

## Project Final Evaluation

For Projects funded by London Councils ESF Programme 2016-2020

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For London Councils use only:

Date Final Project Evaluation approved by London Councils:

\*Please note that this Final Project Evaluation must be conducted by an external organisation. All procurement requirements for securing the external evaluator and completing this Final Project Evaluation must be adhered to.

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## 1. Project Aims and Activities

Delivered by a partnership network managed by lead partner RedbridgeCVS, the Aim Higher Project ran between September 2016 and June 2019. It aimed to improve the employability, health, parenting, life skills, social and financial inclusion of 749 economically inactive (65%) and long-term unemployed (35%) people from the target groups below living in the London Boroughs of Camden, City of London, Enfield, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets.

This was achieved through recruitment of participants and delivery of project outreach and targeted activities in settings easily accessible to the project target groups, for example schools, libraries, in addition to traditional settings accessed by jobseekers like job centres.. At the heart of the project was a 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.

The target groups were:

- Women (51%)
- Ethnic minorities (60%)
- Older people (50+) (18%)
- Disabled people (22%)
- Lone parents (16%)
- Homeless and/or those recovering from alcohol addiction or substance misuse (7%)
- Those with a work limiting health condition (7%)

On completion the project had enrolled 410 participants of which 38% were economically inactive and 62% were long-term unemployed.

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, job clubs, 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 confidence building, employability training, and IAG sessions delivered by experienced advisers

These activities were delivered by RedbridgeCVS and the project's contracted delivery partners; Osmani Trust, London Training and Employment Network (LTEN), Volunteer Centre Hackney, HCT Group and Bromley By Bow Centre. Other contracted partners were Urban Futures, Enterprise Enfield, Gingerbread and St. Mungos. These organisations withdrew from project delivery as a result of the many challenges faced by the partnership in the delivery of this project, which will be examined in this evaluation. Additional project partners, Work Works Training Solutions, St. Giles Trust and Faith Regen Foundation were contracted to support delivery of the project after these partners withdrew.

The project's unpaid referral partners included Cofipro, Wilbury Primary School, GrowTH, New Challenge (NCS provider) priority 1 providers SHP, Shelter, and Thamesreach, Positive Employment, probation services, Fashionworks, LB Camden, LB Islington, jobcentres, specifically Edmonton, Palmers Green, Hackney and Hackney Central library.

The project was funded through the London Councils Grants Committee and 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, 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 Aim Higher project.

- Fit for Fun, which enables local community groups and individuals to access free exercise classes for 20 weeks
- Social Prescribing project enabling individuals referred by their GP to access 1-1 support and local services to improve mental health and social inclusion.

RedbridgeCVS 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/economic development managers e.g. Anna Loughlin LB Enfield and Andrew Munk LB Hackney.
- Reviewing the employment, enterprise and skills strategies of each borough
- Reviewing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments of each borough (JSNA)
- Conducting 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 Tower Hamlets CVS

#### Common issues identified

- Lack of ESOL provision
- Lack of flexibly delivered training 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.
- Domestic violence and abuse most prevalent amongst Bengali women

The 21 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.

Aim Higher 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 24 participant files
- Reviewing participant case studies
- Surveying contracted partners, referral partners, participants, other lead partners and employers
- Individual discussions with some project staff, stakeholders, 9 participants, the Partnerships & Development Manager and the London Councils Strategy Director

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 e.g. Faith Regen Foundation and Works Works Training Solutions shared a delivery site for several months of delivery. St Giles Trust delivered 1-1 IAG at Hackney jobcentre on a weekly basis and Work Works Training Solutions based activity e.g. job clubs in Edmonton and Palmers Green jobcentres. Project activities were delivered around school hours in child friendly local outreach venues, such as Wilbury Primary School, where participants could bring their children if they needed to. A total of 42 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 some of the specified target groups specifically women (64%), ethnic minorities (77%) health condition (21%) aged 50+ (26%) and homeless and/or those recovering from alcohol addiction or substance misuse (11%). It should also be noted that 23% of people engaged onto the project had a mental health condition and 67% were parents (including lone parents).

