



# **BME AND REFUGEE PARTNERS AGAINST POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN ISLINGTON:**

**SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR ISLINGTON EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION**

Aisha Forbes and Laís de Almeida  
April 2014



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# 1. AKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Unemployed BME men, consultation participants at Family Action, BME men's coffee morning at Emirates Stadium:

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Anonymous, 42, Somali male

Anonymous, 41, Somali male

Anonymous, ex youth-offender, 25, Black male

Anonymous, 20, Black male

Anonymous, 20, Black male

Anonymous, 20, Somali male

Thank you to Zaynab Hassan, from Family Action, for hosting us at the coffee morning.

## 2. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic

VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector

DWP – Department of Work and Pensions, Central Government

JCP – Job Centre Plus

NHS – National Health Service

# 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The problem

BME and Refugee communities are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment in Islington. Evidence gathered in this report demonstrates that the current approach towards unemployment fails to support the most vulnerable communities out of poverty.

The report describes the government's punitive 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing unemployment and its failure to value people holistically, recognizing the individual, their unique complex needs, skills, ambitions and dreams.

The report demonstrates this in examples of disproportionate and unfair use of sanctioning as well as Work Programme stipulations that force people into low-paid menial jobs, disregarding their experiences, circumstances and ambitions. This has pushed people into crisis and prevented routes to training and career development. These factors, in addition to widespread discrimination and stereotyping experienced by BME, migrant and refugee communities has contributed to a landscape of mistrust, isolation, marginalization and poor mental health, further exacerbating barriers to employment and perpetuating the cycles of poverty.

The report describes in full the most significant barriers to employment face by BME, migrant and refugee communities under the following key themes:

- Negative public perception and stigma, exacerbated by discriminatory rhetoric in media;
- Underemployment of over-skilled refugee and migrant workers;
- Age, race, disability and ex-offender discrimination by employers;
- Mental health issues;
- Poor support from mainstream employment services;
- Focus on jobs rather than developing careers and nurturing talent;
- Cost of childcare;
- Lack of access to IT, telephone and other resources to look for work;
- Lack of engagement, confidence and ability to access services and influence decision making;
- Lack of jobs and training opportunities;
- Social isolation;
- Lack of experience;

The report demonstrates the drastic need for a shake-up and redraft of employment services to respond to these barriers, at both a national and local level.

## The solutions

This report calls for a radical shift towards a system that values and uplifts people for what they can contribute to society, with a drive for more holistic services nurturing potential and developing careers.

We reimagined a more effective joined-up landscape that enables people to fulfil their potential, it includes:

- Training and conversion courses;
- Subsidised childcare;
- Integrated mental health support;
- Holistic person-centred career support;
- Early holistic intervention;
- Volunteering for community integration;
- Statutory services working with BMEVCS;

To achieve this vision and address poverty and unemployment in Islington, this report asks Islington Employment Commission to consider adopting the following recommendations.

- Better working together, cross-sector, multi-agency action: including a borough level toolkit and common framework, a review of how JCP can work more closely with local VCS, and a multi-agency employment forum for employers, NHS, DWP and VCS for better cross referring and signposting;
- Commissioning the VCS for the delivery of employment support projects;
- Involvement of the VCS in decision-making;
- Shift of approach towards valuing people and what they can offer Islington's communities;
- Developing employer relationships to create routes to employment and provide good work experiences;
- Accessible information and mapping of employment support in the borough;
- A community employment hub with shop front for organisations across sectors to provide pop-up employment support;
- Supporting resident-led social enterprise and self-employment;
- Time-banking between organisations to share and exchange skills, resources to respond to unemployment;
- Fundraising community events to raise awareness and funding for employment support.

Our wider campaign message to central government calls for:

- A government shift towards holistic person-centred career guidance and development rather than a punitive approach towards unemployment;
- DWP to be more locally driven, working with local VCS partners rather than national contracts that fail to understand and respond to local need;
- More visibility of local community services in JCPs;
- Mental health support and signposting to be integrated in employment support;
- Early intervention, signposting and support for new migrants to prevent social isolation, underemployment and cycles of poverty;
- Drive to accredit migrant's skills and overseas experience.

The document generates innovative solutions and collaborative approaches to action these recommendations, in a climate of limited resources.

# TACKLING THE BARRIERS OF EMPLOYMENT FOR BME

INDIVIDUAL'S EXPERIENCE



TRAINING & CONVERSION COURSES



STATUTORY SERVICES WORKING WITH BME VCS



SUBSIDISED CHILDCARE



VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY INTEGRATION



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT



EARLY HOLISTIC INTERVENTION



HOLISTIC PERSON-CENTRED SUPPORT



COMMISSION THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR



MULTI-AGENCY ACTION



EMPLOYER RELATIONS CREATING ROUTES TO EMPLOYMENT



SHIFT OF APPROACH VALUING PEOPLE



MAPPING OF EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT



INVOLVE VCS IN DECISION-MAKING



SUPPORT SELF-EMPLOYMENT & ENTERPRISE



BOROUGH LEVEL TOOLKIT



COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT HUB



PARTNERSHIP & TIME-BANKING BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS



