemployment amongst parents of dependent children, particularly lone parents, ethnic minorities, disabled, those aged 50+, those with a health condition, homeless people and people in recovery.

The 33 residents who participated in the focus group or survey advised of multiple barriers to employment including; no childcare, ESOL, housing issues, ill-health, social isolation. Many felt they lacked the basic skills, confidence, qualifications, experience, understanding of current recruitment practices and employer expectations to compete in a competitive jobs market.

Most had no CV or an out of date one, some had not participated in a job interview in over 3 years, had no qualifications, had not worked for over 3 years, had no previous experience in their desired job sector; or had no previous work experience.

Outreach East project activities were designed to address these issues in order to move people closer to the labour market or into work.

3. Methodology

The evaluation took place between May and September 2019 and involved

- Review of MI data and monitoring information
- Review of 25 participant files
- Reviewing participant case studies

- Surveying contracted partners, referral partners, participants, other lead partners and employers
- Individual discussions with some project staff, stakeholders, 3 participants, the Partnerships & Development Manager and the London Councils Strategy Director
- A participant focus group with 8 participants

All discussions were guided by set questions to ensure consistency in approach. Direct quotes are not linked to any individual to protect confidentiality.

4. Project Activities

The project's MI system, participant files, group session registers, case studies, stakeholder and participant feedback show robust evidence that the partnership conducted much activity to work towards achieving project aims.

To maximise accessibility of the project, partners either had their delivery site based in their delivery borough or co-located with other local services e.g. Adult Training Network at Leytonstone jobcentre. Project activities were delivered around school hours in child friendly local outreach venues, such as children centres, where participants could bring their children if they needed to. A total of 37 outreach locations were used during the lifetime of the project.

Although the project did not achieve profiled start targets. Their approach to engagement enabled the partnership to exceed its targets for the engagement of most of the specified target groups specifically women (64%), ethnic minorities (69%) disabled (24%) health condition (34%) and aged 50+ (26%). It should also be noted that 29% of people engaged onto the project had a mental health condition and 68% were parents.

This is a marked improvement on RedbridgeCVS' previous projects, where there was always underperformance in the engagement of disabled people, those with health conditions and people aged 50+. This is an area of strength for the project.

The project delivered a range of activities targeting the priority groups on the project;

- A bespoke course, OPEN, for benefit claimants aged 50 and over delivered at Leytonstone and Seven Kings jobcentres
- Mindfulness sessions, taster exercise sessions, signposting to IAPT, raising awareness of IAPT services and Access to Work Scheme
- Women only social events such as picnics and coffee mornings
- Creative English courses to people with pre-entry English

In addition, having, Ellingham, an organisation that works with people with disabilities and health conditions, as a contracted delivery partner, helped ensure participants with a range of health issues could access appropriate support.

Participants accessed a wide range of activities on the project i.e. food hygiene, pre-entry and accredited ESOL, literacy, numeracy, IT, mindfulness, financial capability, CVs, interview skills, job applications, confidence building, a bespoke 50+ course. They also accessed coffee mornings, events such as Community Day, International Women's Day, Employability Day, a celebratory event at City Hall and a picnic in the park. These group activities provided opportunities for social interaction and 97% of the attendees scored the sessions as good or outstanding.

Participant files show that participants also accessed 1-1 personalised support, CV building, mock interviews, careers advice, emotional support, benefits advocacy. This is in line with *p87 of the LEP ESIF Strategy for London 2016* that presents the need for *a more personalised approach, tailored to individual circumstances*.

Another area of strength for the project is the additional hours of support project participants accessed beyond the 6.25 hours per participant target. 56% of participants accessed over 7 hours of support despite the fact additional hours of support were not funded, unless the participant was homeless or in recovery.

However, additional hours were not routinely reported to London Councils and the quality of the recording of activities on project forms was variable across the partnership, which is an area of improvement.

Pictures of some of the project's events are below

Employability day event June 2017



City Hall celebration event with Assembly member, Keith Prince and LB Redbridge
September 2018



Women's picnic in the park July 2019



5. Participant Feedback

The views of participants on the Outreach East project were positive overall with 89% scoring activity they participated in as good or outstanding. Participant feedback was recorded after every group induction, workshop and course. Evaluations measured distance travelled and

shows how activities impacted participants. 13 participant surveys and a focus group consisting of 8 participants were also completed.

94% of leavers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the support received. However, the sample size was small due to low rates of completion of leaver forms. The main areas participants' felt the project had improved for them was their confidence, job prospects, skills and knowledge of options. One commented their time on work placement at RedbridgeCVS had helped to *"update admin skills and time management"*.

All participants surveyed rated their project advisers good or very good in terms of their knowledge, understanding of participants needs, support planning, target planning, next steps and sign posting.

Twenty-five randomly selected participant files were viewed for this evaluation. All files included the following sections:

- Participant file contents checklist
- Enrolment documents (including proof of address, right to work in the UK, employment status etc)
- Induction (including a signed participant handbook declaration which confirmed: their understanding of their rights and responsibilities on the project; what support was available on the project, who funds the project, its cross cutting themes and how they are integrated in to the delivery of the project; and the requirement to provide employment or training information to their project adviser).
- Initial assessment / Reviews and Individual Action Plan
- 6+ / 12+ hours support (including signed action plan review summaries, group session attendance records, copies of CV, cover letters, completed job applications etc)
- Gaining / 26 weeks sustained employment / Voluntary work placement
- Progression into education or training
- Exit and tracking (including leaver form)

It should be noted that RedbridgeCVS developed an Employment Status Assessment Form to further clarify and evidence the employment status of a participant. London Councils saw this as good practice and rolled out the template to be used across the entire priority 3 programme.

