

ASPIRE
Developing Sustainable Organisations

Programme Evaluation and
Impact Assessment
2006/07



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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction and Context	6
Purpose and Structure	13
Methodology	14
About the Programme	16
Participant Profiles	17
Key Findings	19
Review of Programme Content	30
Case Studies	34
Conclusions	38
Recommendations	40
Appendices	

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Executive Summary

The following independent evaluation of the Aspire funded Developing Sustainable Refugee Community Organisations Programme was commissioned by the Muath Trust in late May 2007 and completed by the end of July 2007.

The core aims of the evaluation were to *“To undertake an evaluation of the ASPIRE Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme recently run by Fircroft College and the Muath Trust Development Agency to identify the impact of the course and the capacity building support on individual students and the organisations they represent.”*

The findings presented in this report and executive summary are based on:

- A literature search to locate the research within the relevant policy context.
- In-depth individual interviews with the Muath Trust’s Programme Coordinator, and the Fircroft Residential course tutor, who in addition to providing the main tutoring for Fircroft was also employed by the Muath Trust to deliver the mentoring element of the Programme.
- One to one face-to-face or phone interviews with Programme participants.
- A focus group for organisations involved with the Programme.
- Follow up interviews with case study participants.

The Programme had a number of separate and distinct elements:

- Working with a key ‘Agent of Change’ from participating organisations.
- 1 free place per participant organisation on a programme of 6 residential training sessions covering topics such as business and strategic planning and fund raising.
- Free places on a further 4 residential of participants’ own choosing from the Fircroft Short Course Guide.
- An initial evaluation and health check leading to the development of an organisational action plan.
- Mentoring intended to support organisations to work through the action plan.

The key findings of the report are:

Choosing the Programme

Interviewees were asked why their organisations had chosen the Aspire Programme and learning new skills to use in their organisation and professional development opportunities with 100% (9 people) citing these as the most important reasons for choosing the Programme.

In interviews some 88% (n=8) of respondents noted that they had chosen the Programme because it was specifically aimed at refugee community organisations, whilst an (unsolicited by the evaluators) discussion at the focus group felt that the programme as a whole, and the residential element in particular, would have been better if it had been open to everyone with a general feeling that it was as important to be working with people from a range organisations with the same needs (e.g. needing to agree legal status/management systems/access initial funding) as it was to be working with refugee community organisations.

100% (n=9) of respondents identified the key reason that the Programme was felt to be suitable for their organisations was the fact that information and skills from the Programme could be shared across the organisation and that the Programme offered the opportunity to build and develop participants' skills.

Of almost equal importance, with 88% of respondents (n=8) noting them as important, were the following factors: the opportunity to improve organisational performance, help with fund raising, the convenient timing of the Programme and that it was aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations.

Developing Skills and Implementing Learning

Both interviewees and their organisations had hoped that they would build skills as a result of engaging with the Programme with both 88% (n=8) of individuals and 88% (n=8) of organisations rating writing funding bids as the key learning they were hoping to gain. Interestingly some 88% (n=8) of individuals were hoping to learn about conducting an organisational review with only 44% (n=4) of organisations rating this as important.

All respondents report being more confident, assertive and better able to undertake their role/work constructively with colleagues. They also state that they now have a better understanding of their organisations' operating environments and that they are better able to understand the nature of sustainable organisations.

88% (n=8) of respondents felt that they were able to provide better services to their clients as a result of the learning and skills they had gained through the Programme.

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they felt better able to contribute to their organisations' sustainability as a result of the Programme.

Focus group participants were positive about the impact the Programme had made on their sustainability with one participant telling us "*show me how to mix the tea and I don't have to call you every time I want a drink*". Focus group participants agreed that the Programme had given them the

knowledge “*to last in the longer term*” and that they were generally more aware about thinking about succession strategies and building sustainability.

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they had been able to share the learning and information from the Programme with other people from their organisations.

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they had started doing things differently as a result of their involvement with the Programme including for example reviewing and improving the structure of the organisation, developing projects more suited to their clients and communities needs and applying the funding techniques learnt.

7 people (77% of respondents) therefore felt that the learning from the Programme had contributed to improved services for clients.

100% (9) of respondents felt that as a result of their engagement with the Aspire Programme that they better understood and were better able to contribute to their organisations sustainability. Furthermore some 88% (n=8) felt that they had built better networks with other voluntary and community organisations.

Programme Content and Delivery

Overall interviewees and focus group participants were extremely positive about all elements of the Programme with the residential and mentoring elements being rated as good, very good or excellent by everyone.

Participants were extremely positive about the programme and all would recommend it others. They particularly valued:

- the one-on-one mentoring;
- access to information resources at Fircroft;
- opportunities for organisational and
- personal development; and opportunities for sharing and exchanging knowledge.

The **key recommendations** of the report include:

- Giving consideration to building in opportunities for some integrated activities where refugee community organisations can network with other new and emerging voluntary and community organisations.
- Giving consideration to increasing the ways in which cross-organisational learning could be enhanced, and exploring the potential to encouraging more than one person to be consistently involved with the programme.
- Further clarifying the role of and expectations of the ‘Agent of Change’.
- Fircroft, with Muath and potential partners, should consider strategies for developing and promoting mentoring as an effective element of learning menus for RCOs and the wider VCS.

- Consideration should be given to improving recruitment for future Programmes, and should as far as possible be designed to accommodate at least a three month lead in time to allow for a number of open days/information sessions about the Programme to be offered.

1. Introduction and Context

The Muath Trust Development Agency and Fircroft College came together in 2006 to develop the Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme.

1.1 About the Programme

The Programme is funded through ASPIRE (Asylum Seekers Pursuing Integration Refuge and Employment) which is a Birmingham Development Partnership which *“aims to develop innovative solutions for supporting asylum seekers and organisations working with them while they await a decision from the Home Office”*¹.

Part-funded by the European Community EQUAL fund, with 50% of the monies coming from Birmingham partners, the ASPIRE Programme offered an opportunity for the Muath Trust - an established Local Development Agency with a track record of working with and delivering support to refugee community organisations (RCOs) - to work with Fircroft College, a specialist adult residential college which seeks to strengthen communities by empowering individuals. The goal of formalising this partnership was to enhance capacity building and learning options for RCOs. This approach was particularly focussed on supporting and enabling participant organisations to improve the quality of the services they offer to asylum seekers.

The Programme was designed to have a number of components:

- An initial evaluation and health check leading to the development of an organisational action plan.

- Mentoring intended to support organisations to work through the action plan.

- 1 free place per participant organisation on a programme of 6 residential training sessions covering
 - You and Your Organisation
 - Funding Programmes
 - Funding Strategies
 - Financial planning
 - Strategic management
 - Business planning

- Free places on a further 4 residencies of participants' own choosing

¹ Source: Aspire website www.aspire-birmingham.org.uk

from the Fircroft Short Course Guide.

- Support to introduce an appropriate quality system.

As part of the criteria for entry into the Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme, each participant organisation was required to identify an 'Agent of Change' who would:

- Attend 4 network meetings
- Attend the programme of 6 residentials
- Attend a further 4 residentials
- Agree to volunteer for at least 6 hours per week
- Undertake and complete the paperwork required to evidence their participation

Each 'Agent of Change' would be eligible to receive a pack which included a briefcase, calculator, mouse mat, memory stick, A\$ Folder, A4 pad and a pen.

Each participant organisation also made a commitment to:

- Agree an action plan for the development of the organisation
- The introduction and implementation of an appropriate quality system
- Identify and sign up and least 1 Agent of Change
- Contribute to regular monitoring and evaluation of project activity.

Recruitment for the Programme commenced in November 2006 with residentials commencing in December and ending in May 2007.

1.2 The Context for Refugee Community Organisations

The ASPIRE Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme, targeted at meeting the capacity building needs of Refugee Community Organisations in Birmingham, has been developed at a time of rapid change, both for RCOs in particular and for the voluntary and community sector in general, with:

- An enhanced expectation by central Government that the sector plays an increasing role in the development and delivery of public policy and services.
- The introduction of new legislative frameworks for voluntary action (Charities Act; 2006).

- Fundamental shifts in VCS funding streams and patterns and an increased emphasis on ‘mainstreaming’.

Additional factors affecting RCOs include:

- Expectations placed on them to play an increasingly prominent role in implementing community cohesion and integration strategies.
- The reduction of funding streams which support independent advocacy and an apparent expectation that organisations can play a more substantive role in national policy implementation (Home Office; 2005a/Commission on Integration and Cohesion; 2007).

It is, therefore, important to place this local initiative within the wider context of change both within the voluntary sector and in policies and strategies that specifically respond to the needs of refugee communities.