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

However, unlike the Outreach East project, Aim Higher underperformed in the engagement of disabled participants (13%). Feedback from project partners and participants revealed a reluctance for some participants to declare a disability as it was felt this would be viewed negatively by employers. In addition, the project engaged a much higher number of long-term unemployed participants than profiled 68% against a target 35%, unlike the Outreach East



project which exceeded economically inactive targets. This is an area of improvement for the project.

Aim Higher's underperformance on the engagement of economically inactive participants was largely due to the fact that the 2 partners with the highest start numbers on the project, Faith Regen Foundation and Work Works Training Solutions, got most of their referrals from Positive Employment recruitment agency, Edmonton and Palmers Green jobcentres who mainly worked with long term unemployed people.

Several partners fed back that they found it difficult to evidence the employment status of economically inactive participants and focused on engaging who they could onto the project because they were behind profile.

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

- A bespoke job club for long term unemployed benefit claimants including those aged 50+ and with health conditions delivered at Edmonton and Palmers Green jobcentres
- Signposting to IAPT, raising awareness of IAPT services and Access to Work Scheme
- Women only confidence building sessions
- Employability training sessions for BME communities

In addition, having, St Giles Trust an organisation that works with ex-offenders who presented with multiple barriers i.e. homelessness, poor mental health, in recovery from alcohol addiction and/or substance misuse, as a contracted delivery partner, helped ensure participants with a range of issues could access appropriate support.

Other activities accessed by participants on the project included, CSCS training, IT training, signposting to local services e.g. benefits, debt advice, IAPT, CV building, interview skills, job application and jobsearch support, confidence building. They also accessed, events such as an Employability Day jobs fair at Bromley by Bow Centre and a celebratory event at City Hall. Group activities provided opportunities for social interaction and 87% of the attendees scored the group sessions as good or outstanding.

City Hall celebration event for Aim Higher and Outreach East participants with Assembly member, Keith Prince, Redbridge CVS, LB Redbridge September 2018



Participant files show that participants also accessed 1-1 personalised support, CV building, careers advice, emotional and soft skills support. 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. 42% 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.

## 5. Participant Feedback

An area of strength for the project is participant feedback. The views of participants on the Aim Higher project were overall positive with 87% 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. 17 participant surveys and 9 participant interviews were also completed.

96% of leavers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the support received. However, the sample size was small due to the low number of participants completing leaver forms, 98 in total. The main areas participants' felt the project had improved for them was their confidence and job prospects.

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

The main areas participants' felt the project had improved for them were their confidence and job prospects. One participant interviewed commented "*I got new skills and my confidence back*" another said, "*I'm getting interviews since I got help from my adviser*".

24 randomly selected participant files were viewed for this evaluation. Most 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 and its cross cutting themes and how they are integrated in to the delivery of the project; 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)

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). Where it was required documents were signed by participants and their advisers or had been verified with an official business stamp.

Some of the files did not include a checklist but were generally logically organised. However, this pattern tailed off when it came to the leavers' forms; only 9 completed leaver forms of the 24 sampled files.

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 and feedback. 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.

Feedback from staff about the lack of leavers confirmation in files 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 form
BBBC	4	1	5
FRF	11	2	13
LTEN	7	2	9
OT	22	11	33
RCVSAH	2	0	2
SGT	4	0	4
VCH	6	3	9
WWTS	12	7	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>98</b>

**69.38% of leavers scored Very Satisfied**

**26.53% of leavers scored Satisfied**

## **Participant Case Study**

RCVS012 registered onto the project in December 2018, was homeless and managing a health condition. They were keen to find part-time work in a museum but lacked experience, confidence and felt hopeless about their current situation.

The Aim Higher project enabled the participant to be allocated an experienced adviser, who provided, 1-1 assessment, action planning, information, advice and guidance, signposting to housing advice, 1-1 support to update CV, complete applications and prepare for interview.