In all the sampled participant files 100% of enrolment, induction, initial assessment and individual action plan / review, support and activity hours and outcome documents (including evidence where required) could be found and ticked off on the checklist. Where it was required documents were signed by participants and their advisers or had been verified with an official business stamp. Files were also logically organised. However, this pattern tailed off when it came to the leavers' forms; only 9 completed leaver forms of the 25 sampled files.

Feedback about the lack of leavers confirmation was simply poor response from participants and lack of resource to follow-up participants. Due to the project winding down staff hours were either reduced or staff were made redundant. This ongoing follow-up is an area for improvement across the project partnership.

Summary of leaver feedback

Partner	Leavers scoring Very Satisfied	Leavers scoring Satisfied	Totals that fully completed the leaver form
ATN	2	1	3
DABD	18	0	18
EAST THAMES	7	4	11
ELLINGHAM	7	2	9
FRF	1	0	1
HARMONY HOUSE	10	7	17
RCVS	34	13	47
RCVSWF	5	0	5
TOTAL	84	27	111

71.18% for leavers scored Very Satisfied

22.88% of leavers scored Satisfied

The project has been successful in responding to the individual needs of participants, with delivery driven by what participants wanted to achieve as outlined in their individual action plans. An area for improvement among project advisers is the level of detail included in action plans, which didn't always reflect all the participants' needs highlighted by the initial assessment. There wasn't a consistency in approach in completing action plans with some being incredibly detailed and holistic, while others lacked information. RedbridgeCVS held paperwork training workshops to address this, which led to some improvement.

Anecdotal feedback from project advisers is the level of complaints received from participants about the lengthy enrolment process. ESF requires projects to verify the status of economically inactive participants. Some organisations were uncomfortable with providing this verification themselves because they could only rely on what participants had told them. Job Centres are able to provide the evidence but they in turn required participants themselves to bring the eligibility form for their Work Coach to sign at the next appointment. For some participants, specifically those with learning difficulties, it was difficult for them to remember to do this. This would typically lead to delays of 3 to 4 weeks and in some cases Job centres were apparently still refusing to sign the form.

This area of complaint was perhaps an opportunity for project advisers to suggest participants giving feedback, reminding them of the methods set out in the handbook each participant received during induction.

It is worth noting that many participants gave very positive feedback on hearing of the project ending, some of their comments are below.

"I shall miss them (project advisers) as they have been very supportive of me and have helped me quite a bit...Thank you so much."

"I just wanted to say thank you very much for all your help and all the support that you have given me."

"Thank you so much for the advice. It's a great help...I really feel bad as I would miss such a good support from you. It's because of you I came volunteering... Thank you for the suggestion and support and for sure I will be missing your support, wishing you all the best."

"Thank you so much for all your help and support also... I wish you all the best for the future too you have been great, it was lovely to have met you."

"I write to make you aware of an excellent service I received...I asked for help to get back to work...I have received exceptional help with the following:

Updating my CV

Updating my profile

Updating my statement

Various job applications"

"Thanks for all your help, I really appreciate it."

"Hope there will be another project like this soon"

"My adviser was excellent and very easy to work with, he opened up my options in terms of the type of work available...and I ended up taking a job I never knew existed...Improvement of my CVs and cover letters as well as help to answer the questions on the application forms was amazing help as I received many more replies than before, which led to my job. I would recommend Outreach East to anyone who wants help to get into work."

RedbridgeCVS Case Study



"I had some work experience from a few paid roles and had been doing some volunteering. I kept applying for jobs and I would get interviews, but the outcome was always negative. I joined the Outreach EaST Project while I continued to apply for jobs. I got help to update my CV, guidance on how to complete application forms and most importantly for me, help with my interview technique. I had several mock interviews, which really improved my confidence. I am now in a full-time permanent paid role. I am really enjoying my job and have developed a lot of new skills. I would recommend the Outreach EaST Project to anyone who is looking to get tailored support to get back to work, improve their skills and build their confidence. I am really glad that I engaged with the project". Chinua Johnson

6. Achievement of Soft Outcomes

The project had an initial assessment, completed by all participants, to identify their support needs and strengths in key areas including employability, health, basic/functional skills and soft skills. It was identified through this that the most common areas of support required by participants were:

- IT skills development
- Literacy and/or ESOL
- Confidence building
- CV development
- Job application completion
- Interview skills

Participants were asked to complete the same assessment again at least once during their time on the project to measure their distance travelled. 83% (398) of participants completed an initial assessment review.

The results of initial assessments and reviews were collated and monitored quarterly to ensure participants were making progress on the project. These reviews demonstrated that participants significantly improved their soft skills.

79% of participants felt they had improved their IT skills

83% of participants felt they had improved their Literacy and/or ESOL

94% of participants felt they had improved their confidence

97% felt they had improved their CV

85% felt more confident about completing job application completion

92% felt they had improved their interview skills

The projects ability to support participants to improve these soft skills is the result of the range of interventions it delivered to ensure it effectively addressed participants' needs. This included, Creative English, referral to English Conversation Clubs, accredited Literacy, employability skills workshops, 1-1 CV building, mock interviews, supported application sessions, job/IT clubs, referral to IT training, confidence building training and other confidence building activities such as celebration events.