1.2.1 The Changing Voluntary Sector

The Compact (Home Office; 1998) envisaged “*a new relationship between Government and voluntary organisations*”. Since 2002 and the Treasury’s Cross Cutting Review on the future role of the voluntary sector, there has been a plethora of policy and practice guidance on the VCS. Overall, as noted, this has had a common theme of enhancing the role of the sector in public policy delivery. This has included:

- The reduction of ring-fenced grant funding regimes, with an increased emphasis both in statutory and (for example) Lottery funds on the VCS clearly demonstrating outcomes which support the achievement of central Government policy objectives (e.g. enhanced educational attainment, crime reduction etc) - rather than supporting sector initiatives which may have broader, but largely unquantifiable, community benefit. This has been linked to concepts of outcome related commissioning and ‘mainstreaming’ funding regimes through the commissioning processes.
- The emphasis on the sector by Government as a procurement partner in a range of new, competitive tendering, settings (e.g. environmental services; Home Office; 2005b/ National Audit Office; 2005).
- The promotion of ‘new forms’ of organisation - in particular social enterprises (DTI; 2004; Social Enterprise Strategy). This has also involved the introduction of community development finance initiatives (e.g. Phoenix Fund) with their emphasis on loans to promote social enterprise and community business rather than grants or service level agreements which, traditionally, recognised at least some elements of organisational ‘core costs’.

The promotion of the role of the sector has coincided with recognition, from Government perspectives, of the need to enhance its skills base and infrastructure support. Investment has, therefore, been made in:

- ChangeUp and the subsequent Capacity/Future Builders programmes which envisage sustainable regional and sub-regional infra-structure support systems being in place over the current decade (Home Office; 2004a/2005c). It should, however, be noted that these new systems (supported by national and regional centres, or ‘hubs’, of excellence (for example in Information Technology development) rely on consortia arrangements. The Refugee Council has recognised the difficulty of RCOs engaging in such complex arrangements and commissioned research (2006 - as yet unpublished) on how such groups could be more effectively integrated into the new work force and sector development initiatives.
- Changing and updating charity law (Charities Act; 2006), with a redefinition of charitable activity, the creation of new legal entities (Community Interest Companies) and subsequent guidance to, and requirements on, organisations to ‘professionalise’ and enhance the skills of trustees and management groups.

Partly as a result of these policy shifts, the sector has continued to expand in the last decade (NCVO; 2004). The picture is, however, uneven, with growth being particularly evident within larger national charities, but with a relative decline in smaller, locally focused agencies with incomes of under £100,000 (NCVO; 2006) and under £500,000 (Charity Commission; 2007.) These are the very categories that RCOs are most likely to fall into and the implications of this trend are explored in subsequent paragraphs.

1.2.2 Refugee Community Organisations: The Local Context

There are conflicting estimates of the number of refugees in the West Midlands (Sport Structures 2005/Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees, 2006). Equally, reliable data on the numbers, and incomes, of local RCOs are hard to come by and there has been a lack of systematic research into RCOs regionally (Bailey & McCabe 2005).

As a result, there is no, single, reliable database on the number of Refugee Community Organisations in Birmingham. Estimates vary from 48 (Birmingham Voluntary Service Council) to 106 (Phillimore & McCabe; 2007). Membership of Birmingham New Communities Network (BNCN) is perhaps the most robust indicator of the range of RCOs - with some 76 groups in contact with the Network and approximately 30 active members.

This, however:

“Excludes all the more informal groups. We estimate there are over 70 different Sudanese groups in and around Sparkbrook and Sparkhill alone - though most of these have no formal (constitution) and appear and then disappear depending on local loyalties and movements in an out of the district.”. (McCabe et al; 2007).

Griffiths et al (2005; see also Zetter et al; undated ESRC) comment that the RCO sector nationally: *“is now characterised by an established core of established organisations surrounded by a periphery of volatile and {...] insecure organisations”*

This is reflected in the local situation that is characterised by:

- Fragmentation.
- Organisations with relatively short term life-cycles which are often in competition for scarce resources and *“closing by the dozen due to lack of funding.”* (McCabe et al 2007).
- Organisations being reliant on voluntary action/small grants
- RCOs lacking the capacity to/being *“excluded from”* contracts with statutory agencies (Garry et al; 2006)

Further, it should be acknowledged that, locally, even those ‘established’ organisations (such as the Bosnia-Herzegovina UK Network):

“ Are fragile and depend on attracting different forms of often short term funding...so even these (groups) have little security or sustainability.”

“[Most] rely almost totally on volunteers. They have either no money or move from one small grant to another...so there is no capacity. Not really. The groups fold when a main volunteer gets a job or moves....and then they may reform. But they are not sustainable (organisations) ...the skills that person has leave when they leave the group and there is only so much volunteers who are often unemployed and under other pressures can do.”
(Garry et al; 2006)

1.2.3 RCOs in Policy Context

“ (RCOs) play a critical role in social support for refugees and asylum seekers. Refugee Community Organisations - whether they are formal or not - are often the first point of call for refugees and asylum seekers who do not trust official bodies - whether they are statutory or the big voluntaries.” (McCabe et al;2007)

Current national policy towards Refugee Community Organisations is itself fragmented and, at times, contradictory.

RCOs have been expected to play an increasingly important role in the delivery of both the Refugee Integration (Home Office; 2005) and Refugee Employment (DWP; 2005) strategies. The implementation mechanisms for both are currently under review and changing. It is currently unclear how RCOs might be engaged in, or funded to support, these areas of policy development in the future.

In addition, there is increasing funding pressure on RCOs to make a transition from their ‘traditional’ role of providing social and advocacy

support to a focus on service delivery and engagement in specific activities which can be seen as contributing to the integration and community cohesion agendas (Cantle; 2005).

“What (RCOs) are good at is social support and enabling the authorities to access minority communities. They are excellent gatekeepers who can negotiate contact when ...(agencies) need to consult...but this is not funded. If they want funding they are increasingly being pushed to deliver services. This may not be their strong point. But it’s the only way they can get funding....and then if they don’t deliver - and they tend to be expected to deliver a lot for a little - it’s harder for others to get funding”. (McCabe et al; 2007)

Further, responsibility for RCOs is increasingly split across different sections of Government. Needs and support may be addressed at a national level through the Community Cohesion Unit, Faith Communities Unit (Communities and Local Government - formerly the Home Office) or The Office of the Third Sector.

Indeed much of the debate on the role of refugee groups has been subsumed into:

- Wider debates on community cohesion (Cantle; 2005; Commission on Integration and Cohesion; 2007)
- General race equality strategies (Home Office; 2007).

Whilst at one level RCOs appear to have, in common with VCS organisations in general, a wider role to play in policy, at the same time the agenda has moved on - from asylum seeking and refugees to migrants and EU migration patterns. Indeed, a range of recent policy documents ((Commission on Integration and Cohesion/Home Office; 2007) no longer refer directly to RCOs, but use the term Migrant Community Organisations to cover both ‘historic’ refugee communities and new arrivals from the EU. In short, a primary concern for refugee integration has been replaced by a concept of controlled economic migration.

1.2.4 RCOs and Capacity Building

As noted, VCS capacity building has become a major plank of Government policy towards, and investment in, the sector.

Both within Birmingham and at a regional level, there have been a number of RCO specific capacity building programmes in recent years, with Muath Trust taking a lead on this as part of the emerging network of Local Development Agencies across the city.

More recently, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has enabled Birmingham New Communities Network (BNCN), working with the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham, to develop a pool of refugee researchers to undertake needs analysis work within refugee communities

and the Refugee Council has provided limited resources to support community development within the RCO sector.

Most of these initiatives have:

- Been reliant on short-term European, UK Government or grant making trust monies.
- Addressed the needs of RCOs within the contexts of programmes aimed at BME voluntary organisations; initiatives which themselves have often been short lived (Embrace West Midlands/Black Regeneration Network.)
- Not been linked into ‘mainstream’ capacity building programmes. This appears to be a characteristic nationally. For example, the Refugee Forum North East commissioned research (May 2006) on how developmental support for RCOs could be better aligned with regional ChangeUp and Future Builders strategies and expressed concern that such organisations were treated as “*outside the development needs of voluntary and community groups as a whole.*” (Invitation to Tender; 2006 - final report not yet available).
- Offered one-off/short term training rather than ongoing developmental support (Evelyn Oldfield Unit; London).

Whilst there are reported to be “*40 local infrastructure support organisations and services (in Birmingham)*”, the Birmingham Change Up Consortium (2006) suggests that most of these are small agencies which, themselves, lack skills, knowledge and resources and that “*the infrastructure support sector is under strain - overstretched in its capacity to meet the volume and diversity of frontline VCOs’ needs.*” (Birmingham Change Up Consortium; 2006)

“What is needed is a long term approach. The needs are so deep and complex and what is needed is long term one-to-one support. It’s not just a matter of putting on some courses. People (involved) are not familiar with even the basics...how to keep accounts that will meet (funders) requirements, legal structures, reporting...you name it.. yet all we get is short-tem (money) and no direction about what we are building capacity for these (groups) to do.”

(RCO Support Agency Interview; cited in McCabe et al; 2007)

The vast majority of voluntary organisations in the UK (NCVO; 2006) and within Birmingham (Birmingham Change Up Consortium; 2006) rely on volunteers and have incomes of less than £10,000 per annum. Their capacity building needs are complex and the enhanced service delivery role expected by Government requires increasingly professional management within even

small, predominantly voluntary VCOs. There is increasing competition for scarce resources and an over-stretched infrastructure.