The participant secured an interview with an employer after a few months of support on the project but was unsuccessful. Their adviser supported them to stay motivated and keep applying for roles.

When a role for the V&A museum came up the participant was excited to apply. They were supported in completion of the application and got shortlisted for an interview, which their adviser helped them prepare for through 1-1 mock interview coaching. They were successful at interview and secured employment with the V&A museum as a Gallery Assistant on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2019.

The participant has been in the role for almost six months and does a day of voluntary work with the museum each week, in their education department to further develop their skills. Finding work has also give them the confidence to complete training with a church to become a volunteer mentor for ex-offenders. They have also been able to secure housing.

The participant commented, *"I have the job I've always wanted... (project adviser) has helped me so much and I just wish that there are more people like him to support people like me"*

## **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. 62% 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.

64% of participants felt they had improved their IT skills

58% of participants felt they had improved their Literacy and/or ESOL

91% of participants felt they had improved their confidence

94% felt they had improved their CV

79% felt more confident about completing job application completion

83% 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, referral to English Conversation Clubs, referral to accredited Literacy and ESOL, employability skills workshops, job clubs, 1-1 CV building, interview skills, supported application sessions, referral to IT training, confidence building training and other confidence building activities such as celebration events.

61% of participants engaged onto the project had been out of work for over 3 years. 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 also be noted that the initial assessment template changed 3 times during the lifetime of the project as a result of partner 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 they 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 positive.

Several participants interviewed for this evaluation commented that the project had helped improve their self-confidence and confidence in looking for work. Comments included,

*"I can find jobs myself now and know the different ways to find them. I feel better confidence because I know what I'm doing"*

*"My adviser was just so lovely, she helped me believe I can do it, when I didn't think I could. I don't think I would have found my job if she didn't help me with my confidence"*

The development of participants' soft skills is an area of strength for the project.

## 7. Partnerships

### Partnership arrangement

RedbridgeCVS has delivered employment and skills support (including contract management) since 2010. As the Lead Partner in this project RedbridgeCVS 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:

- Bromley by Bow Centre
- HCT Group
- LTEN
- Osmani Trust
- Volunteer Centre Hackney
- Urban Futures
- Enterprise Enfield
- Gingerbread
- St Mungos

They were selected because of their track record, links with employers and their existing local presence which helped to increase recruitment and retention of the target groups.

Enterprise Enfield, Gingerbread, Urban Futures, St. Mungos and HCT Group withdrew before the project ended largely due to the need to implement retrospective changes to evidencing

processes 6 months into delivery of the project as a result of London Councils inaccurate roll out of the ESF priority 3 programme. These partners were replaced by Work Works Training Solutions, St Giles Trust and Faith Regen Foundation in 2018.

Partners delivered an end-to-end service ensuring each participant had their own adviser giving 1-1 and group support throughout the project. In addition, each partner added value to the partnership by providing different yet complementary services.

### Experience of delivering the project

All 12 Aim Higher delivery partners (including those who withdrew) were sent a list of survey questions and five responses were received. All Lead partners were also surveyed, and all responded. Telephone interviews were conducted with two organisations, one from each of the above.

When asked about their overall experience of the project all said that it was one of the most difficult contracts to deliver *“as the paperwork changed or was added to continually”*. One partner reported *“We recruited staff from the start of the programme however due to ongoing changes we were never able to meet any outcomes for nearly 6 months. We never recovered the cost for staff.”*

The experience for partners was rated overwhelmingly negatively overall with the multiple changes imposed by London Councils on the project cited as the main reason. Specific examples of complaints from the feedback include:

- *“Issued incorrect guidance in original handbook and sent an updated version with right guidance over 7 months later”*
- *“Initial project documents missed essential requests for eligibility criteria evidence, which meant people initially engaged onto the project were not eligible until we retrospectively chased their documentation”*
- *“We didn’t have a reporting database for 6 months of the project.”*
- *“Changes sometimes communicated after the fact in claim feedback not before and meant things had to be amended retrospectively. On some occasions feedback took a long time to get back. There was a sense that they didn’t have enough capacity to deal with the amount of paperwork they were getting.”*
- *“Some of the results forms were very confusing, i.e. progression into jobsearch or overly long winded. Placement form required the supervisor to sign one document twice.”*

Delivery partners perceived the adherence to ESF requirements as “onerous and petty”. One partner said, *“The scrutiny from both the LC and lead partner was often unnecessary – e.g. rejecting a file because the client described herself as Miss and then we in a second document wrote Ms (this is just 1 example)”*.