As previously mentioned, 50% of participants engaged onto the project had been out of work for over 3 years and 61% were economically inactive. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the most significant barriers to employment for participants were an out of date or lack of CV and lack of confidence.

It should be noted that the initial assessment template changed 3 times during the lifetime of the project as a result of feedback. An example is, in January 2018, RedbridgeCVS delivered refresher paperwork training, during which partners advised that participants were finding the initial assessment too long. Partners were encouraged to suggest changes and provide examples of initial assessments used on other projects. As a result, the initial assessment was reduced from 11 sections with, 3 pages to 1 page with 3 sections. This made it much easier to measure the achievement of soft outcomes and feedback on the template was much more favourable.

During the participant focus group conducted for this evaluation, several participants commented that the project had helped improve their self-confidence and confidence in looking for work. Comments included,

"My confidence was so low...support I got from my adviser helped me see I had skills I should be proud of and made me feel more confident."

"This programme was amazing. Feeling bad for its closure. As a participant I have managed to get my confidence back and now I am looking for jobs with more confidence."

7. Partnerships

RedbridgeCVS, the Lead partner in this project, has a strong track record of delivering, managing and leading ESF programmes managed by London Councils, among others. At the start of the project the partnership consisted of the following delivery partners:

- DABD
- London and Quadrant (East Thames)
- Madas
- Ellingham
- Harmony House
- St. Mungo's
- Gingerbread
- Adult Training Network (ATN)
- RCVS were also a delivery partner, in addition to leading the partnership

RedbridgeCVS have successfully worked with two of these partners in delivering ESF funded programmes in the past. One such partner said, *"We had worked previously with them on the Job Shop Community Outreach project which worked well and so going into the project we felt confident with RedbridgeCVS leading in the partnership we'd have a positive experience."*

Each partner on the project delivered an end to end service, except for Madas, working with participants from engagement to employment sustainment or progression into training.

Partner relationships

In a recent evaluation survey delivery partners expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the leadership, contracting, coordination, monitoring and support given by RedbridgeCVS. Survey responses also suggest that relationships between the lead and delivery partners were very good. Paperwork training sessions, quarterly partnership meetings and monthly monitoring visits to partners by the lead partner's Partnerships & Development Manager were key to resolving issues and maintaining successful working relationships. One partner said, *"We feel completely supported by RedbridgeCVS. The partnership relationship has been very efficient and transparent."*

Roll-out difficulties did affect things, however, with the same delivery partner commenting at the end of the project, *"All the way through at monitoring meetings – particularly on the issue of 3rd party verification it seemed the constant struggle partners were experiencing with getting this evidence was listened to and empathised with but resulted in nothing to really help facilitate making this any easier."*

Despite its optimistic start, six months into the project, it was negatively impacted when London Councils' new team implemented the first of many changes to evidence requirements to ensure the project was ESF compliant. In March 2017 London Councils advised that the project did need to retain and verify copies of proof of address, evidence of employment status, eligibility to live and work in the UK. This was notified to the partnership as a retrospective change which meant all participants previously had to be recalled and provide this proof. Significant staff resources had to be diverted from project delivery to chase up documents for participants engaged between September 2016 and March 2017. At this point, 60 participants could not provide the required evidence and became ineligible for the project. It was hoped a line could be drawn under this but the financial loss for organisations in not finalising this paperwork was too great.

Changing criteria so often over the lifetime of the project meant project staff frequently had to focus on addressing the amendments required in order to achieve approval of queried and rejected paperwork/evidence. The impact on the project was mainly felt on staff resource and support hours. Project staff had the time consuming and onerous task of amending, redoing and/or chasing additional evidence. This meant less staff time on engaging new starts on the project and supporting existing participants, thereby slowing down the project resulting in significant underperformance against profile. The three other Lead Partners of LC ESF programmes submitted completed questionnaires for this evaluation, and one said, *“The issue is they still kept adding new requirements for evidencing a result right until the end of the project.”*

During project delivery four additional partners (Hope for Havering, then Newham Choice for Youth, Faith Regen Foundation and HCT Group) joined the partnership to assist with achieving profiled targets. However, they, with the exception of Faith Regen Foundation, along with 4 original partners (Adult Training Network, St. Mungo’s, Madas and Gingerbread), all eventually withdrew citing dissatisfaction and uncertainty around the frequency of London Councils rejecting claims based on changing criteria.

Other examples of criteria changes implemented well into delivery are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report. The cost to project delivery and to the partnership was high. Staff morale suffered and participants were confused about why they had to repeatedly give more information. Some delivery partners felt that the uncertainty around claims made it financially unviable for them to continue in the partnership. In response several project staff were let go or walked out in frustration or concerned about the threat to their jobs from the reduced payments for project delivery. One delivery partner manager said, *“...the constant petty errors that especially initially took ages to come back from monitors for amendments to be made took its toll on staff morale and even resulted in our administrator finally resigning due to the frustration of the whole project.”*

RedbridgeCVS Partnerships & Development Manager said, *“this project partnership suffered the highest staff turnover compared with all other projects I’ve led”*. Another delivery partner manager felt, *“...the folks at RedbridgeCVS were always understanding of the challenges and difficulties faced in the project due, I believe, to being delivery partners themselves. It was therefore unfortunate that issues with getting things approved put such a negative slant on the whole project.”*

This summarises comments from all delivery partners, many expressing the same frustration and upset but in much stronger terms.