All of these characteristics are shared between, particularly, the generic community sector and refugee organisations. Some of those interviewed as part of the evaluation suggested that RCOs have particular needs:

“At least voluntary organisations usually know that funding is a game you play - and they know there is a game. They may not be good at it but they know there are rules and there are regulations.....RCOs start at least one step behind....they don’t understand that there is a game you have to play, that there are rules and that you have to play by those rules.”

These issues beg larger questions of the Government’s strategies for voluntary and community structure development (ChangeUp, Future Builders, Specialist Hubs etc.):

- Do RCOs require separate capacity building support - and how does this ‘sit’ with wider integration agendas?
- Should RCO support be part of mainstream sector development and mainstream programmes such as ChangeUp?
- How can/should RCOs engage in mainstream developments more effectively - or can those Government sponsored initiatives be more effective in addressing any specific RCO needs?

These questions are addressed, from the viewpoints of participants in the ASPIRE Programme, in subsequent sections of this report.

2. Purpose and Structure of the Report

The Muath Trust and Fircroft College commissioned the evaluation in June 2007.

The primary aim of the evaluation was:

“To undertake an evaluation of the ASPIRE Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme recently run by Fircroft College and the Muath Trust Development Agency to identify the impact of the course and the capacity building support on individual students and the organisations they represent.”

Against this the evaluators were asked to give consideration to:

- Providing an overview of programme participants, their backgrounds and profile of organisations they work or volunteer for.

- Identifying how students have taken the knowledge and learning developed during the programme and applied it to their organisations' work & activities.
- Ascertaining the impact the course and the associated support has then had, or is likely to have, on the organisations' activities, sustainability, and success in achieving their objectives.
- Identifying how well the additional development support has complimented the teaching and learning undertaken on the short courses.
- Ascertaining what impact there has been on the personal development of students.
- Identifying areas for development and improvement in the overall programme and the course content and delivery methods.

This report has been prepared to present:

- The methods, approach and activities undertaken by the review team commissioned to deliver this evaluation.
- Full research findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations for development of the Programme.

3. Methodology

The evaluation team adopted a range of evaluation methods to assess the impact of the Programme, on individual 'Agents of Change' and in terms of organisational impact and to assess participant perceptions of how that learning could contribute to the sustainability of their organisation.

The approach adopted included:

- A literature search to locate the research within the relevant policy context.
- A review of Programme materials.
- A start up interview with the Muath Trust's Programme Coordinator and the primary course tutor from Fircroft College.
- In-depth individual interviews with the Muath Trust's Programme Coordinator, and the Fircroft Residential course tutor, who in addition to providing the main tutoring for Fircroft was also employed by the Muath Trust to deliver the mentoring element of the Programme.
- 9 One to one face-to-face or phone interviews with Programme participants.
- A focus group for organisations involved with the Programme.
- Follow up interviews with case study participants.

3.1 Participation in the Evaluation

Following a meeting with the Programme tutor/mentor, individuals from 13 organisations were identified for inclusion in the evaluation who were either regular participants at the residential elements of the Programme and/or were in receipt of regular mentoring support as the key 'Agents of Change'. This approach was taken as a number of the participant organisations had 2 or more people engaged with the Programme at differing times and the value of identifying one person as the main focus for the work ensured that the evaluation team were able to benefit from gaining the views of each group's main participant and explore, more effectively, their personal learning and how this related to organisational development. Potential case studies were identified in conjunction with both the Programme tutor/mentor and The Muath Trust.

Of these 13 people, 9 were able to participate in the evaluation, a response rate of some 69%. It is worth noting that this was the 3rd evaluation activity that ASPIRE DSO participants had been asked to engage in within a short period of time. Of those people not participating, 2 had agreed to take part, and face-to-face interviews were arranged, but not completed due to non-attendance. One person was unable to attend 2 arranged meetings.

A full copy of the key question schedule can be found at appendix 1. In essence, the participants and their organisations were asked questions within the following broad categories:

- Organisational and or individual rationale for choosing the Programme.
- The impact of the Programme on individual participants.
- The impact of the Programme on participating organisations.
- The impact of the Programme on organisational sustainability
- Overall satisfaction with the Programme and suggestions for improvement and development.

The Muath Trust distributed invitations to participate in the focus group to all participating organisations. The focus group was re-arranged on three occasions in an effort to maximise participation.

It was originally intended that the focus group would be for people from participant organisations who had not participated as individuals in the Programme. However, of the 6 people who attended, from 5 different organisations, 3 were the designated 'Agents of Change' and only 1 person from 1 organisation had not been actively engaged in some aspect of the Programme.

4. About the Programme

The overarching aim of the Aspire Programme is:

To develop capacity building processes specific to refugee community organisations with a focus on the quality of services they offer asylum seekers.

Participants were recruited through the Muath Trusts extensive networks, either by flyer or direct personal contact and were primarily organisations that were or had been receiving support through their local development agency. The original intention of The Muath Trust and Fircroft had been to deliver a year long Programme commencing in April 2006, however, difficulties with match funding meant that this was not possible and in reality the Programme did not start recruiting until October 2006 with an Open Day being held at Fircroft College in late November 2006. With the first residential being held in December 2006 time scales were somewhat shorter than originally envisaged and this has resulted in the action-planning element of the Programme continuing through until September 2007.

Muath feel that developing the Aspire Programme offered an opportunity to make refugee community organisations “*more competitive and sustainable*” and to build on and complement their role as a local development agency.

Residentials

The residential element of the Programme has been developed from the Developing Sustainable Organisations Programme that Fircroft offer to voluntary and community organisations that is designed to help organisations become more sustainable through the delivery of an accredited course.

In addition participants were able to choose to attend a further 4 residentials of their choice from Fircrofts extensive programme which covers areas² such as leadership and management, community organising and professional development.

Mentoring

The mentoring was intended to offer Programme participants an opportunity to put the learning into practise and has been designed to be (and has been offered as) participant led.

² There is an extensive programme of courses at Fircroft full details of which can be found on their web site at www.fircroft.ac.uk

Workshops and Forums

Designed to bring 'Agents of Change' and others from their organisations together around a common issue they have offered an opportunity for short focussed learning and knowledge development. Workshops usually have on outside speaker and have looked at:

- Community research
- Ward advisory boards
- Success Stories
- Funding
- Employment (targeted based on geographical area and open to RCO's from this specific area. However, all those who benefited were engaged with the Aspire programme)
- Using Excel

The Forum was originally intended to act as a steering group for the Programme, however, given the collapsed time frame and feedback from the participants this was not prioritised. However, regular feedback mechanisms were built into all aspects of the programme, and the whole programme responded to and acted on participant's views in a robust and inclusive way.

Action Planning and Quality System

Built around an initial assessment of need and linked to establishing a quality system with participant organisations, this element of the programme has recently commenced as such is not covered by this evaluation.

Course Materials and Handouts

All residential course participants received handouts and information for each element of the course along with signposting to other sources of support and information, particularly internet based sources. In addition everyone received a copy of Just About Managing by Sandy Adirondack.

5. Participant Profiles

17 organisations originally demonstrated an interest in the Programme, of these 13 went on to become regular Programme participants - either through attendance at the residential element of the programme or through the take up of mentoring opportunities. 1 organisation joined the Programme but then was unable to take up the opportunity and did not engage with any of the Programme's activities. A further 3 organisations signed up to the Programme and took up an initial mentoring opportunity and met with the mentor for either 1 ½ hours (2 organisations) or 1 ¼ hours (1 organisation). These groups were not involved in the evaluation because of the very limited nature of their engagement.

9 organisations had one identified 'Agent of Change' and no other people from the organisation involved. The remainder had 2 or 3 people involved, sometimes with a split in participation between the residentials and attending mentoring sessions or attending network meetings.

9 organisations attended both the residential and mentoring sessions and of these take up ranged from 30 minutes to almost 23 hours, with the 'average' mentoring time being 9 hours per participating organisation.

4 organisations did not participate in the residential element of the programme, but did participate in the mentoring support with take up ranging from 3 hours to 28 ½ hours; the 'average' mentoring time being 11 ½ hours per participating organisation.

10 organisations participated in workshop and forum activity:

- 3 organisations attended 1 workshop
- 4 organisations attended 2 workshops
- 3 organisations attended 3 workshops.

The 6 core residential elements of the Programme are accredited to level 2 or 3 by the Open College Network (OCN) 8 or 9 participants handed work in for assessment for each of the units and the course tutor anticipates 8 or 9 people will achieve an OCN level 2 accreditation as a result. Of the 8 participants attending the Excel workshop 7 have achieved OCN level one accreditation. Also the Organising Your Community Group session in July was accredited to OCN level 2 and again some 8-10 people have completed the work for the accreditation.

