

**Young Roots**

**Bridging London Project**

**Independent Evaluation**

**Report**

**September 2015**

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*"I got problems solved like with my solicitor and I felt happy thanks to games. Everything has changed. My English is better and I feel happier. Life is easier. I started going to Croydon College some weeks ago. Come to Young Roots!"*

*Project user, 17 years old from Afghanistan*

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## **1) Introduction**

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Young Roots, Bridging London Project (subsequently referred to as the project), completed between July and September 2015. The evaluation process involved consultation with 108 individuals, including young people who are currently or have previously been involved with the project, paid and unpaid team members, Trustees, parents, foster carers and partner organisations. The report summarises the themes of stakeholder feedback on project delivery and impact or 'difference made', it outlines the strengths and challenges described relating to project delivery and records stakeholder ideas and suggestions on future needs and project development. Finally, it presents our own conclusions and recommendations as independent evaluators based upon our review of the above and other qualitative and quantitative data received.

The evaluation was designed in consultation with a Young Roots evaluation steering group and overseen by Roz Evans, Bridging London Manager. Stakeholder consultation was supported by a team of ten young volunteer interviewers coordinated by Charlene Jollivet currently on a student placement with Young Roots. We are especially grateful to Charlene and the team of volunteer interviewers: Eella, Kobiga, Tung and Bernice, Sara, Seada and Weedah, Aldair and Bridget without whom the participation and contribution of young people would have been much reduced.

The evaluation would also not have been possible without the input and co-operation of all the other team members at Young Roots, external stakeholders in partner organisations, foster carers, young people and parents, all of whom have taken time out from their daily schedules in order to feed into the process. We would particularly like to thank all the young people who gave their time, shared their views and experiences as young and often unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees with us.

## **2) Evaluation context and purpose**

Young Roots is a small charity working in London, and in partnership with community-based organisations in Lebanon and Nepal, to provide support and activities for young refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have experienced conflict in their home country and/or suffered difficult journeys to the UK. Approximately half of the young refugees and asylum seekers helped by Young Roots are separated from their families and came to the UK alone. These unaccompanied asylum seeking children must negotiate complex and stressful immigration and social care systems.

The Bridging London Project aims to improve the life chances of young refugees and asylum seekers in Barnet and Croydon by providing activities which improve communication and social skills, reduce social isolation, and improve confidence and the ability to problem-solve and/or seek help.

This is done through weekly youth groups, peer support programmes with schools and colleges, girls only activities, monthly Saturday trips and school holiday activities. Young people are also referred on to other organisations for casework, legal advice, counselling, and educational support. In year two of the project, 758 young people attended various activities.

Young people's participation is a fundamental part of the project's approach. Members consult peers, choose activities and trips, help plan events, and volunteer for the Bridging London Project. This external evaluation was commissioned in June 2015 during the third and final year of Young Roots' delivery of the Bridging London Project. Internal project evaluations were also completed in years one and two. This independent external evaluation was conducted to:

- Explore and evaluate the impact of the project on the young people it supports
- Identify any unexpected outcomes (positive and/or negative)
- Identify any unmet needs for young refugees and asylum seekers in the locations where it works
- Help Young Roots to improve future work supporting young refugees and asylum seekers in London
- Help Young Roots to evidence the impact of its work to funders

The evaluation has also helped evidence and illustrate the long term development and 'distance travelled' of young people who have attended the project over some time.

### **3) Executive summary**

This evaluation has been undertaken in the third and final year of the Bridging London Project. With the help of ten volunteer interviewers we were able to invite and receive input from 67 young asylum seekers and refugees and 41 stakeholders from within Young Roots and other organisations in Croydon and Barnet. All contributors have direct experience of the Bridging London Project delivery, either as young people who have engaged with the project or as practitioners within Young Roots or partner organisations working in the same context.

The feedback from all stakeholder groups has been extremely positive. It is clear that Young Roots is a very highly valued and respected organisation, recognised for its strong commitment to the needs of the young people it works with, for its emphasis on and practice in a participatory approach and its collaborative and flexible approach to working with other organisations supporting young asylum seekers and refugees.

Contributors from all stakeholder groups consistently emphasised the effectiveness and importance of the project in providing welcoming, safe spaces coupled with regular and varied opportunities for young asylum seekers and refugees to meet up with others in similar circumstances, to have fun, to make and build friendships, social and support networks. Similarly, the opportunity to meet with and over time develop trust based, supportive contact and relationships with Young Roots paid and unpaid team members was equally recognised and advocated as a vital function and impact of the project.