The perception that the rejected claims and scrutiny by London Councils were unnecessary dominated delivery partner feedback, however it was the timing of the changes which drew the most criticism e.g. *“LC [London Councils] changed the rules and did not always inform the Lead or agree it in advance, this impacted on resources, delivery and the relationship with the Lead.”*

ESF programmes are governed by specific and rigid rules. Project delivery partners and other priority 3 Lead Partners surveyed felt they correctly invested time to train staff at the start of the project to achieve understanding enough to implement the evidential needs. However, the impact of the wholesale non-compliant roll out of the project by London Councils and the subsequent *“drip feeding evidence requirements”* for projects to retrospectively collect additional information for months of claims led to mistrust and resentment aimed at London Councils. London Councils Grants Committee has publicly acknowledged the confusion and extra work caused by the flawed roll-out of the programme. For all this, *“with ESF it’s either correct or it’s not”* and the difficult and extra work perhaps made it hard for projects to square this circle.

There was also a significant negative financial impact on delivery partners. Three of the five respondents said that the project cost them more to run than they received in claim income. This was despite high interest from participants in the support offered by the project. ESF eligibility requirements were found to be insurmountable for significant numbers of potential participants. *“...eligibility ID documents changed, which limited the target group on what they could provide to show eligibility”*. For example, *“DWP clients were allowed to produce Driving licences as proof of address – our clients were refused this even though the enrolment form stated they could”*.

Then there was the strain on project staff at all levels across the partnership. Partners referred to: *“stress for staff”* and *“dreadful impact on staff morale”*; Serious loss of income because *“huge amounts of work were not paid for.”* Also, *“huge levels of overwork and repeat work and repeated repeat work required.”*

Lead priority 3 partners advised of reputational damage.

*"The impact with our partners has been really, really tough and we're not sure if we can regain our credibility with them e.g. will they work with us again?"*

One respondent said that it was *"..the worst managed programme I have ever been part of in 30 years in this field"*.

*Another stated "loss of valued partners from our partnership. Loss of reputation due to being 'red ragged' unfairly. Damaged relationships with partners, tears and anger on the phone and in person with previously friendly organisations (which we have come through, but it was very unpleasant)."*

### **Working with RedbridgeCVS**

All delivery partners who responded positively rated their experience of working with RedbridgeCVS as lead partner,

*"..we enjoyed being a partner of RedbridgeCVS who were extremely pleasant and friendly and did their utmost to help at all times."*

*"The overall experience with Redbridge [CVS] has been a positive one with all members of staff being responsive and doing their best to help clarify any questions. The delivery team always felt able to approach Redbridge staff for advice which was appreciated."*

However sometimes the pressure to submit claimable outcomes leading to extra checks RedbridgeCVS conducted on behalf of delivery partners caused tensions across the partnership, one said:

*"Project admin staff were overzealous and added to the overbearing scrutiny and notably over control of partners".*

*"LC was unsure about what they were doing and so therefore Leads were unsure of what they were doing. However, Redbridge CVS as a lead did try to impart clear information to the partnership based on what they had been told by LC!"*

### **Future London Councils Projects**

Despite the challenges almost all partners said they would tender for suitable London Councils projects in future.