Detailed information is only available from those people participating in the one to one interviews and of these:

- 8 were volunteers within their organisations holding various positions including Chairman (2), Director, Vice Chair/Development Officer, Secretary/Public Relations Officer, Events Organiser, and West Midlands Coordinator.
- 1 was a full time paid employee.
- 3 were women and 6 were men
- 5 were African, 1 Asian, 1 Pakistani and 1 Somali
- 8 were still working for/volunteering with the same organisation as when they started the Programme.

Of the 9 people participating in the interviews, 8³ had previously been engaged in other UK-based training and learning opportunities, both accredited and unaccredited, and:

³ Please note people had attended more than one course or training activity.

- 2 had been awarded an NVQ level 3 Advice and Guidance
- 2 had attended Communication Management for BMEs
- 1 had an MBA
- 1 was currently studying for a BA
- 1 had a Diploma in Social Research
- 1 had attended a course in ESOL changes and its affects on the voluntary sector
- 1 had attended Procurement training
- 1 had undergone a Share Friends Induction
- 1 had attended a Broadcasting and Presentation course
- 1 had attended management committee training
- 1 had attended first aid training.

6. Key Findings

The findings are based on 9 telephone interviews with Programme participants and the comments of the 6 people (from 5 organisations) who attended the focus group.

6.1 Reasons for Choosing the ASPIRE Programme

Learning new skills to use in their organisation and professional development opportunities (see Table 1) were cited by respondents as the most important reasons for choosing the course, with personal development opportunities coming a close second. One respondent commented, “ *[My] main interest was developing the organisation as well as personal development*”.

Interestingly, some 88% (n=8) of respondents noted that they had chosen the Programme because it was specifically aimed at refugee community organisations. However, focus group participants felt that the programme as a whole, and the residential element in particular, would have been better if it had been open to everyone. Focus group participants commented that “*being only with RCOs keeps singling us out and we need to meet all sorts of other organisations*” and “*we need to be integrated - we would learn more from other people they would learn more from us - mix up better*”. Other focus group participants commented “*working with other organisations not just refugee ones gives better opportunities to mix and integrate and helps other people feel that we’re not alien to them*”.

One focus group attendee commented that their organisation had undergone training on Quality First, and that this had been delivered in a group with other small voluntary and community organisations that were also working to implement the quality standard. They went on to comment that they had been surprised to find out that “*British people can’t always read and write and that British people have difficulties with youth*”.

There was a general feeling from the focus group that it was as important to be working with people from a range organisations with the same needs (e.g. needing to agree legal status/management systems/access initial funding) as it was to be working with refugee community organisations.

Table 1: Reasons for Choosing the ASPIRE Programme

(Actual numbers of respondents in brackets, people could choose more than one reason)

I wanted to learn new skills to use in my organisation	100% (9)
I was looking for professional development opportunities	100% (9)
The programme was specifically aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations	88% (8)
I was looking for personal development opportunities	88% (8)
I wanted to learn new skills so that I could improve my job performance	77% (7)
The programme was free	66% (6)
I wanted to learn new skills in order to get a better/new job	55% (5)
The programme was being offered by Fircroft College with additional support from The Muath Trust	44% (4)
My line manager suggested I do the programme	44% (4)
Undertaking this programme was identified as part of an appraisal, training needs analysis or supervision session within my organisation	33% (3)
The programme offered a package of learning and development that I couldn't find on offer any where else	33% (3)
I was the dedicated ' <i>agent of change</i> ' within my organisation and therefore had to attend the programme	33% (3)

Other reasons for choosing the Programme included:

- Wanting to learn more about voluntary sector and organisational infrastructure
- Wanting to set up their own organisation and needing more information on the general UK context for voluntary and community organisations
- Wanting to learn more about completing funding applications as one focus group participant noted, “ I want to develop the perfect project for the perfect funding”.

- Developing management skills, and understanding more about the structure of the organisation and where it could be improved.

One focus group participant commented that the course was very timely as their organisation had only recently been established.

6.2 Developing Skills

Respondents were asked to identify which skill elements of the Programme had been of particular interest both to them personally and to their organisation. They were asked to identify which skills they were hoping to develop as a result of the Programme.

As can be seen from the Table 2, 88% of respondents (n=8) identified that for both them and their organisations, developing skills in the preparation and writing of funding bids was one of the most important elements of the Programme. It is however interesting to note that whilst 88% of respondents felt that undertaking an organisational review was an important skill, only 44% (n =4) of their organisations felt this was important.

Table 2: Skills Development

(Actual numbers of respondents in brackets, people could choose more than one reason)

Skill Area	Participant	Organisation
Writing funding bids	88% (8)	88% (8)
Organisational Review	88% (8)	44% (4)
Strategic Management	77% (7)	55% (5)
Financial Planning	66% (6)	66% (6)
Business Planning	66% (6)	55% (5)
Implementing a Quality Assurance system	66% (6)	44% (4)

Other skills that respondents were seeking to develop included:

- A better understanding of legal structures and systems
- A more detailed understanding of legal requirements e.g. Child Protection policies.

6.3 Why was the ASPIRE Programme suitable for your organisation?

Respondents identified that the key reasons the Programme was felt to be suitable for their organisations were that information and skills from the Programme could be shared across the organisations and that the Programme offered the opportunity to build and develop participants' skills.

Of almost equal importance, with 88% of respondents (n=8) noting them as important, were the following factors: the opportunity to improve organisational performance, help with fund raising, the convenient timing of the Programme and that it was aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations.

It is interesting to note that the implementation of a quality system within the organisation was not seen by any of the respondents as an important factor when choosing to engage in the ASPIRE Programme, given that one of the 'offers' and requirements of the programme was *the 'introduction of a quality system appropriate to your organisation'*⁴

One respondent noted that when the ASPIRE Programme was chosen by their organisation *"it was seen as good because it was a continuous programme of development with good facilities"*. Another commented that the location and reputation of Fircroft were important.

Table 3: Suitability of the ASPIRE Programme

(Actual numbers of respondents in brackets, people could choose more than one reason)

Information and skills from the programme could be shared across the organisation	100% (9)
It built and developed my skills	100% (9)
It helped to improve organisational performance	88% (8)
It was aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations	88% (8)
It offered help with fund raising	88% (8)
The times were convenient	88% (8)
It offered a programme, plus mentoring and action planning	66% (6)

⁴ Source Developing Sustainable Refugee Community Organisations Handbook for Organisations and their Agents of Change (not dated)

To improve job performance	66% (6)
It was free	66% (6)
Muath Trust were involved in offering additional support	66% (6)
Programme offered by Fircroft	55% (5)
It formed part of a career development plan for me	22% (2)
It offered help with implementing a quality assurance system	0

6.4 Personal Impact and Individual Learning

Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact of the Programme for them as individuals.

Table 4 demonstrates that people recognise they have derived a considerable amount of personal learning from the Programme. All respondents report being more confident, assertive and better able to undertake their role/work constructively with colleagues. They also state that they now have a better understanding of their organisations' operating environments and that they are better able to understand the nature of sustainable organisations.

88% (n=8) of the respondents felt that they were able to provide better services to their clients as a result of the learning and skills they had gained through the Programme.

Table 4: Individual learning and impact

(Actual number in brackets people could choose more than one reason)

As a result of attending the course are you/do you?	Nos.
More confident and better able to undertake in undertaking your job/volunteering role	100% (9)
More assertive in undertaking your job/volunteering role	100% (9)
Better able to work with your colleagues	100% (9)

Have a better understanding of your organisation's operating environment	100% (9)
Understand the nature of sustainable organisations	100% (9)
Have a better understanding of funding programmes	88% (8)
Have a better understanding of fund raising	88% (8)
Have a better understanding of financial management	88% (7)
Better able to work with your management committee	88% (7)
More able to move into a new/better job or paid employment	66% (6)
Have a better understanding of the benefits of a quality assurance system to your organisation	55% (5)

6.5 Organisational Impact

Telephone interview respondents were asked to reflect on the impact the Programme has had on their organisations. They were asked how useful each of the individual aspects of the Programme had been for them and their organisations, and what had changed as a result of their involvement with the Programme.

6.5.1 Building sustainable organisations

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they felt better able to contribute to their organisations' sustainability as a result of the Programme. One person commented that they had a better knowledge of funding streams and how voluntary organisations and the voluntary sector works. Another told us they had *“more awareness and understanding of the logic of the voluntary sector. We also have a better structure to our organisation due to the training, which will improve our sustainability”*. Another commented their organisation had a *“better understanding of the voluntary sector and [a] better understanding of our short, medium and long terms goals”* One person told us that it had helped them contribute to a new organisation in terms of diversifying funding sources. Another noted that they now *“understand that we need to be different and original to other organisations to attract funding”* another that they had started to think about their work in terms of projects.

Focus group participants were positive about the impact the Programme had made on their sustainability with one participant telling us *“show me how to mix the tea and I don't have to call you every time I want a drink”*.

Focus group participants agreed that the Programme had given them the knowledge “*to last in the longer term*” and that they were generally more aware about thinking about succession strategies and building sustainability.