The establishment of such relationships and the approach of welcoming and working flexibly with young people on a long term basis (including through varying periods of non contact or engagement) enables young people to share worries and problems as and when they arise, often at key points and stages in their experience of being a separated child or young refugee in the UK social care and asylum systems. This in turn often generates a need for one to one advocacy and casework across a range of issues and needs. Again, through the evaluation consultations we received consistent feedback on the effectiveness, positive impact and need for the one to one work that the Bridging London project undertakes with many young people in this area.

As the main evaluation report describes and comments further on, the individual casework and advocacy role provided by the project very effectively links with the group sessions, trips and activities provided by Young Roots. It is an area of work that often makes a very real and vital difference for young people, many of whom would otherwise struggle or not be able to resolve problems in shared or supported accommodation, access timely legal advice, properly benefit from effective social work support, know about or access other rights, entitlements, courses or activities. It is however a growing area of work that needs more resources within Young Roots, particularly in the context of reducing availability of such support externally as a result of funding cutbacks in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors. Young Roots are clearly aware of this need and are engaged in planning and development activities to address this need.

In the final stages of consultation interviews and online surveys, young people and external stakeholders were asked to indicate a rating or assessment of their experience of participating in or

working with Young Roots and the Bridging London Project. The response summaries are testimony to the quality of work and relationships achieved by the project:

Stakeholder category	Not at all good	Not good	Mixed	Good	Very good	Don't know or no response
Young people (67)				22 (33%)	40 (60%)	5 (7%)
Parents and foster carers (6)				2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (16%)
External stakeholders (12)				3 (25%)	9 (75%)	
Combined responses (85)				27 (32%)	52 (61%)	6 (7%)

### Summary of recommendations:

The following recommendations draw upon our stakeholder feedback and key messages regarding future needs and challenges. The recommendations are set out in more detail under heading nine.

- a) Continue Young Roots (Bridging London) current groups and activities and continue to respond to participant suggestions when planning trips and outings where feasible
- b) Develop and resource the individual casework and advocacy role and capacity
- c) Continue to support the development of English language skills and confidence
- d) Review and ensure sustainable capacity and distribution for essential project functions
- e) Explore paid student placement potential
- f) Continue and explore collaboration and partnership approaches

## 4) Methodology

The evaluation and needs assessment process was designed to achieve the key tasks set out in the Terms of Reference and was based on a fixed budget equating to approximately 14 consultancy days. In total, 111 stakeholders were invited to participate and contributions were received from 108 (see table below).

67 young asylum seekers or refugees (45 male and 22 female) from 21 countries of origin fed into the evaluation, sharing their experience of the project and offering views and suggestions regarding future needs and interests. 37 of these young people were interviewed by Young Roots paid and voluntary team members with preparatory training and guidance provided by ourselves (Richard Malfait and Sophie Cottrell). We also completed 30 individual interviews with young asylum seekers and refugees.

16 internal Young Roots stakeholders and 18 staff in external stakeholder organisations were either interviewed in person, by telephone or fed into the evaluation through an online survey. One parent and six foster carers also gave feedback and shared ideas on future needs and priorities. An interview format and semi-structured approach was used in conversations with all stakeholder groups and the online survey questions were harmonised to help ensure consistency across the consultations.

The external stakeholder list was developed by Young Roots, including only organisations with direct experience of referring young people to Young Roots, or experience and roles supporting young refugees and asylum seekers themselves. Participation of all stakeholders was voluntary and individuals were informed that their feedback and contributions would be made anonymous and not specifically attributed to them in the final report. Summary data on stakeholder input is included in the tables below.

### Breakdown of stakeholders:

Overview of stakeholder input	Individuals
Service users (current and recent) from 22 countries of origin	67
Paid team members	8
Unpaid team members (interns and volunteers)	7
Trustees	1
Parents (1) and foster carers	7
External stakeholders (from 16 partner organisations)	18
Total number of individual contributions	108