JOINED-UP APPROACH



JCP WORK CLOSELY WITH LOCAL VCS

ACTION FOR ISLINGTON



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



SHIFT IN POLICY TOWARDS CAREER GUIDANCE



DWP SERVICES MORE LOCALLY DRIVEN



DRIVE TO ACCREDIT SKILLS FOR MIGRANTS



IMMIGRATION SUPPORT FOR BETTER SIGNPOSTING



COMMUNITY SERVICES VISIBILITY

ACTION FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT



## 4. INTRODUCTION

Islington is a borough of extremes of rich and poor. Statistics show that BME and Refugee communities are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment in Islington compared to other ethnic groups. <sup>[1]</sup>

- **Black residents** are twice as likely to face unemployment or have low income occupations in Islington;
- **Asian residents** are significantly more likely to be economically inactive especially Bangladeshi households;
- **BME children** more likely to face child poverty - statistics show highest rate of children living in low income and workless households are Black African – (81%), Kurdish (84%), Turkish/Turkish Cypriot(79%);
- **Residents with a disability** or long term condition disproportionately face poverty/unemployment;
- **Young people** more likely to face unemployment than the Islington average.

This report provides evidence and recommendations for Islington Employment Commission to address these inequalities.

This report was compiled in partnership with Islington BME Forum, Islington Refugee Forum and Evelyn Oldfield Unit. Evidence was gathered from 20 representatives from 16 BME and Refugee organisations at a workshop event.

The meeting sought to:

- Discuss and understand the key issues around poverty and barriers to employment for BME and Refugee communities;
- Generate innovative recommendations on policy and services that will better support people to escape the cycle of poverty.

[1] Employment Commission, The Islington Picture, Sourced from Census (2011).

Workshop discussions were co-designed and facilitated by Laís de Almeida – for her MA in Service Design at the Royal College of Art, where she is specialising in services to address poverty and inequality, using Islington as a case study.

The approach of the workshop was solution-focussed, with an emphasis on valuing people, their unique circumstances, experiences and aspirations, to gain insight on how they can be supported in a more meaningful and holistic way.

The event led participants through creative exercises to profile the stories, ambitions and dreams of people/families their organisations work with, who are facing poverty and unemployment. We drew out key themes and barriers people are facing and finally re-imagined an alternative ideal life journey retelling their life story where they were better supported to fulfil their dreams and potential, identifying how these key moments could have been facilitated by different stakeholders such as the voluntary sector, statutory services, the individual, businesses, communities and training providers.

Following the workshop, we consulted a group of eight unemployed BME men on the findings of the workshop discussions; the experiences and views they shared both validate and support the recommendations of the report.

This report details the main barriers that BME, refugee and migrant's experience and key recommendations for policy and services that could address these issues.

We hope Employment Commission can consider and action some of these recommendations and value working together with VCS to affect change.



## 5. MAIN BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

### for vulnerable BME, Refugee and migrant communities

Groups expressed that, contrary to public opinion and discriminatory beliefs, people do want to work and are proactive about pursuing employment but face significant barriers including:

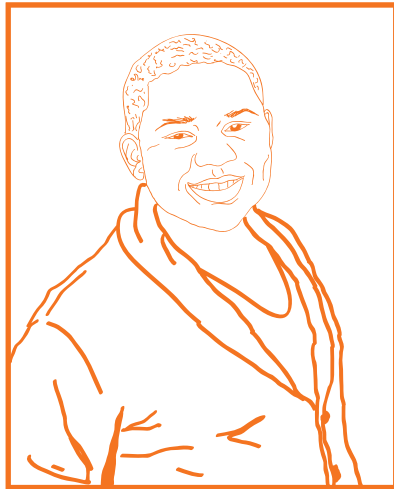
#### **Negative public perception and stigma, exacerbated by discriminatory rhetoric in media**

People feel victim to discrimination and prejudice by employers, support services and members of public. There is a negative perception of people who are out of work or claiming benefits, based on unfair assumptions that they are 'lazy' or state dependent and choose unemployment as a lifestyle – examples were given of JCP staff automatically treating people suspiciously, assuming that they are not looking for work and applying a lot of pressure on people without fully understanding the customer and the barriers they face. People feel a lot of discrimination is fuelled by stereotyping created by negative portrayals from sensationalised media such as 'Benefits Street' and 'How to Get a Council House'. People feel misrepresented in the public eye, contributing to people feeling anxious, isolated, stressed and penalised.

*“These TV programmes make us out to be scroungers, that’s not me, I don’t want me and my family to live on peanuts, I want to contribute and find work” Abdi, unemployed male, Islington. Abdi is training in accountancy and aspires to find a bookkeeping role as an entry, but is finding it hard to find work.*

#### **Underemployment of over-skilled refugee and migrant workers**

Many groups voiced that often refugees and migrants are highly skilled professionals but their training and/or experience will not be recognised in the UK. As a result people face difficulty in finding suitable employment where they can make use of their skills and further their career, so end up having to take on menial and low paid work.



## SAM'S PROFILE

I am a young student, and I finished my A level's in psychology. I am 21 years old and am unemployed for 3 years. I come from a black ethnicity, and am diabetic. I never had a job, am very frustrated, and lacking confidence. I have a small group of friends.