6.5.2 Sharing knowledge and Learning

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they had been able to share the learning and information from the Programme with other people from their organisations. This compares well to the 2005/6 evaluation of the Developing Sustainable Organisations where some 74% of questionnaire respondents had shared learning and knowledge from the course with others in their organisations⁵. 3 people (33% of respondents) noted that there had been some barriers to sharing information; with one person finding it difficult to find the time as the group were busy doing other things, one person noted that language served as the largest barrier with the need to translate information to other members, and time restrictions due to family commitments.

The impact of learning shared with colleagues in participant organisations has been reported to include:

- Better understanding about developing funding ideas and how to present ideas to funders
- More confidence in writing funding bids, more knowledgeable about funding environment
- Better able to write funding bids and proposals (2 organisations)
- Better structure to organisations due to the training which organisations believe will improve their sustainability
- Better knowledge of funding streams and how voluntary organisations and the voluntary sector works
- Better understanding of short, medium and long terms goals

One of the focus group participants noted “*whatever I learn at Fircroft I talk about this at our staff meeting once a month, I tell them what I’ve learnt in our own language*”, another commented that they had changed their structure to create an office managers post.

9 people (100% of the respondents) told us that they had started doing things differently as a result of their involvement with the Programme. This included:

- Developing projects more suited to the needs of the organisation’s target community
- Changes to the management structure of the board, with specified roles and responsibilities for board members and staff

⁵ Goodwin and McCabe June 2006 Developing Sustainable Organisations Independent Evaluation of the 05/06 Fircroft DSO Programme

- Revised an existing business plan as a result of the learning from the Programme
- Applying funding techniques and skills
- Improved the structure of the organisation
- Become more efficient
- Feeling better informed and more knowledgeable about sustainability
- One focus group participant commented *“We have changed loads of things, we have put new documentation in place”*, another *“We used to talk and talk away, but now we have evaluation forms”*, yet another *“we know how to raise funds and we know how to deal with funders requirements”*.
- One focus group participant commented that they felt more confident and better able to speak in front of others another noted that his colleague who attended the course was *“clearly much more confident”*.

6.5.3 Better Services to clients

Only 2 organisations (22% of respondents) felt that they were unable to provide better services to clients as a result of the Programme - with one of these noting *“we are still looking to put what we’ve learnt into practice at a managerial level”*. 7 people (77% of respondents) therefore felt that the learning from the Programme had contributed to improved services. One commented that their organisation had *“more robust systems”* and was *“no longer cutting corners, we operate more systematically”*. Another noted that they were *“better tuned into the needs of our community”*. Another organisation was engaging with more diverse communities as a result of the ASPIRE Programme. One focus group participant noted that *“...I found out about involving users and involving users to find out what is bothering them and can be improved so that we can develop better services”*.

6.6 Usefulness of the ASPIRE Programme

Respondents were asked to reflect on how useful each element of the Programme had been to them and their organisations (see Table 5).

One person at the focus group commented, *“If I hadn’t done the course the organisation wouldn’t be where it is today”* with all them agreeing that the most useful part of the course had been concerned with fundraising strategies.

Overall, interviewees and focus group participants had found the Programme to be useful, and could identify learning that would be both useful to their organisations and that would help build future sustainability.

Only 44% (n=4) of respondents had implemented a quality system. This may be linked to the fact that at the time of writing no health checks or action

planning had yet been carried out with the majority of participant organisations and that mentoring had been very ‘user led’, with the mentor working with the groups on issues (primarily funding) of interest to the group. It is clear from the interviews and the focus group that participants were more aware of quality systems and tools and as one focus group participant commented “*our organisation has had a quality system in place for two years, but we have improved the way in which we keep our evidence and we have developed a better volunteer agreement*” another remarked that they were much more “*aware of quality and would be looking to develop this in the future*”.

Table 5: Usefulness of the Programme

(Actual numbers of respondents in brackets, people could choose more than one reason)

Element of the Programme	Useful	Have used the learning	Will use the learning	Not Appropriate
Organisational Review	77% (7)	66% (6)	33% (3)	0
Writing funding bids	77% (7)	77% (7)	22% (2)	22% (2)
Financial Planning	66% (6)	66% (6)	22% (2)	0
Strategic Management	66% (6)	44% (4)	22% (2)	0
Business Planning	66% (6)	33% (3)	22% (2)	22% (2)
Implementing a Quality Assurance System	44% (4)	33% (3)	11% (1)	0
Forums and workshops and meetings	55% (5)	11% (1)	11% (1)	0
Action Planning	33% (3)	22% (2)	22% (2)	0
Mentoring and support	66% (6)	55% (5)	44% (4)	0

6.7 Take up of other learning opportunities

As part of the ASPIRE Programme participants were encouraged to attend an additional 4 residential courses at Fircroft, these additional residentials

were open to both Aspire Programme participants and others in their organisations.

52 residential places were taken up across 18 different courses including for example:

- Leadership and Management
- Supporting and Developing Volunteers
- Project Management
- Strategic Business Planning
- Training the Trainer

6.8 Developing Knowledge and Improving Relationships

100% (9) of respondents felt that as a result of their engagement with the Aspire Programme that they better understood and were better able to contribute to their organisations sustainability. Furthermore some 88% (n=8) felt that they had built better networks with other voluntary and community organisations.

Focus group participants talked about how the Programme has helped them to develop new relationships and that they will be keeping in touch with people in the future one person noted *“it’s really important for organisations to have the change to meet and exchange experiences and vies and to find out more about ways of working”* 2 people felt that there was room to develop more joint and partnership working arrangements and would have liked to learn how to develop this further.

Table 6: Developing Knowledge and improving Relationships

(Actual numbers of respondents in brackets, people could choose more than one reason)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Gained a better understanding of funding programmes	88% (8)	11% (1)	0
Gained a better understanding of organisational and legal responsibilities	66% (6)	33% (3)	0
Developed new or improved financial planning systems	88% (8)	22% (2)	0
Gained a better understanding of sustainability	100% (9)	0	0
Developed clear plans about how to sustain itself over the next 1-5 years	55% (5)	22% (2)	11% (1)
Built new relationships with other voluntary and community organisations	88% (8)	11% (1)	0

Built new relationships with statutory sector agencies	66% (6)	33% (3)	0
Built new relationships with private sector agencies	33% (3)	66% (6)	0
Improved relationships with its funders	55% (5)	33% (3)	11% (1)
Improved relationships with employees (this question was not applicable to 3 respondents)	100% (6)	0	0
Improved relationships with volunteers	100% (9)	0	0

Since completing the Programme

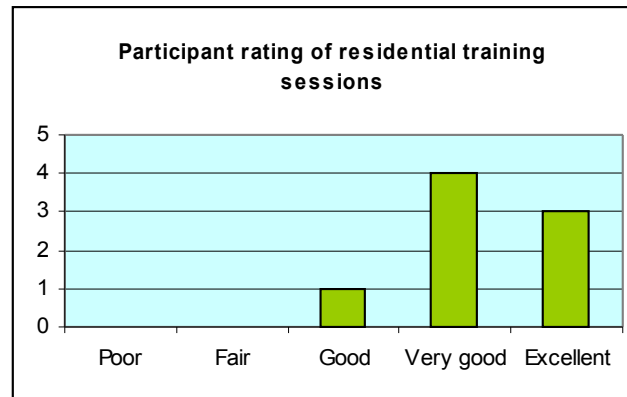
- 8 organisations (88% of respondents) have developed a business plan
- 6 organisations (66% of respondents) have written a strategic plan.
- 6 organisations (66% of respondents) have written a funding strategy
- 6 organisations (66% of respondents) have written funding bids from these 2 organisations had received grants of £750.00 and £6,500.00.
- 6 organisations (66% of respondents) have reviewed their organisational structures
- 6 organisations (66% of respondents) have attended forum or network meetings for the participants
- 4 organisations (44% of respondents) have implemented a quality assurance system.

7. Review of programme content and suggestions for improvement

7.1 Fircroft Residentials

Participants were asked to rate the residential and associated support element of the programme on a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Chart 1



(n=8)

Please note one respondent had not attended the residential element of the programme and therefore did not respond to this question

Overall telephone respondents and focus group participants were very positive about the learning and support on offer from Fircroft, and as one focus group participant explained *“learning in blocks of time makes you focus on what you’re doing, for example on a one day course I leave at 4.00pm, and I go home and sort out the children, but if you’re on a residential then you can think about what you’re learning and you can access the library and ask people until you get the learning”*. Two focus group participants found attending residentials difficult and one person noted that *“I work during the week and it’s very hard to attend a residential when you are a volunteer, it’s hard to commit to three or four days a month to attend the residential”* another commented *“having someone out of the organisation for three or four days every month is very difficult to manage - all the time off”*.