### Countries of origin (C of O) of young people:

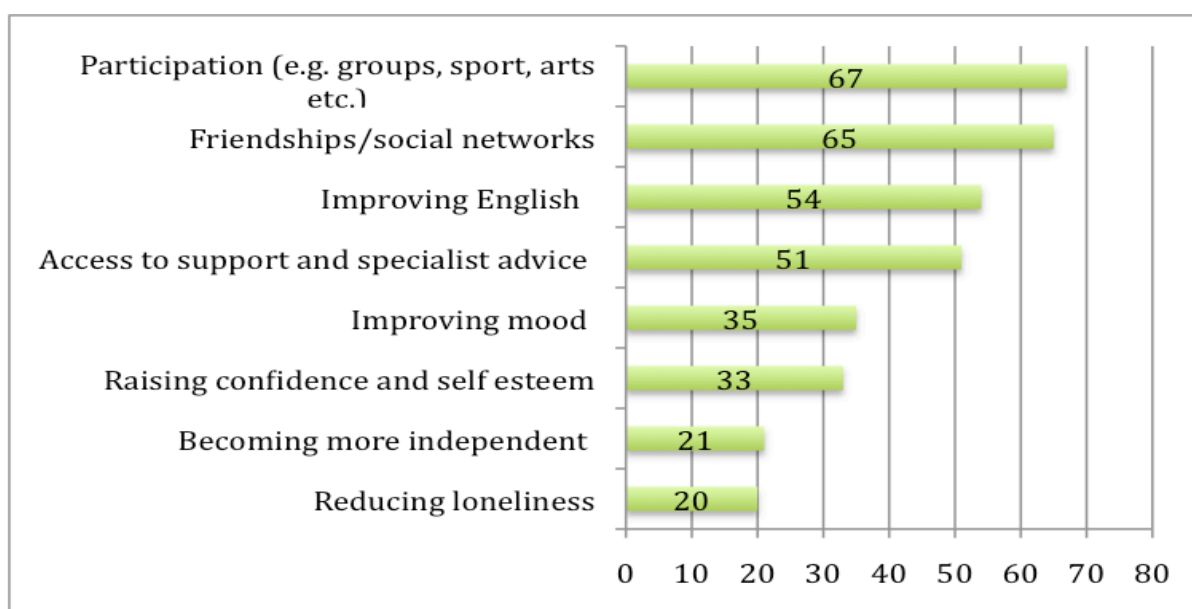
C of O	No.	C of O	No.	C of O	No.	C of O	No.
Afghanistan	26	Ethiopia	1	Poland	1	Sudan	2
Albania	3	Ghana	2	Portugal	1	Syria	2
Angola	4	India	1	Sao Tome & Principe	1	U.A.E.	1
Bangladesh	1	Kurdistan/Iran	1	Sierra Leone	1	Vietnam	2
Egypt	2	Nigeria	2	Somalia	1		
Eritrea	3	Pakistan	6	Sri Lanka	3		

## 5) Difference made and impact – stakeholder feedback

We asked a cross section of young people, Young Roots managers, trustees, team members and partner organisations in both Croydon and Barnet if and what difference they thought the Young Roots Bridging London Project had made for participants. The responses were overwhelmingly positive (in fact without exception).

In quick interviews at group sessions and events in Barnet and Croydon all 67 young people were asked if and how they felt they had benefitted from their involvement with Young Roots. Questions were ‘open’ and people were not asked specifically if involvement in the groups had ‘reduced loneliness’ for example. Answers were spontaneous and we think may reflect a mix of ‘main difference made’ and (or) most recent ‘benefit’ felt. Many team and partner agency stakeholders told us that in their experience and view, many young people benefited in most if not all of the areas listed in the headings below but often at different times and stages in their experiences of coming to London, being an asylum seeker and an unaccompanied child. In their evaluation interviews young people were however able to make multiple responses and these were noted, reviewed and categorized as follows:

### Do you feel that the project has helped you - if so in what ways?





The table below shows the 'difference made' response groupings of young people as a percentage:

Main areas of help and benefit	Number of young people stating	As % of all young people
Participation (e.g. groups, sport, arts etc.)	67	100%
Friendships/social networks	65	97%
Improving English	54	80%
Access to support and specialist advice	51	76%
Improving mood	35	52%
Raising confidence and self esteem	33	49%
Becoming more independent	21	31%
Reducing loneliness	20	30%

Brief explanations on how young people said they have enjoyed or been helped by the project are set out below. The impact and benefits listed were closely mirrored in the responses of team members and partner organisations.

*“The social spaces in which the young people can also access practical support are invaluable for those who have lost everything. Young Roots has become the first point of contact for many of those, and having established, regular and consistent group activities makes this possible.”*  
*External stakeholder*

- a) **Providing a place to go:** Aside from the focus or theme of activities in group sessions, young people and those supporting them commonly told us that an important aspect of being involved with Young Roots was that the groups provided a safe space, in a known location at a known time where they could go to meet with other young people in a similar situation to themselves. Young people often attended group sessions with different and changing regularity, generally more frequently initially and perhaps less often as their social networks, involvement in other groups and activities and independence developed over time. However several stakeholders and young people told us that knowing that a group existed and was meeting routinely meant that they could feel confident and if and when they wanted to re-visit or ask for help, they knew where to go.