### MY DREAMS ARE...

To become a psychologist in Harley St.; to have kids; to have a flat; a car; to live my life comfortably.

### MY INTERESTS ARE...

Football;  
Social media;  
Psychology;  
Volunteering in a youth project.

### MY STORY

No support or advice on career. Can't afford the tuition fees to pursue psychology. Support from Jobcentre is not meaningful, and is put into work programme which also doesn't help. Is constantly struggling with benefits being stopped for lack of communication in the process. The consequence of these are: No confidence; no contribution for rent resulting in family pressure; no money for transport to search for job, and no money for jacket for interviews.

### MY SKILLS ARE...

Listening; research & writing skills; people; good with computers; communication; networking (though he doesn't see this as a skill).

### WHERE AND WITH WHO I LIVE...

Social housing with my family. I don't have a father. I live with my mum and younger sibling.

### HOW DO I SPEND MY DAYS

Searching for jobs; putting my CV together and sending hundreds of them online; volunteering once a week in admin; caring for mother and sibling.

## MAIN BARRIERS

- Poor support from mainstream services;
  - Doesn't recognise his own skills - and lack of experience doesn't help;
  - Suffering discrimination and stigma when applying for jobs (racial & disability)
- This results in a cycle which is also having huge impact in his confidence.

## People facing age, race, disability and ex-offender discrimination by employers

Groups voiced that their communities experience significant discrimination by employers, including:

- Older people 55+. Examples were given of older BME people who had experienced redundancy after many years of specialist work, then face difficulty in finding similar work, with employers favouring younger candidates with English as a first language, and feeling that their skills are too specialised and not transferable to new areas of work;
- Young people: Other examples were given of ex youth offenders having lack of experience on their CV, and not being considered for jobs leading them to resort back to crime.

*“It’s twice as hard for me to find a job, because of my background and lack of experience, employers don’t want to know, it’s hard as it makes me more likely to reoffend, it’s a vicious cycle” Unemployed black ex-youth offender, 25yrs old.*

## Mental Health issues

Groups voiced that people faced significant mental health issues that presented barriers to people finding and sustaining employment. Examples included refugees and migrants who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder leading to incapacity to work. Examples were given of Somali communities coming from turbulent environments from the civil war and tribal division, and the importance of understanding the emotional and mental impact. Also common are conditions of anxiety and depression caused by the pressures of poverty and the high uncertainty and constant risk of being sanctioned by JCP. Feeling unfairly treated and not finding work has led to people to feeling stress, loss of confidence, frustration, isolated from society and ‘stuck in a rut’. Groups voiced examples of this leading to people developing a negative outlook and attitude, and being more at risk of turning to addictions or suicide. Groups voiced that there is a lack of adequate signposting to mental health support services from JCP.

*“One of my clients has become very stressed and anxious because of constant threat of sanctions, she is always nervous of making a mistake with her advisor. She is pressured to apply for 25 jobs a week or risk sanctioning”  
Workshop participant*

## PEEPA'S PROFILE

Refugee single mother with 3 children

English is not my first language.

I am qualified as a paediatrician in my country.

I have unskilled myself in order to make ends meet and make money here working in a shop.

This doesn't cover my expenses but I can't claim benefits.



### MY SKILLS ARE...

Highly qualified refugee but cannot get jobs as my qualifications are not recognised here.

### WHERE AND WITH WHO I LIVE...

Social housing bedsit with children, boy aged 13, girls aged 8, younger child in nursery.

### HOW DO I SPEND MY DAYS

Long hours working in the shop, limits time I can spend with my children.

### MY STORY

I came to UK to escape conflict 3 years ago in my home country. My husband has left and I was pregnant when I arrived in the UK.

### MY DREAMS ARE...

To return home and have stability and a happy family life in the job that I trained for.

### MY INTERESTS ARE...

Travel;  
Attending talks and debates;  
Embroidery;

## MAIN BARRIERS

- Cost of childcare and access to IT;
- Underemployment - taking menial work because of pressure to earn;
- Lack of engagement, confidence, inability to influence and access decision making.

## Poor support from mainstream services

Groups described poor experiences with JCP and the prescriptive and punitive nature of the Work Programme. Examples included people being unfairly sanctioned, forcing them into crisis. People facing undue pressure and feeling constant risk of being sanctioned, causing anxiety and feelings of powerless. People treated suspiciously by JCP advisors. JCP Advisors are too time-poor to fully understand or appreciate customer's personal circumstances, barriers, skills and ambitions to adequately support them in to work. Advisors too focussed on 'tick box exercises'. Work programme is a blanket prescriptive one-size fits all approach that caters more for low-level skills and doesn't allow people to continue with their training or volunteering commitments.

Examples were given of a migrant woman being forced to withdraw from her IELTS (International English Language Testing System) training to adhere to the Work Programme. This proved costly and prevented her from furthering her English language skills, which is well known as a barrier to employment. Another example was of a Somali woman who was feeling forced to give up her training for her cooking and food hygiene qualifications in order to avoid sanctioning and meet the demands of the Work Programme.