Telephone interview respondents were asked to identify what they had particularly enjoyed and or found useful about the teaching and support at Fircroft and they told us that they liked:

- The accommodation, the access to library, ICT and information
- The Organisational Review workshop, which *“increased my understanding of VCO context in the UK”*
- That the teachers were patient and that *“materials were always given in advance - very helpful!”*
- Networking, meeting other similar organisations,
- Discussions and interaction with other organisations
- Being able to ‘bounce ideas off others’ in similar situations

- *That the “Residential allowed for better concentration*
- *“Helen’s teaching style and experience was excellent”*
- *Fircroft provided a good learning environment and had “good facilities, you had personal space, library facilities and the teachers flexibility”*

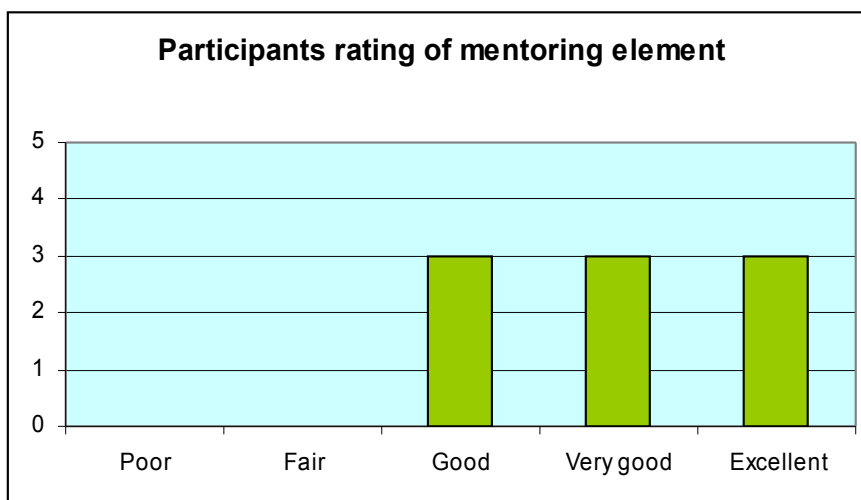
We asked people what would have improved their experiences at Fircroft and they suggested:

- That they would have liked more time needed on certain sessions - but did not specify which.
- The length of the residential is reduced. People commented on the need to change structure of course, *“12 hours a day is too much, should have 8 hours per day max during residential”*, with one person suggesting that the course should fit into 2 days.
- One person commented in the telephone interviews that it was *“not convenient for parents (lack of access by parents violates equal opportunities)”* when talking about the length of the day
- One person could not think of anything they wanted to change and they commented that they were *“impressed by open access to facilities”*
- One person would have liked more variety of food on offer
- *“Laptop availability for you room, to allow time to work around your children in your room”*
- One person noted that *“too many handouts, less explanation on residential”*
- Focus group participants suggested that the order of the programme should be re-arranged - and that the Programme should start with the unit on Management
- Focus group participants would like to have had access to more seminars and workshops to explore specific themes or focus, and that people from participant’s organisations should be able to access these.

7.2 Mentoring

Participants were asked to rate the residential and associated support element of the programme on a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Chart 2



(n=9)

Respondents were asked to identify what they had particularly enjoyed and or found useful about the mentoring and they told us that the one to one support was useful, particularly the funding support and that they had found the person carrying out the mentoring helpful. Comments included:

- *“Mentoring support helped change my perspective on funding and partnership work, one to one time with the tutor”*
- One person commented *“The mentoring support helped change my perspective on funding and partnership work”* and went on to say that they found one to one time with the tutor (who also offered the mentoring element of the programme) was useful
- *“I received extra explanation - more than in the class”*
- *“Feedback was useful, x (mentor) identified our weaknesses and presented means of overcoming these”*

One person commented that they did not know about the mentoring.

We asked people what would have improved their experiences of mentoring 4 people (44% of respondents) commented that they would have liked more time with the mentor, focus group participants agreed with this and one commented *“x (mentor) doesn’t have enough time and I would prefer more of a support worker with clearer ways of working”*.

Suggestions for improving the mentoring support included:

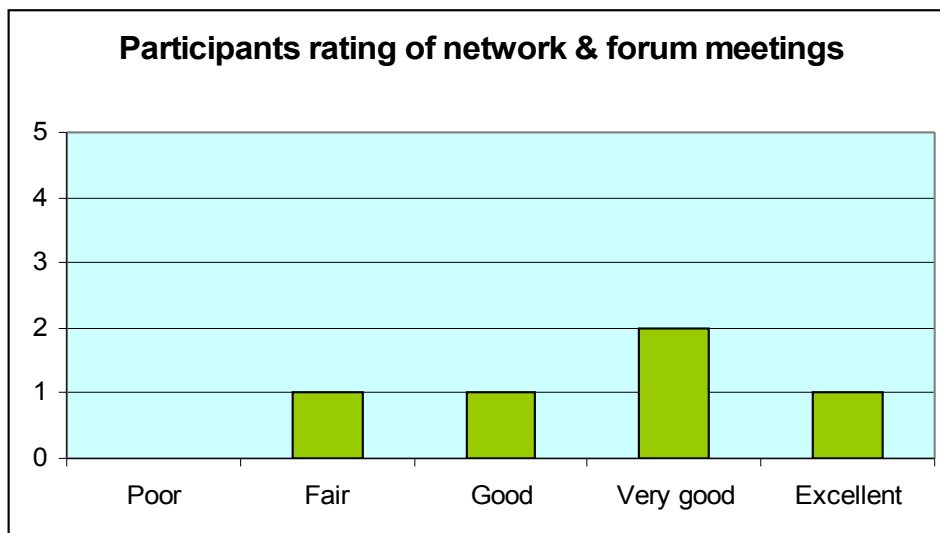
- Establishing more regular meetings and group support sessions.
- One person commented about finding another provider as an alternative to Muath for example BVSC or B.STRONG and suggested that Muath needed to be more welcoming.

- One person commented that they would have liked help with sourcing and assistance with completing more significant funding bids and they felt that they only got assistance on small bids, which were not really appropriate for their organisation.
- Having a pool of different mentors with specialist expertise in different areas
- One suggested that the mentor needed to “*give more time or more awareness to clients about what they can offer*”
- Make the contact details for other support agencies available.

7.3 Network and Forum Meetings

Participants were asked to rate the network and forum meeting element the programme on a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Chart 3



(N=5)

3 respondents commented that they didn’t attend any network or forum meetings, with one person commenting that they were unaware of the networking on offer.

Respondents were asked to identify what they had particularly enjoyed and or found useful about the networking and forum meetings and they told us that they had particularly enjoyed the chance to meet and network with other organisations. One person commented that they had particularly enjoyed “*interaction and exchange with other groups*” and another told us that they were a “*good social way of meeting, enjoy the face to face opportunity of meeting people*”

Suggestions for improving the network and forum meetings included:

- Improving communication about the purpose, time and venue.

- Improve the administration of the meetings in general and the agenda and minutes in particular.
- *“Involving more communities e.g. Ethiopian and Sudanese organisations didn't participate”*
- Maintaining continuity, though as one person commented *“Sometimes other organisations didn't turn up and this affected continuity”*

7.4 General Comments

9 people (100% of respondents) would recommend the Programme to other organisations and general comments about the Programme included:

- Involve more RCO communities (Somali groups predominated)
- Need more time on certain courses such as Financial Management and Business Planning
- Really benefited from course, especially in terms of learning about organisational structures
- Smaller class sizes would enable more individual attention
- Could only attend mentoring when had a chance to do so.

8. Case Studies

4 participant organisations agreed to feature in the report as case studies to help demonstrate the impact of the ASPIRE Programme. The aim of these was to explore the impact of the Programme on particular organisations in greater depth.

Case Study 1: AfroBritish Support Services

About the Organisation

AfroBritish provide advice, information and guidance on employment and training issues - the service is open to the wider community but they target refugees and asylums seekers. They also provide translation assistance for those with language difficulties in seeking benefits and completing forms. The organisation was founded in 2002. AfroBritish is an active member of RETAF, which is chaired by the Manager of AfroBritish.

The organisation currently has 'Next Step' funding and a projected income of £110,000 for this financial year. This makes it one of the larger and more experienced organisations to partake in the ASPIRE DSO course.

Why the Aspire Course?

Essentially it was a choice between two employees and the decision was made on the basis that the participating employee had an active interest in attending and the other employee was unable to attend.

The personal motivation of the participant came from the fact that: ***“I moved from Norway and had an understanding of the voluntary sector there, but wanted to attend this course because I was looking to increase my understanding of the voluntary sector in the UK.”***

However, the participant expressed reservation about the length of the residential and the over-reliance on handouts, ***“there were too many handouts and sometimes less explanation.”*** The participant also felt that class sizes were too big.

Outcomes and Impact

The main impact have been made to the manner that AfroBritish approaches funding: ***“Our organisation has changed the way we approach funding - especially in areas such as bid writing.”***

Personally, the participant also feels better able to contribute to the organisations fundraising activities, ***“I feel more confident about writing funding bids and have a better understanding of the UK’s funding environment.”***

The Organisational Review segment of the programme was especially useful: ***“it gave me a better understanding about the how, where, why and what of VCOs in the UK.”***

Case Study 2: The West Midlands Somali Association (WMSA)

About the organisation

WMSA primarily work with Somali women and young people. They provide supplementary education in the core curriculum subjects and additional cultural education. They provide support, advice, guidance and recreational activities to young people facilitate discussions around health, education and employment skills related themes.