*“I get food here and see my friends. Talking to them makes me feel better. My English is getting better as a result.”*  
*Male project user*

- b) **Opportunities to make and meet friends:** Young people engaging with Young Roots during the course of the project have routinely been asked if they feel that attending the groups or activities has helped them make friends – to date, 80% have replied “yes” with 35% confirming that they also meet up with new friends outside of the groups and activities. Current and former members of Bridging London groups and activity participants told interviewers that they really enjoyed meeting and making new friends through their involvement with the project. For those new to London (often with no friends or family support networks here aside from key workers and foster carers), the sense of isolation and having to ‘start again’ was a theme in feedback. Getting involved with Young Roots’ activities and groups was often recalled as a milestone in their experience, and the route through which many of them began to establish and develop their friendships and social networks. Several young people told us that they especially enjoyed meeting other people and adults from different countries and cultures (including British people). Being able to talk about similar experiences of leaving homes, family and friends in their countries of origin and of being an asylum seeker or young migrant in the UK also helped reduce their sense of isolation.

*“It’s helped quite a lot –I didn’t know anybody and had no friends in London and I am staying in a hostel... they make me feel welcome and I get food and friendship.”*

*Male project user*

- c) **Helping to improve English skills and confidence:** Young people engaging with Young Roots during the course of the project have routinely been asked if they feel that attending the groups or activities has helped them learn English – to date, 71.5% replied “yes”. One of the most common and strongest messages regarding ‘difference made’ expressed within all stakeholder groups was that young people’s ability and confidence in speaking English was greatly helped and improved through their involvement with the project. English is normally spoken as the common language by project team members and young people in the planning of all trips, activities and groups and this was identified as highly valuable (and presumably necessary) by all the evaluation contributors but especially by young participants. Some commented or asked that this should be more of a rule or expectation in groups and other activities, saying that occasionally a few young people will effectively separate themselves from the main group by not speaking in English and using their first language. Being able to confidently speak, understand and otherwise communicate in English was commonly identified as a one of the main priorities and essential needs for themselves and others when first learning to live in the UK. It was also recognised as a fairly urgent necessity by those wanting to become independent and seeking to develop or progress their education, achieve employment or other goals in life in the UK.

*“Young Roots is an essential service for young asylum seekers and refugees. Those young people are often unaccompanied minors who find themselves isolated and overwhelmed with grief and trauma. Young Roots provide them with a safe space to socialise, access support and process their situations.”*

*External stakeholder*

*(How has participating in Young Roots helped?): “... it can change your mind, you meet different people from different backgrounds. I’ve met people and my English has improved. I find it hard on my own but I meet new people here and go to new places. They also helped me enrol in college and get a solicitor to apply for status.”*

*Male project user*

- d) **Access to trusted adults and getting help with problems:** Most of the young people consulted told us that they were primarily and initially attracted to Young Roots for the groups (and opportunities to meet other young people), for the fun trips and activities organised around London. Whilst these benefits were still core motivators for young people’s engagement, it is also clear that participation in the project provided a foundation for the development of trusted relationships with team members that often enabled young people to share problems or worries and ask for help. Young people told us that team members had explained and helped them understand aspects of the asylum system, their legal situation or their rights as a young person in care. They had also helped them to find or raise concerns about accommodation or support issues with mainstream agencies and professionals, in accessing language and other courses and finding out about other services and networks. Young people described how through developing trust in the Young Roots team members, they felt able to share and discuss issues as they arose, often over a period of several years and through different stages of their asylum seeking experience in the UK. Many young people described worrying about their asylum case, missing their family at home or suffering from emotional, physical or trauma related ill health. The relationships established and maintained through engagement with Young Roots, both with workers and other young people involved in the project, were crucial in helping them cope or access appropriate help during these periods.

*“The young people are able to develop their confidence and it greatly improves their self-esteem, which is often lacking. The young people feel fully supported and feel able to trust and openly communicate with the staff, which is particularly important for young people who are experiencing problems with social services or remain confused about issues relating to asylum/age disputes.”*

*External stakeholder*

- e) **Having fun (and feeling happier!):** A common message from young people and other stakeholder groups was that the project provides opportunities and an environment in which young people can simply have fun. One stakeholder observed that young asylum seekers and refugees, especially those separated from the families and friends overseas, often miss out on the type of fun and social experiences that those growing up in stable, safe communities and families can participate in and enjoy. Feelings of isolation, worry and insecurity, loss and confusion can come to overshadow long periods in a child or young person's life while age disputes, entitlements and asylum and immigration status and future options or events are unresolved. All stakeholder groups emphasised the real value and positive impact of Young Roots organising free trips, groups and activities for young people who would in many cases have very few chances to socialise, visit places and enjoy themselves with peers.