*"I've been on Work Programme – it was hell" Workshop participant*

*"In the job centre, they just have to see so many people, you're not a priority. They don't really know your situation to help and just tell you to try again, it's a short-term solution to a long term-problem" Unemployed black ex-youth offender, 25yrs old.*

## Focus on jobs rather than supporting careers and nurturing talent

Mainstream employment services fail to value or nurture peoples skills, ambitions or aspirations and is dominated by a drive to put people into menial, low paid jobs and zero hour contracts. This leads to people feeling unfulfilled and not valued, frustrated and stuck in poverty, leading to poor mental health and risk of addictions and spiralling debt. The lack of career support was highlighted by a young BME male:

*"It's hard because I don't really know what I want to do or be, I wish I knew what I want to be so that I can work towards that, and it would give me some focus. I could go back to college, but that's another 2 years, and I don't even know what I should study" Unemployed black male, 20 yrs old.*



## JACQUE'S PROFILE

I am in my 50's and am from Congo. I have employment history and experience. I was a lecturer in statistics at a university in Congo. I left because of political instability. I came to London and studied English and computing, and became a teacher at a college teaching maths and computing. I was made redundant 2 years ago and can't find a job.

### MY DREAMS ARE...

Be off benefits. I have many more working years to offer in the field I have experience. I don't want 0 hours contract, or stacking shelves in Matalan.

### MY INTERESTS ARE...

Parties; music; socialising; sports; fashion; cultural history; reading and current affairs.

### MY STORY

Work programme has not supported my ambitions or valued my work experience. I'm frustrated with how the unemployed are portrayed and people's negative perceptions. I feel I am discriminated against because of my age. My experience is very specialised and some employers feel are not transferable. The job centre can't help me with jobs comparable to my old one, and put me forward for zero hours contract and stacking shelf jobs, and jobs that don't provide references. I got sanctioned not knowing why, so I got a loan out from a loan shark and my debt is spiralling. My self-esteem is really low and I am feeling very down, negative and frustrated.

### MY SKILLS ARE...

Bi-lingual, years of work experience as a math and computing teacher. Experience of the system.

### WHERE AND WITH WHO I LIVE...

I live in social housing. I live alone and feel isolated.

### HOW DO I SPEND MY DAYS

Long term unemployment has led to stress, a very negative outlook – feel like I'm stuck in a rut, and it has led to bad habits such as drinking and gambling to escape and cope. I volunteer sometimes and visit a day centre.

## MAIN BARRIERS

- Lack of employment opportunities matching career expertise;
- Age discrimination, and negative perception of unemployed (treated suspiciously);
- Not feeling valued and isolation led to mental health issues - negative outlook makes it more difficult.



## Cost of Childcare

Often meaning that people are better off on benefits. Lack of support or clear route for childcare.

## Access to IT, telephones and other financial resources to look for work

Majority of jobs opportunities are advertised online, some people have limited access to IT or have poor computer literacy. People don't have enough money for phoning employers/agencies to enquire about jobs, or for transport to search for jobs or for buying presentable clothes for interviews.

## Lack of engagement, confidence and ability to access services and influence decision making

BME, Refugee and migrants groups are often isolated and powerless, having limited awareness of services, systems and processes, commonly as a result of cultural or language barriers.

*“Often people with language or cultural barriers, do not know that they have rights to complain or appeal an unfair decision or treatment”* Workshop participant

Furthermore, these groups have limited access to civic participation to influence services, change public opinion and feel integrated.

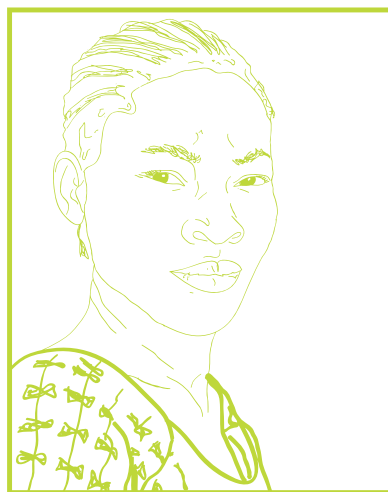
## Lack of jobs and training

Groups voiced that the job market is very competitive and there is a lack of jobs especially employment opportunities that match people's career expertise and skills. There is also a lack of regulation of jobs advertised on the government job site with the listing of many 'fake/fictitious jobs', and jobs advertised with lack of sufficient description of job requirements, wasting the time, resources and efforts of job seekers, and causing increasing stress and frustration. People are also experiencing instability and feeling exploited by zero-hours contracts.

Groups described people are having to take on low paid menial jobs and have no money for training and development to progress and move out of in-work poverty. Groups also described that to comply with the prescriptions of the Work Programme and avoid sanctions, people are having to quit their training and volunteering commitments that they had enrolled in for their career development.

## MARIE'S PROFILE

I am a secondary school teacher and post graduate from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I am a french speaker and single mother with a school aged child. I am on benefits (JSA).



### MY SKILLS ARE...

Teaching, class management, admin skills.

### WHERE AND WITH WHO I LIVE...

I live in temporary accommodation in a bedsit living with my child in Islington.

### HOW DO I SPEND MY DAYS

I do cleaning jobs in the early hours - my neighbour takes my child to breakfast club at school. I volunteer part-time and look after my child after school time.