RedbridgeCVS Partnerships & Development Manager said, *“Everyone lost money on this project and relationships with some of our partners have been damaged”*. Below is an example of how the frustration with the constant change affected a delivery partners’ perception of RedbridgeCVS,

“... (RedbridgeCVS) were very helpful and understanding of the challenges we faced in the constant need to resubmit paperwork that often was in need of repeated error correction. However, there were also occasions where it at least felt like previously submitted documents had disappeared or gone missing and this was especially the case after the introduction of the encryption software for sending and receiving paperwork by email. I can however understand how all the constant changes to paperwork meant keeping on top of which correct version of form to be held onto was challenging”.

However, there is strong evidence that RedbridgeCVS went beyond expectations to support partners in managing the difficulties they faced on the project. This included both RedbridgeCVS' Partnerships & Development Manager and Performance & Claims Manager conducting additional monitoring visits with London Councils QA officers to provide practical support to London & Quadrant staff to make required paperwork corrections. The same was done for Ellingham and enabled both partners to get previously rejected paperwork approved.

The project also had some excellent relationships with referral partners such as Work Redbridge, Reed in Partnership, Easy Consultancy, Redbridge Volunteer Centre and Go Ahead Training. These relationships were vital in securing third party verification for project participants. One referral partner commented, *"it was really easy to make referrals to the project"*. Another commented, *"always got timely feedback on referrals and their progress."*

8. Partnerships with employers

Surveys were sent to 10 employers who provided work placement, volunteering and employment opportunities to project participants and 5 were returned, 1 from a recruitment agency, 2 from retailers and 1 from a care provider.

Feedback from these employers was generally positive particularly regarding the calibre of participants referred to them; and the support they received from the project to help participants complete work or volunteering placements.

100% of survey respondents rated partnership working with the project as good or outstanding and all advised they would work with the delivery organisations again.

Comments included

"Great candidates, well prepared and keen"

"Liked having one point of contact I could discuss things with"

"It helped to see someone's work and make sure they had the right attitude before offering them a job"

However, all 4 employers highlighted concerns regarding the project's evidencing requirements, comments included

"Didn't understand the need to sign forms twice"

"Easier to confirm things through email"

"Expecting us to print and scan things was a bit much"

RedbridgeCVS' Partnerships and Development Manager confirmed that their delivery staff and partners organisations sometimes found it difficult to convince employers to evidence results in a compliant way, especially in cases where there was no pre-existent relationship with the employer. But the partnership did their best to address this by requesting participants' payslips to evidence job outcomes.

An area of strength is the project's use of relationships with local authorities, specifically Redbridge, Havering and Barking & Dagenham, to access vacancies for project participants. Attendance at local authority provider forums, meant these local authorities regularly shared their vacancies and those of their stakeholders with the project. As a result, 12 project participants progressed into vacancies within a local authority or their stakeholder.

However, the partnership did not always work together as effectively as possible with employers. Partners rarely shared vacancies across the project. The Partnerships & Development Manager advised that partners were keen to protect their individual relationships with their employers and due to multiple, continual issues with the project, felt under pressure to achieve their individual re-profiled delivery targets, which resulted in the minimal sharing of vacancies. There was also no evidence of the project effectively linking into large scale recruitment drives to increase job outcomes on the project.

Although this way of working was not ideal, little was done to change it. The Partnerships & Development Manager advised that the partnership was dealing with the many issues that occurred on the projects. The withdrawal of 7 delivery organisations, most of which had some of the strongest employer relationships and flexible working arrangements e.g. Gingerbread, impacted the good and coordinated employer engagement the project had enjoyed with them in the partnership. Also, most participants were far removed from the labour market, which significantly impacted job outcome performance. However, it is agreed that a more joined-up approach to job brokerage may have enabled the project to increase the number of outcomes achieved.

Some attempts were made to engage other large employers who could provide multiple work experience and job vacancies for the project on an ongoing basis, e.g. Cordant Security, Orridge and CEX. Some opportunities were brokered but there was a low number of applicants, largely due to the lack of flexibility for parents (shift work) and locations of roles (central London and Essex) which were not always appropriate.

Nevertheless, the project did successfully utilise internal resources to provide sustainable and flexible vacancies for project participants. Harmony House had a very effective delivery model, which provided accredited functional skills and vocational training, employability skills development and a work trial with a guaranteed interview for a flexible, part time, 6-month contract. This enabled parents, particularly lone parents, who struggled to find flexible working arrangements, to build experience and access paid work to fit around childcare.

It could have been very beneficial for more partners on the project to take this approach.

Harmony House case study

Gift Anthony came across Harmony House in October 2016 after being involved in some voluntary work serving in a soup kitchen in Barking with a friend who has children at the same primary school as herself. This was after several years of raising her young family alone, where she endured through some difficult challenges including needing to be rehoused in temporary accommodation in Havering. Throughout this time her children continued in school in Dagenham, which is where she became friends with Joy, another friend who had just registered with Harmony House and who introduced her to the Outreach East project.



She was started on their employment programme which included a thorough diagnostics in English, followed up by Entry Level 3 sessions and Mock tests, which enabled her to pass an online exam and get an Entry level 3 English qualification.