A lead partner commented, *"Their [London Councils] response wasn't always good, but I did find that I could call and speak with them and often get things resolved or agree to disagree. There were many things they did to try and address, issues such as changing eligibility criteria, increasing payments for 6+ hours support retrospectively and allowing us to re-profile. QA visits and support to check paperwork was very helpful."*

*"They are very open to talking over the phone to resolve issues and trying to be flexible. Not many funders are like this."*

*"It seems strange, but I would, our trustees would not. As long as we could be sure from the beginning what the requirements are, so we know exactly what is expected. Also, only if they had enough staffing to fully deliver on the management of the contract."*



Others felt more strongly about working with London Councils, expressing their need for caution and closer scrutiny of requirements of any potential project before proceeding,

*“It was too painful and costly... The ONLY way we would consider another LC contract is if we were convinced there had been both a change of attitude and a change in the staff managing the monitoring side since this is where 90 per cent of the problems originated.”*

*“We would look very closely at the contract specification before considering tendering for a London Councils project. We would be particularly cautious around the requirements for outcome/eligibility evidence, reporting and payment structure.”*

## **8. Partnerships with Employers**

Surveys were sent to 9 employers who provided work placement, volunteering and employment opportunities to project participants and 6 were returned, all from retailers.

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

*“The process was simple and most of the clients were seen very quickly”*

*“I found them to be very supportive of their clients”*

*“They were quick in feeding back on the support given to clients”*

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..

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, which impacted capacity to address this. The withdrawal of 5 delivery organisations, most of which had some of the strongest employer relationships and flexible working arrangements e.g. HCT Group, Urban Futures and Gingerbread, also significantly reduced the employer links the project had access to. Nonetheless, it is agreed that a more joined-up approach to job brokerage may have enabled the project to increase the number of job outcomes achieved.

There are some good examples of partnership working with employers. Work Works Training Solutions had relationships with a range of retail employers including Matalan. They delivered a sector-based work academy, where participants would access pre-employment training, followed by a work placement, which, if successfully completed led to a guaranteed interview with the employer. Also, Faith Regen Foundation partnered with a recruitment agency, Positive Employment who offered work experience and job opportunities to project participants through their links with employers.

However, despite the high number of job and work placement opportunities these partnerships generated this did not lead to a high number of job outcomes on the project. There is evidence in participant files of participants not attending job interviews or failing to start or complete placements. This could partly be due to 61% of participants being out of work for over 3 years, therefore quite far removed from the labour market.

## **9. Working with Priority 1 providers**

Priority 1 providers, Thamesreach, Shelter and SHP made a total of 84 referrals to the project. 48 participants were started on the project of those 31 were from priority 1 providers. Others were referrals from GrowTH and jobcentre plus.

RedbridgeCVS originally contracted St Mungos as a paid delivery partner on the project to engage homeless people, 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 did impact the engagement of this target group, but RedbridgeCVS responded by procuring a new partner, St Giles Trust to support homeless people and increased engagement with the other priority 1 partners. They attended a team meeting at Shelter to promote the project to generate referrals. They also met with

Thamesreach's lead from the sustaining tenancies and resettlement team, Pamela Estrella, to agree a simple partnership working process..

### **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

- Aim Higher project 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
- RedbridgeCVS to assess which partner best suited to work with referral i.e. St Giles Trust or Faith Regen Foundation and pass referrals to them.
- 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

### **Outcomes**

- 17 participants engaged in employability skills development and jobsearch  
12 participants have a CV created or updated
- 9 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... I was particularly impressed with St Giles Trust who followed up referrals quickly, fed back and offered my clients lots of 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. Faith Regen Foundation found this to be the case.

- 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. St Giles Trust did this and had more sustained engagement with homeless participants than Faith Regen Foundation as a result.

## **What could have been done differently**

There was an over reliance on the contracted partner at the beginning of the project to achieve the homeless targets e.g. St Mungos. The withdrawal of this partner due to the challenges they faced with the eligibility criteria for the project, led to the project's increased engagement with priority 1 delivery organisations. However, this could have been prioritised earlier.

London Councils could have better 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/Improvement/ Areas/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 over 100 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 it's quite common for them to dip in and out. We didn't want people to have to re-enrol."*

- Lack of joined up employer engagement as previously mentioned. The number of job outcomes achieved on the project is very low. Better coordination could have improved this.
- 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, e.g. Camden, Islington and Hackney. This was due to the withdrawal of some of the delivery partners covering these boroughs e.g. Hope for Gingerbread, 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..