### MY STORY

I have refugee status as a result of experiences in my home country. I have overcome great challenges to arrive safely in the UK and gain status, my husband is still in DRC. I had a successful teaching career which was cut short by conflict. I was attending IELTS (International English Language test) but was asked to leave in order to comply with the mandatory work programme and doing ESOL course basic level. I have had menial jobs in the UK cleaning but I want to be able to teach.

### MY DREAMS ARE...

To be a teacher in the UK and to settle and start a new life with my child.

### MY INTERESTS ARE...

Teaching science;  
Supporting people;  
Human rights;  
Volunteering with refugee organizations.

## MAIN BARRIERS

- Lack of UK social and institution awareness of culture, systems/processes, language difference leads to prejudice and discrimination;
- Migration issues: loss of status and social networks leads to isolation - language difficulties, PTSD and depression;
- No support systems - no clear route for childcare. Poverty - housing. Menial work and no money for training.

## Social isolation

Groups described people feeling isolated and marginalised from mainstream society. Contributing factors include migration issues leading to loss of status and social networks. Language skills presenting barriers to social integration and cohesion. Anxiety, mistrust and lack of confidence about searching for jobs and opportunities outside of their own community, culture or locality. Discrimination and experiences of poor treatment from system lead to mistrust and fear of authorities, resulting in people wanting to stay closed within their own community and feeling anxious about integrating.

## Lack of experience

Employers prefer applicants with UK work experience and history. This presents significant barriers for skilled migrants who are new to the country, and disproportionately affects young people who are new to job markets.

*“I am never offered a job, because they say I don’t have enough experience. I have been out of work for two years because of training and [health] issues with my son” Abdi, Islington*

*“My dream job is in IT, but I will do any job now to enter the job market and build my C.V. and progress, like driving, traffic marshalling, security, but people say I don’t have enough qualifications or experience” Somali male, 38. Islington*

## 6.1. REIMAGINING

### How to tackle barriers to employment

After profiling the stories and analysing the barriers faced by the people and families that those organisations work with, the group were lead through a collaborative creative exercise where they imagined an alternative, more idealistic life journey for their service users, visioning a perfect story and identifying the key moments that made all the difference to the person's life. The group then ideated how these moments could have been facilitated by different stakeholders, such as the voluntary sector, statutory services, the individual, businesses, communities and training providers.

The exercise generated the following visions of more joined-up mainstream services to tackle the barriers to employment for BME, refugee and migrant communities:

#### Early holistic intervention, services that prevent social isolation

Getting the right advice early on and access to the right services. For example supportive services at the airport – Group visioned 'friendly and helpful' immigration officers providing holistic signposting to services for people to become stable and integrated, connected to employment support projects, receiving advice on the system, benefits, housing and health services. Other examples given included employers planning ahead before redundancy to prepare people for unemployment with a supportive redundancy programme that can up skill people/retrain people and get people ready for looking for work.

#### Holistic person centred career/enterprise support

Tailored to meet people's individual needs, skills and aspirations, where people can feel valued and identify career or business goals, and get the right support to get there for example, addressing the barriers by signposting to support services for mental health and providing routes to a skilled career with training, apprenticeships, volunteering, and accreditation of skills. A focus on getting people job-ready in the area of work they are passionate about or supporting people to pursue self-employment or social enterprise. The aim of employment support service should be to get people into jobs that value and make use of their skills and aspirations, so that they can contribute and be integrated in society, rather than just be forced into any low-paid menial jobs to be stuck in a cycle of poverty. Support needs to be more mentoring focussed, as a practice that builds confidence and trust between advisor and customer.

# PEEPA'S PERFECT JOURNEY

I arrived in the UK 3 years ago with 2 children and was pregnant when I arrived. I did not know English. My husband was not with me.



## EARLY HOLISTIC INTERVENTION

In the airport Peepa meets a friendly and helpful immigration officer. They contacted social services who have a multi-lingual interpreter who arrives at the airport and provides world class translation services.



## HOLISTIC PERSON CENTRED SUPPORT

Peepa is put into temporary accommodation with her children that is safe, warm, comfortable and peaceful. Peepa is able to register with GP within days and is attending antenatal classes which is great because she's a paediatrician and is meeting other mums to be and making friends.



## ACCESS TO VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

One of the mums speaks Farsi and tells her about a local Iranian organisation where she can access English and IT classes with subsidised childcare, where she starts doing some volunteering in a crèche on a flexible basis.



## ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

Children are settled into a primary school and Peepa is advised on the admissions procedure for getting her oldest child into a secondary school that is also in her neighbourhood.



## SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO INTEGRATE

Has completed her language course after 6 months and can hold conversational English. Peepa is called for an interview with the Home Office and has been granted indefinite leave to remain. This has taken a record of 7 months. Her rapid learning of English has impressed her case worker.



## TRAINING AND CONVERSION COURSES

Peepa has accepted an organisation that gives her a bursary to convert her qualification to a UK recognised one this takes a year. Is successful on getting a job as a paediatrician in the NHS.