She also gained knowledge and a Level 2 qualification in Food Safety as catering and childcare work were the fields she was interested in working in. She was also offered a voluntary work placement in both their Dagenham nursery and their busy kitchen. She had never worked before and so this work trial was perfect in helping her get into a work routine while balancing the time needed to be around for her children. Also decide, which route of employment to progress into. The flexible working hours also helped Gift's gain valuable work experience and further improve her English communication skills. She also decided she preferred to work in the kitchen. She did so well in her work trial she was offered a part-time, flexible working contract with Harmony House in their kitchen, which she sustained for 7 months.

9. Working with Priority 1 Providers

The Outreach East project worked very effectively with Priority 1 (Combatting Homelessness) project delivery partners, specifically Thamesreach, Shelter and SHP in the engagement of homeless people onto the project.

77 homeless people in total were referred to this project by these organisations, of which 56 were eligible and 44 were started on the project.

RedbridgeCVS originally contracted St Mungos as a paid delivery partner on the project to engage this target group, but this partnership faced several challenges. Most significant of those, were the project requirements to evidence address, eligibility to live and work in the UK, which made it difficult for the majority of homeless people St Mungos worked with to access the project. Many had lost these documents whilst being street homeless. In addition, EU Identity cards were not initially accepted as valid proof of right to live and work in the UK, which is the only evidence most of St Mungos participants had.

As a result of these issues being highlighted to London Councils, they met St Mungos to discuss this. Following the meeting they created a Homeless Declaration to be used where participants did not have the required documentation for the project and agreed to accept EU Identity cards to make the project more accessible. However, St Mungos still withdrew from delivery because they felt the changes had come too late into project delivery and they would not achieve their performance profile.

St Mungos' withdrawal from the project could have been detrimental to the engagement of this target group, but RedbridgeCVS responded by procuring a new partner, Hope for Havering to support homeless people and increased engagement with the other priority 1 partners. They attended team meetings at Shelter and SHP to promote the project to generate referrals. They also met with Thamesreaches' lead from the sustaining tenancies and resettlement team, Pamela Estrella, to agree a simple partnership working process, which proved to be very successful.

Thames Reach Case Study

On January 17 2018 RedbridgeCVS' Partnerships & Development Manager and Projects Officer met with Pamela Estrella with the aim to agree a way of working in partnership to support homeless people to move closer to and into work.

The following processes were agreed

- RedbridgeCVS to provide employment focused support and Thamesreach to provide wraparound support related to housing, benefits, funding for equipment or training that will move participants closer to employment, drug and/or alcohol addiction or misuse support.
- All referrals to be made to RedbridgeCVS' Project Support Assistant via secure email
- referrals to be followed up within 3 days of referral and feedback sent to Thamesreach on outcome of referral within 5 days
- Monthly updates to be sent to Thamesreach on progress of referrals enrolled and supported on the project
- Quarterly partnership meeting to review progress and address any issues

Thamesreach identified Newham as a borough the project should focus on due to the high number of homeless people rough sleeping in Stratford Shopping Centre. Pamela kept the project regularly updated with the homelessness situation in the borough, including the opening of a temporary hostel, Newway, funded by the local authority. Part of the requirement for living in the hostel was to actively seek employment to help improve their housing situation long-term but Newway had no employment support provision in house.

Pamela introduced RedbridgeCVS staff to the hostel managers and the project was able to agree weekly in-house employment support to hostel residents.

Outcomes

- 8 participants engaged in employability skills development and jobsearch
- 8 participants have a CV created or updated
- 8 participants attended a job club
- 7 participants reporting they have improved their chances of finding a job
- Shared resource and expertise which added value to both organisations service delivery

Pamela said, "it was very easy to work with the RedbridgeCVS, the communication was great, which meant we could quickly resolve problems, not that there were many. I was particularly impressed with their Project Officer, Jono, who would meet my clients where they were to provide them support. The feedback I got from my clients was very positive, several told me they felt they'd moved closer to finding work as a result of his support.'

Challenges

- Changes made by London Councils to make the project more accessible to homeless people were actioned nearly a year after the project began.
- Many homeless people were short term unemployed as priority 1 providers supported them to access benefits as soon as they engaged with them. This initially made them

ineligible until London Councils allowed for short term unemployed people with multiple and complex barriers to access the project.

- The transient nature of the participant group meant they would have periods of disengagement and sometimes could not be contacted. This made it hard to achieve job outcomes as participants often didn't engage in activity regularly. RedbridgeCVS picked up some participants for appointments and covered their travel costs where needed to try and address this.
- Participants would be moved out of the borough, which made it hard to track and evidence outcomes

Learning

- Keep it simple, make processes for working together as easy as possible
- Ensure clear processes for planning, implementing and monitoring – so that things stay on track
- Build a foundation of mutual trust and ability to address challenges
- Regular and ongoing communication is key to a successful partnership
- Be flexible, embrace changes in order to always work in the most effective way possible
- Deliver support where homeless people are i.e. hostels or in outreach venues near where they're rough sleeping e.g. libraries, to maximise engagement

What could have been done differently

There was an over reliance on contracted partners at the beginning of the project to achieve the homeless targets, St Mungos and then Hope for Havering. The withdrawal of both partners due to the challenges they faced with the eligibility criteria for the project, led to RedbridgeCVS' increased engagement with priority 1 delivery organisations which worked well. However, this should have been prioritised earlier.

London Councils could have consulted with homeless organisations during the commissioning process to get a greater understanding of the challenges faced by homeless people in accessing services due to a lack of documentation. This may have ensured the eligibility criteria for this target group was more flexible from the start of the project and more homeless people could have been engaged.