Nevertheless, the project had several strengths:

- As previously mentioned, the engagement of project target groups has been a success. Targets were exceeded for all but one target groups (disabled) i.e. women (64%), ethnic minorities (77%) health condition (21%), aged 50+ (26%) and homeless and/or those recovering from alcohol addiction or substance misuse (11%). Also, 23% of people engaged onto the project had a mental health condition and 67% were parents (including lone 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, leaver forms and interviews 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 leading to the desired project target groups being referred to the project e.g. women, health conditions, ethnic minorities and homeless participants.
- The project also added value by providing a range of wrap around support e.g. St Giles Trust supported participants to apply for a discretionary grant to access funds in order to pay for ID documentation e.g. passports. They also provided specialist advice and services for ex-offenders e.g. advice on disclosing offences to employers. Other examples of this are, Bromley by Bow Centre have a drop-in advice hub open each weekday that project participants could access. They also have a health centre, health and women's services, which was open to project participants. Faith Regen Foundation also delivered a domestic violence prevention project, which women on the project could access where needed. Volunteer Centre Hackney have a mental health support project that participants could access, and Osmani Trust, who host a range of services in their community centre enabled participants access to family and health support services, also accredited functional skills provision.

## 11. Target Groups. Output and results.

**Table 1: Target Groups Supported:**

**Please note the final figures for this project have not yet been finalised and are still in query. Figures in this evaluation reflect what has been approved by London Councils up until May 31<sup>st</sup> 2019.**

Target group	Profile		Actual	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total number of participants enrolled	382	367	264	146
Long-term unemployed participants	134	128	163	92
Economically inactive participants	248	239	99	56
Women	382	367	264	146



Older people (50 years and over)	69	66	68	38
Ethnic minorities	229	220	202	114
Disabled (Self-declared)	84	81	35	19
Lone Parents	61	59	175	99
Number of Young People Aged 19-24 (if applicable)	N/A	N/A	27	15

**Table 3: Performance Table: Outputs and Results:**

Output/result	Profiled	Actual	Difference
Enrolled	749	410	-339
Long term unemployed participants	262	255	-7
Economically inactive participants	487	155	-332
6+ hours of support (IAG, job-search, mentoring, training, 1-2-1)	675	372	-303
12+ hours of support	45	13	-32
Completing Work or Volunteering placement	148	18	-130
Progression into education or training or specified accredited support service within 4 weeks of leaving the project	150	25	-125
Economically inactive participants in employment/ job search within 4 weeks of leaving the project	0	1	+1
Gaining Employment/apprenticeship within 4 weeks of leaving	225	37	-188
Gaining Employment within 4 weeks of leaving the project (those recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction, homeless)	22	1	-21
Employment sustained for 26 weeks	142	6	-136
Employment sustained for 26 weeks (those recovering from drug and/or alcohol addiction, homeless)	9	0	-9
Submission of final evaluation report	1	1	0

Note: the project was re-profiled in recognition of the multiple issues encountered in delivering the project, and a reduced profile was agreed in 2018. Profiled figures above are based on the original contracted profile.

## Borough spread

**Table 4: Performance Table: Borough starts: Project 5**

Borough	Starts	Achieved
Enfield	184	147
City of London	3	0
Hackney	153	61
Islington	121	42
Tower Hamlets	175	131
Camden	113	16
Waltham Forest	0	1
Barnet	0	1
Haringey	0	11
Total	749	410

## 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' Partnerships & 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, 72 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 5 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 a participant's date of birth even though 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.

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."*

A delivery partner commented "We recommend that London Councils review how this project was managed and particularly the requirements given the complex nature of the project's beneficiaries."

### **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 the 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, it is a lesson learned by all partners. London Councils acknowledges as the funder it was ultimately their responsibility to highlight this to projects.