## Mental health support

Preventative mental health support to help people to cope better with the pressures of unemployment and poverty, supporting resilience and positive outlook to find a way forward, limiting the risk of developing depression or other mental health issues. JCP Advisors can also be more sensitive to vulnerable customers if they have mental health barriers to employment, by signposting to services to address for example anxiety, depression, addiction, PTSD.

## Statutory services working with BME VCS supporting people to integrate

BME, Refugee and migrant VCS provide better, more effective support services in helping people out of crisis, supporting people to access services and move into employment. VCS need to be more involved in the government's approach to addressing unemployment.

## Subsidised childcare

Finding cost effective ways to subsidise childcare for people going back into work or doing training to improve their employability. For example ESOL classes for parents of under 5's that include childcare e.g. hosted in a crèche.

## Better access to volunteering for community integration

For people to develop new skills, hobbies, build social networks and routes to employment. Volunteering preventing isolation and allowing people to receive recognition, appreciation and build their confidence.

## Training and conversion courses

More opportunities for people to convert qualifications for their skills to be UK recognised and accredited. Identifying where retraining is needed for people with specialised non-transferable skills and experience.

## Access to job markets

Programmes to give people work experiences and entry in to work, for example traineeships, connections with employers.

*"I just want to get straight into the job market, something that will give me direct connection and experience with employers"* Somali male, 42 years

## JACQUE'S PERFECT JOURNEY

I taught maths and computing at a College in London for many years. Funding cuts led to my redundancy.



### EARLY HOLISTIC INTERVENTION

The employer provided lots of support to prepare for redundancy - such as help developing a CV, providing skills training, and support with looking for work.



### HOLISTIC PERSON CENTRED SUPPORT

Spoken to an advisor at JCP and talked about career goals, retraining and getting an idea of who he was in an one-to-one session, gives the sense that the advisor understands him. It is a very person-centred approach and allows them to develop a good relationship.



### MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

The advisor has good links with vast range of regeneration opportunities and communicates them with customers. The advisor signposts Jacques to support services for his mental health issues, so that he is supported, and starts to develop a positive outlook.



### VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Starts volunteering in a school which gives him a routine where can share with other people, develops new hobbies and builds social networks so he doesn't feel isolated and do not become depressed. Is integrated in the community and feels supported.



### SUPPORT SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE

Has reinvented himself as a private tutor and have accessed some training. Has more self awareness about job market, employers and opportunities.

Decides to set up own business as a maths tutor. Still accesses ongoing support from JCP and other community projects which have been vital in helping stabilise in this next stage.

Gets a phone call every now and then to see if he needs help and how he is managing and getting on. Feeling very supported all along the way.

## 6.2. REIMAGINING

### How can we work together to make this happen? (Recommendations to Islington)

After reimagining ways to tackle barriers to unemployment we came in to group discussion to ideate what these visions mean for Islington and what needs could be actioned locally to make this happen:

#### Better working together, multi-agency action

In a climate of limited funding and resource, agencies/organisations across sectors can work more closely together to create and update new and existing services, through information sharing, partnership working and signposting. Suggested actions include

- The development of borough level toolkit for all agencies across sectors to engage in a unified borough level approach of action.
- Identifying and reviewing how JCP can work more closely with local VCS.
- Employment forums and networking events for a multi-agency joined-up approach across sectors, for different stakeholders to come together (employers, NHS, DWP, VCS, housing) to develop a more integrated multi-pronged approach, working in unison and cross-referring. There can be more information sharing so stakeholders can be more sensitive to understand community needs. It would allow for closer working together with JCP so that advisors could have greater awareness to provide signposting to support services such as mental health etc.

#### Commissioning the voluntary sector

As a strategic partner that can lead on employment support services and training – The voluntary sector is proven to provide value for money, more effective employment support with a welcoming and supportive environment with friendly, informal settings that people trust, and where they do not



# SAM'S PERFECT JOURNEY

I would love to become a psychologist, but I have no money to pay tuition fees... I am not sure what should do next, I need a job I guess.



## SHIFT OF APPROACH REGARDING CAREER

When Sam is 18 he finishes his A levels. He is very interested in continuing studying psychology and career advice suggests to volunteer in NSPCC.



## EMPLOYER RELATIONS

He volunteers on child line with NSPCC and gets training as a councillor. He is offered an apprenticeship with NSPCC. Of 12 months with skills advancement, becomes more confident and enjoys the work.



## TRAINING AND CONVERSION COURSES

He is 19 during his apprenticeship. He gets career and training advice and decides to do an access course for youth work and business skills. Apprenticeship in youth work for 3 years with a charity working with young people.



## VOLUNTEERING FOR COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Sam is 22 and a qualified youth worker. He is job ready and gets a job while is volunteering in his community to get up a youth project.



## SUPPORT SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE

With 25 Sam sets up a social enterprise working with young people. He is fundraising for projet workers. With 27 he is the director of "Youth first", a very successful youth mentoring project working with the borough.



## SUCCESS STORY

Sam is running for local councillor. He is also advising the Home Office as an external youth expert. Some years later "Youth First" is a national organization with local projects in all major towns.

feel like they are being penalised. More VCS funding should be focussed on or linked to providing employment support.

## **Involve the voluntary sector in decision-making**

VCS organisations are experts on people's real situation so should be around the table and heard more in decision-making. There can also be greater involvement of service users in the design of policy and services for more user-centred approach.