10. Project Strengths/Areas of Improvement/Added Value

The project had areas of development that it had varying success in addressing;

- There was inconsistency in the quality of recording project activities across the partnership, specifically in relation to enrolments, participant action plans and activity records/reviews. Some are very detailed and give a holistic picture of the participant and their journey on the project. Others lacked detail, SMART actions and only focussed on employment support.

RedbridgeCVS made several attempts to address this including creating an Employment Status Assessment form, paperwork guidance, providing training and example templates to

help partners. There was some improvement as a result but ultimately 79 project enrolments were rejected by London Councils, which significantly impacted project performance.

It is worth noting that, ongoing updates to the ways to compliantly evidence eligibility e.g. completing third party verification and referral forms, also significantly impacted the project's performance.

- Recording of participant contact and tracking was also inconsistent across the partnership. The project had follow-up and tracking forms to record contact with participants, as well as having CRM systems to record this. However, these forms were not consistently used throughout the partnership. As a result, it is hard to effectively measure the amount of disengagement on the project.

The Partnerships & Development Manager commented, *"the importance of regular contact and tracking was constantly highlighted to partners, it was also discussed during our paperwork training sessions and should have been more consistent...We were reluctant to withdraw participants from the project because its quite common for them to dip in and out. We didn't want people to have to re-enrol."*

There are several incidences of participants re-engaging with the project after taking time out, one example is a London & Quadrant (East Thames) participant, who disengaged for over 6 months after 2 hours of support on the project due to personal issues. They were re-engaged, accessed a further 12 hours support, a work placement and then progressed into work.

- Lack of joined up employer engagement as previously mentioned, better coordination could have improved the number of job outcomes achieved on the project.
- Project underperformance across starts, outputs and results. Although, it is recognised that the significant challenges experienced by this project have greatly impacted performance, it must be noted that the project performed significantly under profile. The project was re-profiled in 2018 in recognition that the original profile would not be met.
- The project had a significant lack of engagement in some of the delivery boroughs it was contracted to deliver in, i.e. Havering, Barking & Dagenham and Waltham Forest. This was due to the withdrawal of some of the delivery partners covering these boroughs, Hope for Havering, St Mungos, Gingerbread, Adult Training Network and HCT Group. RedbridgeCVS tried to address this by allowing partners to work across all boroughs instead of just the ones they were contracted to deliver in, which had some impact in improving engagement in Waltham Forest.

Nevertheless, the project had several strengths:

- As previously mentioned, the engagement of project target groups has been a success with women (64%), ethnic minorities (69%) disabled (24%) health condition (34%) and aged 50+ (26%). In addition, 29% of people engaged onto the project had a mental health condition and 68% were parents.

- Participants' achievement of soft outcomes has been very good. Over 85% of participants have reported that they developed employability skills and confidence as a result of participation in project activities.
- Support from project advisers has been highly praised by project participants. Participant feedback from their surveys and the focus group highlighted the importance of their relationship with their adviser in helping them progress on the project. Over 90% of participants that completed leaver forms scored their adviser as knowledgeable of the subject or activity and understanding of their needs
- The project has been very flexible and responsive, providing support to meet participant needs whilst managing a significant number of challenges and changes as detailed in several sections of this evaluation.
- Partnership working on the project has been strong, with delivery partners' feedback being generally positive about RedbridgeCVS' leadership and support. Also, effective working relationships with referral partners and priority 1 projects led to the desired project target groups being referred to the project e.g. economically inactive, disabled and homeless participants.

The project also added value by providing a range of wrap around support e.g. Ellingham and DABD provided travel training for adults with learning disabilities, RedbridgeCVS provided support to participants to apply for benefits or resolve benefit issues e.g. sanctions including referral to the LB Redbridge benefits advice service and mental health support through mindfulness training. Also, the provision of an adviser with a background in mental health and housing support who provided 1-1 housing and mental health support to participants. Faith Regen Foundation used their referral partnership with Easy Consultancy to enable participants to access benefits advice.

London & Quadrant (East Thames) had a partnership with Reed who provided a work experience service, which would sometimes result in paid employment. This was funded by the London & Quadrant Foundation. The service, which was called Work Routes was commissioned by London & Quadrant East before their merger with East Thames. This service was offered to all their Outreach East participants, and several benefitted from this support.

11. Project Achievements

Target Groups. Output and Results.

women (64%), ethnic minorities (69%) disabled (24%) health condition (34%) and aged 50+ (26%). In addition, 29% of people engaged onto the project had a mental health condition and 68% were parents.

Target Groups Supported:

Profile	Actual

Target group	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total number of participants enrolled	400	385	307	173
Long-term unemployed participants	140	135	86	82
Economically inactive participants	260	250	159	153
Women	400	385	307	173
Older people (50 years and over)	72	69	80	45
Ethnic minorities	240	231	212	119
Disabled (Self-declared)	88	85	74	41
Lone Parents	64	62	209	118
Number of Young People Aged 19-24 (if applicable)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of Participants who are carers supported (if applicable)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Performance Table: Outputs and Results:

Output/result	Profiled	Actual	Difference	Variance
Enrolled	785	480	-305	-39%
Long term unemployed participants	275	187	-88	-32%
Economically inactive participants	510	293	-217	-43%
6+ hours of support (IAG, job-search, mentoring, training, 1-2-1)	706	423	-283	-40%
12+ hours of support	47	14	-33	-30%
Completing Work or Volunteering placement	156	50	-106	-32%
Gaining basic skills	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Achieving vocational qualifications	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Support towards achieving a Level 2 (or below) qualification	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Progression into education or training or specified accredited support service within 4 weeks of leaving the project	157	16	-141	-90%
Economically inactive participants in employment/ job search within 4 weeks of	0	0	0	0

leaving the project				
Gaining Employment/apprenticeship within 4 weeks of leaving	236	78	-158	-33%
Gaining Employment within 4 weeks of leaving the project (those recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction, homeless)	24	1	-23	-96%
Employment sustained for 26 weeks	149	35	-114	-77%
Employment sustained for 26 weeks (those recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction, homeless)	9	1	-8	-89%
Submission of final evaluation report	1	1	0	

Borough starts:

Borough	Profiled Starts	Achieved
Waltham Forest	184	88
Barking and Dagenham	149	51
Havering	131	8
Newham	183	118
Redbridge	158	214
Essex	0	1
Totals	749	480

12. Working With London Councils

RedbridgeCVS has mixed feedback about their partnership with London Councils. They felt the relationship was very good overall.

During an interview with RedbridgeCVS' Partnership & Development Manager, the following views about the programme management emerged:

- London Councils staff were always available via phone and email to deal with queries and discuss issues. The manager cited several occasions where she was able to talk challenges through with their ESF Technical Adviser, Samara Armitt, and generally, agree a way forward. This is not something most funders do and was greatly appreciated.
- London Councils employing Quality Assurance Officers to conduct initial on-site paperwork checks and feedback in order to minimise the amount of queried and rejected paperwork was very helpful. At one point, QA officer Isabella Loftus,

attended RedbridgeCVS on a bi-weekly basis to check paperwork and was integral in reducing the amount of queried and rejected paperwork.

- Several actions were implemented to address London Council's previous team's erroneous roll out of the programme, which impacted partners' ability to achieve results and draw down funding. This included, allowing group session hours to be funded as part of the 6+ hours support, increasing payments for the achievement of 6+ hours support from £400 to £700 per participant, introducing an EI progression into jobsearch result valued at £450.
- An event organised by London Councils in January 2018 to discuss project outreach and evidencing the EI progression into jobsearch result provided a good opportunity for leads and their partner organisations to come together.
- Amending the eligibility criteria for the project to allow for short term unemployed people with multiple and complex needs to access the project following a meeting with RedbridgeCVS and a partner, which underscored the need for the project to support this target group.
- Allowing the project to be re-profiled and extended by 6 months to allow additional time to achieve results.

However, the following issues were highlighted:

- Although RedbridgeCVS are very grateful that London Councils took several actions to address the impact the flawed roll out of the programme had on the project, 60 participants were still deemed ineligible for the project as a result of this. In addition, partners spent months retrospectively evidencing participants' eligibility for the project, which took significant time away from delivering project activity. This led to the withdrawal of 7 delivery partners and 2 additional procurements taking place to secure new partners. This negatively impacted project performance and the project never fully recovered despite London Councils various attempts to address these issues.

Communication of changes was a real issue. It is felt they were often communicated after the fact or not at all. Examples include:

- A request for proof of a participant's National Insurance Number was added to the final version of the enrolment form although never requested on all 4 previous versions. RedbridgeCVS were not advised by London Councils this would be added and so could not appropriately prepare delivery partners for this change.
- In April 2019, London Councils provided feedback on January, February and March claims, which outlined the requirement for the length of unemployment and employment status sections of third-party verifications to be completed in wet ink. This previously wasn't a requirement and so hadn't been done, which led to the project having to address this retrospectively. It is felt, that this should have been communicated as soon as London Councils decided on this change.

Delayed and unclear feedback was another issue raised, examples include

- Lack of clarity on how to address queried submissions and errors in unit costs sometimes occurring on claim feedback, which took longer to review and sometimes led to delays in raising invoices; leading to payment delays for partners
- Delays in the receipt of feedback on claims, especially resubmissions, this did get better at times but not consistently; leading to payment delays

Requirements in evidencing eligibility going beyond the requirements of ESF

- Driver's licences over 12 months old stopped being accepted as a valid proof of address on this project, but are accepted on other ESF programmes e.g. National Lottery Community Fund's Building Better Opportunities Programme.
- When using EU identity cards to evidence participants' eligibility to live and work in the UK, London Councils requested proof of address despite the fact the date of birth is included in the reference number on the bottom right of these cards. London Councils fed back that EU ID cards do not include the date of birth and so additional proof was required.

It was also felt that the EI progression into jobsearch result was impossible to achieve. London Councils' template contained errors and was unclear. This led to RedbridgeCVS designing an additional template to use in conjunction with London Councils'. Partners following the evidencing criteria of London Councils form were still asked to provide additional evidence.

In addition, only mainstream provision such as the Work and Health Programme, local authority employment projects or non-mandatory transition onto JSA or all work related UC were seen as viable jobsearch progressions, which was limiting. This resulted in partners deciding not to pursue this result as a viable outcome for participants, despite the fact the project had a high number of economically inactive participants that were progressed onto other local provision or partners' other employment projects.

It was also felt that project reporting systems were not fit for purpose leading to several resubmissions of the same paperwork and inability to draw down accurate performance reports.