WMSA’s income in the 2006/2007 financial year was £44,000

Why the Aspire Programme?

One volunteer from the organisation attended the course. The decision was made during a management committee discussion about available training opportunities. The participant was chosen because they were the most active member of the organisation and the best placed to attend.

The organisation was also aware of the fact that the programme offered additional and supplementary learning opportunities - an opportunity they had taken advantage of by requesting extra sessions on financial management.

Outcomes and Impact

As a result of attending the Programme, the organisation has changed its structure:

“Our board is based on advice given during the programme, we have changed our management system and have developed roles and responsibilities for all members and staff.”

WMSA has been able to adapt its services as a result of learning and advice received on the Programme: ***“We have tuned our services into the needs of our clients and are better able to market them to our target community.”***

WMSA has learnt a key lesson in that they understand their environment better and the fact that ***“we need to be different and original to attract funding and attention.”***

Personally, the WMSA representative feels ***“more confident and active in their role as a volunteer.”*** The participant also found the Programme invaluable for networking opportunities with other organisations.

Case Study 3: BARAN Development Association

About the Organisation

BARAN Development Association founded in 2004 provides personal and professional support to asylum seeker/refugee communities and their families, concentrating on the wider West Midlands area even reaching out further to places such as Glasgow in some instances.

With an annual income of around £10,000 per annum from a range of grant making trusts e.g. SRB6 and Community Development Foundation (CDF), the organisation runs a family centre in Handsworth providing services for isolated children via links with schools, interpretation services for newly arrived communities, case support, training, employment and advice support.

Why the Aspire Programme?

The course participant was of Iraqi origin and had recently acquired a Diploma in Social Research at Birmingham University. The participant attended the course on behalf of BARAN Development Association via self

nomination. As Vice Chair/Development Officer, the participant wanted to access the Programme with the aim of ***“Self development and gaining knowledge for the benefit of the organisation and the community”***. The participant was happy to get the opportunity to access the residential and mentoring support and stated that ***“(I have) more awareness and understanding of the logic of the voluntary sector. We also have a better structure to our organisation due to the training which will improve our sustainability”***. However, as with other participants, the BARAN representative reported that the Programme may have been more beneficial if it was less intense and had been spread over a longer duration of time.

Outcomes and Impact

The participant from BARAN felt that the Programme had made them ***“more confident in my ability due to being up skilled in areas such as systems, processes etc.”*** and that they ***“have a better structure to our organisation and were able to work more effectively”*** The opportunity to access additional Fircroft courses (such as Project Management, Leadership and Management & Training The Trainers) had been beneficial and had better enabled them to relay what had been learnt back to the organisation in the form of half day training sessions.

Case Study 4: The Somali Women’s Support Centre (SWSC)

About the Organisation

The Somali Women’s Support Centre (SWSC) provides personal and professional support to Somali women and their families. Whilst serving the whole of Birmingham, it particularly aims its support women within the Sparkhill, Sparkbrook and Small Heath areas of the City.

The organisation works closely with other Somali Organisations such as the West Midlands Somali Community Association and has been in existence since September 2006. SWSC currently offers information and advice to Somali women and their families around educational issues, provides links with local schools to better help the integration of Somali children, runs outreach and interpretation support to Somali families via their volunteers and English/conversation classes for women and children. In addition to this SWSC also has a befriending service for elderly Somali women in the form of luncheon clubs to reduce isolation.

The main sources of income have been from donations from within the community, mainly from individuals although SWSC has recently been successful in accessing a Community Champions Grant. Their annual income is less than £5000 a year.

Why the Aspire Programme

One person from the organisation attended the course. They were nominated via the management committee due to wanting the opportunity to learn more about developing organisations, legal structures and policies and to improve their understanding of the sector as a whole with the aim of achieving sustainability for SWSC. The organisation found out about the course through the Muath Development Agency and believed ***“it was a good opportunity because it was a continuous programme of development with good facilities”***. The Chair (who attended the course) welcomed being able to attend a residential. However, they felt that the course could have been less intense if it had been spread over a longer duration of time ***“I think the duration of the course should be shorter for example 9 to 5 as instead of 9 till 8pm, it would have made things easier and more people could have attended”***.

Outcomes and Impact

“I gained lots of information about the voluntary sector and how it works and a better understanding of the voluntary sector and better understanding of our short, medium and long terms goals”

As a result of the course the organisation has been able to ***“outline specific roles and responsibilities, and better plan our day to day actions”***.

The organisation has learnt about fundraising and project development ***“better systems implemented for example record keeping, feedback and confidentiality to be more efficient with service provision and have more clarity”***.

The organisation has developed a clear strategic direction and has a better idea of where it’s going and how it wants to get there. According to West Midlands Somali Association (WMSA) - ***“this was a new group and you can see the difference it has made to them and how they have grown from when they started the course up until now”***.

The learning from the course has been shared with other committee members at meetings, through sharing with them the information and handouts from the course. They also hope to share what they’ve have learnt with other Somali community organisations.

9. Conclusions

Participants were extremely positive about the programme and all would recommend it others. As noted, they particularly valued:

- the one-on-one mentoring;
- access to information resources at Fircroft;
- opportunities for organisational and
- personal development; and opportunities for sharing and exchanging knowledge.

The value of mentoring is re-enforced in recent reports to Government on developing a menu of learning opportunities (rather than simply training/formal courses within the Voluntary and Community Sector (Mayo; 2006; McCabe et al forthcoming), and all participants had found the mentoring support useful, only one participant had any criticism of the mentoring and this would appear to be more to do with individual perceptions of The Muath Trust than concerns about the quality or nature of the mentoring support on offer.

Participants valued learning from the Programme for organisational, professional and personal development opportunities. It would be fair to say that participants valued the course for personal development as much as professional and organisational development opportunities.

When asked if a key factor for choosing the Programme was because it was aimed specifically at RCOs, the majority of participants answered yes. However, perhaps it is also insightful to reflect upon (unsolicited) comments that RCO's should not be singled out in training programmes such as this. A number of participants felt that interaction with other non-RCO organisations is extremely valuable; especially when one considers that most new and emerging organisations (irrespective of them being an RCO or not) have similar organisational development needs.

All respondents felt that they had a better understanding of the nature of sustainable organisations and were better able to contribute to their own organisation's sustainability. The fact that all but one of the respondents had either developed (or reviewed) their business plans since taking the course reinforced this point. However, only two organisations had actually been successful in attaining funding since completing the course. This could point toward the need for further technical support in fundraising. In fact, a number of respondents had commented that they would value further technical hands-on support in all areas that the programme covered.

Participants felt that the Programme should be open to more than one person across their respective organisation. For example, certain elements of the course were more appropriate for other members (e.g. It is more relevant for the treasurer or a staff member with administrative duties to attend the Financial Planning segment). Equally, by more than one person

attending the Programme, it was felt that organisation wide learning and change could be re-enforced more effectively. Participants also felt that they would like to be able to have seminars open to all of the board or management committee to help re-enforce learning and new practises.

Associated with the previous point, although all respondents stated that they shared information and learning with their colleagues, the majority of participants didn't recognise themselves as the 'Agent of Change'. This is an important point because being an 'agent of change' implies a responsibility to ensure that learning from the Programme is disseminated and acted upon; there is a marked difference between this and merely sharing learning with colleagues.

There were some clear accessibility issues with the residential element of the programme. A number of participants mentioned that the 12-hour sessions were too long and not convenient for those who had young children and families. Of those participating in the interviews 88% (8) people were volunteers, which may reflect the fact that that many RCO's rely upon volunteers - (possibly to a greater extent than other voluntary and community organisations) and may find more difficult to commit to participating in a residential programme.

A valuable knock-on effect from this course was that participant's colleagues from their respective organisations were more aware of available support and training provided by Fircroft, Muath Trust and other service providers.

10. Recommendations

There may be some specific training needs that RCO organisations have (such as language needs), however, future programmes should allow for some integrated activities where RCOs can share and exchange with other new and emerging VCOs.

There are a number of ways in which cross-organisational learning could be ensured. Future programmes could encourage specific members to attend relevant course modules, along with the dedicated agent of change, who should attend all the modules. Alternatively, different members should be targeted during the remaining mentoring sessions, which would allow the mentor to assist the Agent of Change with enacting change across the organisation. It is not evident that this has taken place thus far.

The 'Agent of Change' concept and the roles associated with this need to be made clearer to participants at the beginning of the course, especially those with lesser grasp of English language. It is also worth considering how different programme modules can be targeted at relevant members/staff in advance of the course beginning. One suggestion is to use a simple 'terms of reference' which outlines the role of the agent of change within the organisation and asks management committee members to send the relevant member/staff to different course modules.