## **Shift of approach**

Valuing people for what they can contribute to society and focus on developing careers and businesses relevant to people's skills levels, interests and ambitions. Examples given were varied from cooking, nannying, teaching to accessing training to become psychotherapist.

## **Employer relations**

Develop relationships with corporates and small businesses to fund schemes that create routes to employment and give people good work experience. More engagement with larger diversity of employers to bridge the gap between London employers and residents in Islington. Identify how employers could benefit and what their needs are.

## **Accessible information about employment support**

Mapping exercise of employment support in Islington – so that all stakeholders including JCP can signpost more effectively, and build on what is already out there, identifying opportunities to work more closely across sectors. Islington Council could kick start a mapping exercise and invite organisations to contribute and sustain the project.

## **Employment and enterprise pop-up hub**

Can Islington Council offer a shop front space that could act as an pop-up hub for different organisations to use for free or a low cost on a rolling 'pop up' basis, for the provision of employment support activities such as mentoring, workshops, support for setting up businesses, signposting and information,

employment fairs, volunteering brokerage etc. A shop front space could provide a visible and central point of information and provide a positive, uplifting and supportive space that was non-punitive, and focussed on development and support for the community. It could adopt a social enterprise model with a café and involve volunteers. Similar models have been used in Ealing, Haringey and Tower Hamlets.

We consulted eight BME unemployed males to ask what they would like from a pop up space that could support them in to employment. They described the following ideas:

*“Direct links with companies, in different industries, traineeships and entry to the job market”*

*“Career guidance to help me identify strengths and a career, like with career quizzes”*

*“Business advice and finance”*

*“Some where that could give me a reference”*

*“Somewhere that helps you prepare for interviews and jobs”*

*“Mentoring, to help you all the way until you are employed, give you encouragement that you can achieve”*

*“Motivational speakers, from someone that can relate, and has made it, someone from my area, that has been through it and made it”*

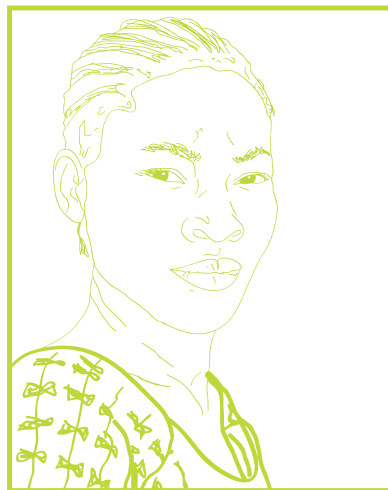
## Support self-employment

Support residents into enterprise and self-employment with a programme to tap into what people's interests and skills are, analysing what they can offer the community and if there is a business there. Offer grants (not loans) to support social enterprise. For example in Jacques' example having been made redundant as a long term maths and computing lecturer, his age and very specialist skills made it difficult for him to find employment, with support and volunteering opportunities he was able to reinvent himself as a maths tutor and set up a successful small tutoring business.

In the consultation with BME males, two out of the eight had ambitions to set up their own business.

*“ My dream is to set up my own business, managing a community sports enterprise, with activities for kids, and adults. I don't really have any connections or links, or the finances to set it up though” Unemployed black male, training to be a personal trainer, 21 years old.*

# MARIE'S PERFECT JOURNEY



I came with my children because of conflict back home. My husband is still there, and I fear, specially with all the traumas I have after the experience there.



## EARLY HOLISTIC INTERVENTION

Arrival with refugee status has access to early intervention support, from where is referred to holistic project which helps to accredit her skills and advocates regarding the system and benefits. This is underpinned by strong links between the community and stator agencies



## TRAINING AND CONVERSION COURSES

Feels free to complete the IELTS course, and gets support on interview techniques, confidence building, dress for success. Is volunteering in a school, building support network and confidence. Clear policy and training within statutory sector allows her to start a conversion course



## SUBSIDISED CHILDCARE

As Marie is working at a school, the hours she works remove childcare issues. And she can afford after school club.



## ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

She is eligible for tax credits and housing benefits. Awareness and access to services via clear referral routes and follow up gives her clear understanding of services she can use.



## HOLISTIC PERSON CENTRED SUPPORT

Her increased confidence leads her to locating a housing association that provides her access to a two bedroom flat. Increases also her social capital. Being recognised as valuable member of community results in improved mental health and resilience.



## SUCCESS STORY

Gets a job and British citizenship. Is preparing husband's status, for family reunion. Now also supports refugee communities especially women, is a community leader within the Congolese community. She is going for local councillor and influencing policy. She is now giving back.

## Timebanking

What can VCS, statutory services and employers offer for free or as an exchange to address issues?

- Skills sharing across sectors addressing training needs e.g. VCS organisations could provide training or talks on BME and Refugee issues to JCP staff. E.g. on Somali tribal issues or women's issues. VCS organisations could provide employment support services in exchange for free venues and space, back office functions from business or the council etc.

## Fundraising

Working together across sectors to do fundraising events such as sports days or community events, to raise awareness and funding for employment support.