RedbridgeCVS' Partnerships & Development Manager, suggested it would have been beneficial to reconcile all delivery figures with London Councils ESF Technical Adviser at the end of each quarter. Several times, changes made following reporting were not reconciled on the Reporting Database. This resulted in an extensive reconciling exercise at the end of the project, which meant additional work for both the ESF Technical Adviser and RedbridgeCVS' Partnerships & Development Manager

In addition, the Partnerships & Development Manager suggested that when there are changes to templates, delivery or evidencing requirements this should be communicated on London Councils' website with accompanying guidance where necessary. This approach works well on other ESF programmes i.e. the National Lottery Community Fund's Building Better Opportunities Programme. It would also ensure lead partners get the same information at the same time and can disseminate this to their delivery partners in a timely manner.

The Partnerships & Development Manager commented, *"at times it felt like London Councils didn't have enough staff resource to expediently check and process claims, which led to delays and some errors. But I always felt that they would try their best to resolve issues I raised with them."*

13. Programme Manager Feedback

In August 2019, on completion of the project, a telephone interview was conducted with Yolande Burgess, Strategy Director for Young People's Education and Skills and Grants and

Community Service at London Councils. The Director and her team managed implementation of the ESF Priority 3 programme across London. She was appointed to the role during the first year of delivery to address the serious issues faced by ESF Priority 3 projects after identifying significant non-compliance with ESF funding criteria and resulting underperformance was identified across the entire programme.

Having not been in post at the start of the project the Director was unable to comment on the setup of the RedbridgeCVS project. However, given that RedbridgeCVS was responsible for a third of the Priority 3 projects in London and the close working involved in getting the project back on track overall she said her team were able to build a good working relationship with RedbridgeCVS, in the face of extraordinary challenges.

RedbridgeCVS as Project Lead

Yolande regards RedbridgeCVS as a “super” project lead. From her attendance at partnership meetings she observed the RedbridgeCVS team demonstrating the balance between good, supportive working relationships with their delivery partners whilst recognising their duty to the funder.

Despite what has been an extremely difficult project Yolande said she has really enjoyed working with RedbridgeCVS, specifically commending their Partnerships & Development Manager, Finance Manager and CEO. Other members of her team also relayed positive feedback about delivery staff following site visits to quality check paperwork.

Strengths of RedbridgeCVS

Yolande highlighted the following;

- The Director felt RedbridgeCVS “led its sub-contractors very well” and they have “very good advisers who are very good at what they do”. She also said they were very responsive to addressing London Councils requests for changes and willing to work together under trying circumstances. RedbridgeCVS were a “calming voice” to its partnership, attempting to manage the strong feelings raised by the challenges while keeping the project going. The Director said she much preferred RedbridgeCVS’ approach of picking up the phone to talk things over even when they were “feeling a little grumpy” about the nature of the changes. Throughout the project “There were lots of honest conversations about the aggravations of paperwork”.
- Whilst RedbridgeCVS were equally as frustrated as its delivery partners with the impact of the poor set up of the programme the team showed commitment to the aim of reducing poverty by sticking with the project. For example, Ross Diamond, RedbridgeCVS CEO, and Harjit Sangha, Finance Manager attended a Grants Committee meeting to share their experience of the project, demonstrating to the committee what was being done to support vulnerable people into employment, despite the difficulties.
- The Director commented that the team “responded heroically” to the changes requested at a time when they could have “walked away,..they chose to stick with it as did all the other partners.... Redbridge had to move mountains to get it back into

shape” The programme required projects to respond to the individual and complex needs of participants and the Director felt RedbridgeCVS delivered well in this respect in providing their expertise delivered by a good team of advisers.

- Appropriate escalation of issues, e.g. St. Giles, a specialist organisation working with individuals recently released from prison. Yolande visited after RedbridgeCVS identified specific difficulty with ESF rules which excluded this incredibly vulnerable group. Yolande found it helpful to speak directly with a St. Giles adviser about how the project criteria was excluding some of the most vulnerable people it was supposed to help. This led to London Councils requesting the GLA to allow flexibility in the eligibility criteria for the most disadvantaged across the whole programme, allowing projects to support even more vulnerable people.
- The Director notes her attendance at 3 RedbridgeCVS AGMs which she finds is a useful way of learning about an organisation’s relationships with their partners. She found all 3 RedbridgeCVS AGMs “incredibly well attended” in volume and by representation of stakeholders e.g. DWP. She commented “A distinct strength about RedbridgeCVS is everything about the organisation tells me it’s absolutely embedded in the local community” She observed RedbridgeCVS “it’s obvious they are very well respected” by their partners and describes them as a “highly experienced, mature and well-established and well-run organisation”. The Director didn’t have any concerns about RedbridgeCVS’ relationships with their delivery partners or stakeholders

Learning

In terms of learning from this final ESF programme, a major assumption was made by all Priority 3 projects and the initial London Councils team who set-up the programme. The error originated in the change in status of London Councils from co-financer to a direct-bid organisation. This meant London Councils had to strictly adhere to the rigid ESF evidence requirements and there was absolutely no flexibility around this despite what they, and projects, were previously accustomed to.

When it became clear six months into delivery that the programme was entirely non-compliant projects faced real challenges on learning: a) that work to date was ineligible and b) an incredible amount of work was going to be needed to recover the programme.

However culpable all parties were for not adhering to the original ESF guidance, something RedbridgeCVS openly acknowledges that they should have done, it is a lesson learned by all partners. London Councils acknowledges as the funder it was ultimately their responsibility to highlight this to projects.