The integration of RCOs into wider/mainstream VCS infrastructure development is beyond the remit of the current Aspire Programme. However, Muath should consider sharing the learning from the Programme with the Birmingham ChangeUp Consortium to ensure that RCO needs are met within this initiative. Fircroft should also consider specifically targeting RCOs in publicity for any future DSO Programmes.

As an accredited Programme, the formal teaching input from Fircroft is regularly reviewed and inspected. Mentoring support in the sector is relatively new and there are no formal systems for quality assurance. It is, however, an increasingly common approach within ChangeUp and other sector development initiatives. Muath and Fircroft should consider raising the issue of quality assurance with the Birmingham ChangeUp Consortium and funders as part of its exit strategy and sharing the Programme's learning at a more strategic level.

Fircroft, with Muath and potential partners, should consider strategies for developing and promoting mentoring as an effective element of learning menus for RCOs and the wider VCS.

There should be some consideration as to how the residential aspect of the course could be made more accessible to RCO members, particularly those who have work or family commitments. Shorter sessions and a flexible mix of residential and non-residential learning components should be considered. Feedback indicates that the course facilitators made every

effort possible to accommodate participant needs. However, a longer lead in time would allow for a more participatory approach, which would entail asking prospective participants at the start of the course about their own opinions on course timings and length, and then being flexible enough to adapt the course structure to meet their needs. However, this may be difficult to apply in practice.

Consideration should be given to improving recruitment for future Programmes, and should, as far as possible be designed to accommodate at least a three month lead in time to allow for a number of open days/information sessions about the Programme to be offered. Publicity should be circulated more widely to organisations, possible through networks such as RETAF for example.

For Office Use:

Appendix 1

Muath Trust
Fircroft College

Developing Sustainable Refugee Organisations
Evaluation Questionnaire

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

This independent evaluation is seeking to assess and understand the impact of the Aspire funded Developing Sustainable Refugee Organisations Programme 2006/7

Merida Associates have been asked to find out what impact the Programme has had both on you and your organisation, and to find out if you and /or your organisation have had an opportunity to put learning from the programme into practice.

We will be asking you a number of questions some of which will be about the things you have learn from the programme and some will be about the things you feel your organisation has learnt from the programme.

We will be inviting representatives from your organisation to attend a focus group which will be held on 2nd July at 2.00 Venue tbc

Your responses will be treated confidentially and data will be anonymously summarised in our final evaluation report.

Section 1. About You

1.1	Name	
1.2	Age	
1.3	Ethnic Origin	

1.4 Have you attended any other training in the past three years - if so what

Course	Qualifications if any
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Section 2 About your organisation

2.1 Name of the Organisation you work/volunteer for

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2.2 What is your role/position in the organisation?

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2.3 Are you a paid employee or a volunteer?

Paid employee full time		Paid employee part time	
Volunteer		On an average week how many volunteer hours do you contribute to your organisation	

2.4 Is this the same organisation as when you started the programme?

Yes		No	
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If yes - how long have you worked for /volunteered with the organisation

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2.5 Are you on the management committee/board of Trustees of any voluntary or community organisations?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

If yes - how many organisations are you involved with?.....

2.6 Were you the dedicated agent of change for your organisation

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

2.7 How were you chosen?

Section 3 Choosing the Programme.

3.1 Why did you choose to attend the DSO Programme?

Please tick all that apply

The programme was specifically aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations	
The programme offered a package of learning and development that I couldn't find on offer any where else	

The programme was free	
The programme was being offered by Fircroft College with additional support from The Muath Trust	
My line manager suggested I do the programme	
I was looking for professional development opportunities	
Undertaking this programme was identified as part of an appraisal, training needs analysis or supervision sessions within my organisation	
I was looking for personal development opportunities	
I wanted to learn new skills to use in my organisation	
I wanted to learn new skills so that I could improve my job performance	
I wanted to learn new skills in order to get a better/new job	
I was the dedicated ' <i>agent of change</i> ' within my organisation and therefore had to attend the programme	

Other please state

For those organisations accessing just the course - find out why they didn't take up mentoring opportunity

For those organisations just accessing mentoring find out why they didn't attend the course

3.2 I particularly wanted to develop skills in:

Please tick all that apply

Organisational Review		Strategic Management	
Writing funding bids		Business Planning	
Financial Planning		Implementing a QA system	

Other please state

3.3 My organisation particularly wanted me to develop skills in:

Please tick all that apply

Organisational Review		Strategic Management	
Writing funding bids		Business Planning	
Financial Planning		Implementing a QA system	

Other please state

3.4 My organisation found the DSO to be the most suitable programme because:

Please tick all that apply

The times were convenient		It built and developed my skills	
Information and skills from the programme could be shared across the organisation		To improve job performance	
It helped to improve organisational performance		It was aimed at refugee voluntary and community organisations	
It offered a programme, plus mentoring and action planning		It formed part of a career development plan for me	
It offered help with fund raising		Muath Trust were involved in offering additional support	
It offered help with implementing a quality assurance system		Programme offered by Fircroft	
It was free			

Other - please state:

Section 4 Usefulness of the Programme

4.1 How useful were each of the modules to you and your organisation

Please tick all that apply

Element of the Programme	Useful	Have used the learning and / or information in my organisation	Will use the learning and / or information in my organisation in the future	Not appropriate to my organisation
Organisational Review				
Writing funding bids				
Financial Planning				
Strategic Management				
Business Planning				
Implementing a QA system				
Forums and workshops and Meetings				
Action Planning				
Mentoring and support				

If you have indicated that any of the above were not currently appropriate to the organisation please tell us briefly why

4.2 Apart from the 6 DSO modules which 4 other residential courses at Fircroft did you attend? (For those people who attended residential)

Why did you choose these?

4.3 For each additional residential attended please indicate:

Residential Attended	Useful	Have used the learning and / or information in my organisation	Will use the learning and / or information in my organisation in the future	Not appropriate to my organisation

4.4 As a result of the programme are/do you:

Please tick all that apply

More confident and better able to undertake n undertaking your job/volunteering role	
More assertive in undertaking your job/volunteering role	
Better able to work with your management committee	
Better able to work with your colleagues	
Have a better understanding of your organisation’s operating environment	
More able to move into a new/better job or paid employment	
Understand the nature of sustainable organisations	
Have a better understanding of funding programmes	
Have a better understanding of financial management	
Have a better understanding of fund raising	
Have a better understanding of the benefits of a quality assurance system to your organisation	

4.11 Has the learning from the programme enabled you personally to provide better services to your client group?

Yes	
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No	
----	--

If yes can you tell us how:

Section 5 Impact on your Organisation

5.1 Have you shared the learning and or information from the programme with anyone in your organisation?

Yes	
-----	--

No	
----	--

If yes, can you tell us how? Who have you shared the info with e.g. committee, staff, etc

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5.2 Have there been any barriers to sharing learning and or information from the programme with your organisation?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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What has stopped your organisation from using the learning from the programme?

Please tick all that apply

Other people in my organisation were not interested	<input type="checkbox"/>
We didn't have time - we have been too busy with other things	<input type="checkbox"/>
I didn't have the time to share the learning with other people	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other barriers to sharing the information?

5.3 As a result of your attendance on the programme has your organisation started to do anything differently

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
----	--------------------------

What things are you doing differently?

5.4 If not do they think they will start to change anything and if so what

5.5 Has the learning from the programme enabled your organisation to provide better services to your client group?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
-----	--------------------------

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
----	--------------------------

If yes can you tell us how, if no why not and what would enable them to provide better services?

5.6 As a result of your attendance on the programme has your organisation:

Please tick all that apply

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	Yes	No	Don't Know
Gained a better understanding of funding programmes			
Gained a better understanding of organisational and legal responsibilities			
Developed new or improved financial planning systems			
Gained a better understanding of sustainability			
Developed clear plans about how to sustain itself over the next 1-5 years			
Built new relationships with other voluntary and community organisations			
Built new relationships with statutory sector agencies			
Built new relationships with private sector agencies			
Improved relationships with its funders			
Improved relationships with employees			
Improved relationships with volunteers			

Other please state:

--

5.7 Since attending the programme has your organisation -

Please tick all that apply.

Written a strategic plan	
Developed a business plan	
Written a funding strategy	
Reviewed the organisational structure	
Implemented a QA system	
Attended forum, network or other meetings	
Written funding bids	

What 2 things could have improved your experiences at Fircroft?

5.11 Using a 1 - 5 scale (with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent) how would you rate the support/help/ mentoring you received from Muath Trust/Helen

1 Poor	2	3	4	5 Excellent
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Can you tell us what you particularly enjoyed/found most useful about the mentoring and support from The Muath Trust

What 2 things could have improved this?

5.12 Using a 1 - 5 scale (with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent) how would you rate the Network/Forum/workshop meetings

1 Poor	2	3	4	5 Excellent
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Can you tell us what you particularly enjoyed/found most useful Network/Forum/workshop meetings?

What 2 things could have improved this?

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Would you recommend this programme to other organisations?

Yes			No	
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Are there any other comments you wish to make

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Thank you for your time.

Appendix 2

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