## 7. LARGER PICTURE

### Our campaign message to central government

#### There needs to be a shift in policy towards career guidance and development rather than a punitive approach to addressing unemployment

We call for an end to the Work Programme and the government's punitive approach to unemployment. We call for a shift towards policy that values people and understands the challenges, barriers and the uniqueness of people's needs, with a focus on nurturing potential, supporting people to build confidence, identify and achieve career goals and access opportunity.

Our evidence demonstrates that the work programme perpetuates poverty cycles, through an impersonal one size fits all approach that favours menial low paid jobs and fails to value people's ambitions. The work programme has forced people out of their training or volunteering commitments, deterring them from truly improving their employability in a way that is relevant to them and what they can offer to society. The punitive approach of the work programme has contributed to mental health issues and pushed people into crisis and has an impact on other services.

We call for more diversity of specialist advisors for different areas and complex customer needs, so they can respond more sensitively and effectively to the individual and getting people back to work, developing more trusting relationships between advisor and customer.

We call for more comprehensive training of JCP advisers to deal more sensitively with specialised cases, and understanding the larger picture for signposting.

#### DWP services to be more locally driven

JCP should have a duty to be closer connected to VCS organisations and services in the area that have better understanding of local needs. There should be a focus on working together with local community organisations to understand and respond to local needs in an integrated way rather than big national contracts that deliver a one-size fits all approach. This approach has proved to be ineffective, punitive and breed mistrust between customers and advisors.

## Community services visibility

We call for an end to ‘no posters/leaflets’ policy in JCPs. JCPs are a central point of contact and opportunity to signpost to support services – there should be community noticeboards to make local support and opportunities more visible to job seekers.

## Mental health services

Mental health issues are synonymous with unemployment and poverty. There should be more holistic support and signposting integrated in the JCP offer, to help people cope with the pressures of unemployment and poverty and address mental health barriers to employment.

## Immigration

Airport immigration officers to be more supportive and connected with services for better signposting to promote integration and prevent isolation and poverty from early on.

## Drive to accredit skills for migrants

Migrants have a lot to offer the UK’s economy, and this opportunity is lost when migrants’ skills and training are not recognised in this country. We call for a drive for conversion courses to accredit migrant’s skills so they can fulfil their potential and ambition and be integrated in society.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This report provides forward-thinking and collaborative routes to address disproportionate rates of unemployment and poverty faced by BME and Refugee communities; we believe the recommendations would also have wider benefit for other ethnic groups facing unemployment.

The group recognised that Islington Council is a supportive listening council compared to other London boroughs, but voiced a need for closer working together and taking on of innovative solutions.

We acknowledge the positive contribution that JCP Islington do to improve the lives of vulnerable residents, and understand that the negative experiences shared in this report may not be reflective of every one's experience, however it shows a need for JCP in Islington to improve links and relationships across sectors, to support BME and refugee communities. Islington JCP hosts meetings and support to engage with local customer representative groups, of which Voluntary Action Islington, Choices CIC and community hubs are members. This existing initiative provides a great opportunity to work together to action some of these recommendations, and begin more collaborative working.

We ask the Employment Commission to explore and adopt our recommendations and support our wider campaign message to central government.

The BME and Refugee voluntary partners look forward to a response from Islington Employment Commission.





## 9. APPENDIX

### About the authors and partners

#### Every Voice – Islington BME Forum

Every Voice is an equality and diversity social enterprise. We produce independent festivals, media, educational programmes, community research and forums that champion the voices of those who persistently face marginalisation, stereotyping and discrimination.

We work to put an end to factors of race, gender, age, faith, disability, sexuality and socio-economic class impeding on people being heard and feeling valued in life.

Our work seeks to influence more fairness and diversity of representation in the mainstream. Every Voice runs Islington BME Forum, which is a network of Black and Ethnic Minority community organisations in Islington. Islington BME Forum exists to strengthen the voice and capacity of the BME voluntary sector and influence race equality in the borough.

#### The Ladder

The Ladder is a live service design project being developed by Laís de Almeida in the context of Islington, as an area of extreme inequalities, as part of her MA studies in Service Design at the Royal College of Art.

The Ladder is experimenting possible services to tackle the challenges identified regarding unemployment, under-employment or in-work poverty, suggesting a shift from a demand-led employment landscape, to a supply-led one. This means creating work opportunities around individual's skills rather than making individuals skills match the jobs available.

The service is being codesigned with the local community of the Andover Estate, in Islington, and the pilot is being established with the support of Finsbury Park Community Hub.

For more information: [www.the-ladder.co.uk](http://www.the-ladder.co.uk)

## Evelyn Oldfield Unit

The Evelyn Oldfield Unit is an independent, membership-based, charitable organisation. We aim to provide, develop and coordinate specialist aid and support services for established Refugee and Migrant Organisations in order to increase their capacity and potential for meeting the needs of their communities.

## Islington Refugee Forum

Islington Refugee Forum (IRF) is a refugee-led, independent organisation. IRF was created to act as a common voice for refugees, to improve their quality of life and support their integration into the community. Community organisations play a crucial role in facilitating this integration and the understanding of Islington's services. IRF aims to ensure that the borough will be a fairer place for refugees and migrants who live, work and are in education in Islington.



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