*"Young Roots makes me happy – they change my mind and my brain – I meet new people and we talk."*

*Female project user*

*"I enjoy coming because school is hard and I come from school and can relax and have some fun playing lots of games."*

*Male project user*

- f) **Emotional and mental health needs (and access to support):** Project team members and partner organisations told us that many young asylum seekers and refugees suffer emotional distress and trauma as a result of their experiences both prior to coming to the UK and after. Whilst articulated in different ways, this was also expressed through discussions with young people themselves. The project team (and other stakeholders) felt that there is appropriate sensitivity to the issues and needs of young people and that the team responds well when such needs are identified, making referrals to specialist agencies and counselling organisations, providing a safe place and relationship through which young people can speak, be listened to and feel supported.

*"I believe that involvement in Young Roots is of huge benefit to this very vulnerable group of young people, in a number of ways; not only by assisting them to get help for important practical problems (e.g. housing and immigration advice), but also benefiting their mental health by enabling them to make friends, play games, do social activities and generally act as children and young people."*

*External stakeholder*

- g) **Developing confidence:** Young Roots' workers observed that when many young people first come to groups or become involved in project activities their confidence in interacting and participating with others is often low. Many speak very little English, are still adjusting to life in the UK and are having to build completely new networks of friends and lives in London. Project workers described how they are often able to see young people visibly relax and begin to gain confidence in themselves both in group activities with Young Roots and in life more generally.

*"I have seen Young Roots give young people the confidence to deal with their problems; one young person told me after attending the Boys' Group that it was the first time that anyone had listened to him and believed what he had to say."*

*External stakeholder*

- h) **Trying activities and having things to do:** As described elsewhere, many young people are faced with the challenge of adapting to a new life, language and culture in London and the UK, in most cases without the support of birth parents, other family members or friends. Isolation, lack of funds and language barrier for those who don't speak English can make it very difficult for many young people to start getting involved in sports or to develop hobbies and interests. The opportunities to try different activities, go on residential and day trips were enjoyed and valued.

*"I have done all sorts of activities through the Friday group and YR – I helped make a film and went to an art workshop and learnt how to play the guitar. I did a few sessions at the school and that was great. I really like the Friday group and have been on trips too to London Eye, to Brighton and to the Aquarium ..."*

*Female project user*

- i) **Learning about London, life in the UK and developing skills for adulthood:** Many young people consulted appreciated being able to learn about London, travelling by public transport and UK currency for example through activities run by Young Roots. Stakeholders noted that young asylum seekers had often not had opportunities to explore or visit places in their new home city, partly because of their relatively recent arrival but also due to the costs involved and possibly lack of adult and peer company or support. Having the opportunity to learn about London and UK life skills in a safe and supervised environment is a useful additional benefit to the fun and socialising that takes place on these outings. These trips provide a safe environment in which young people can ask questions, share experiences and learn with their peers as they adapt to life in the UK.

*"... my English has improved and I have learnt to speak it in two years – I have also made friends and feel happier, more confident. I sang on stage and did a performance – it's fun and supportive here – not like at school".*

*Male project user*

- j) **Access to girls' only groups and activities:** Several of the girls we spoke to had participated in the girls' only trips and activities and had appreciated the opportunity to go on trips without boys present. The opportunity to socialise and have fun in an all women environment was felt by several young people and other stakeholders to be an important aspect of the work to maintain and develop in the future, either through regular trips or through a group that meets every week or month. Young Roots used to run a Wednesday afterschool club only accessible to the girls attending that school. Most of them have now joined their outside school activities. The girls group was reorganised so that it was run outside school and could therefore be attended by any girls living in the area. Additional funds from Awards for All have now been secured for a weekly girls' group on Mondays outside school from 28<sup>th</sup> September.

*"I used to really enjoy the girls group on a Wednesday after school – bring that back! Also I really enjoyed the museum trip and would like to go to another..."*

*Female project user*

## 6) Project strengths – stakeholder views

We asked project staff and partner organisations what they felt were the main strengths in the project approach and work generally. We were also able to develop a strong sense of strengths through reviewing the feedback from young people. These are summarised below:

*"Communication between Young Roots and other groups and organisations in the area is excellent and each fulfils a vital purpose in helping young people. Young Roots offers something unique and the knowledge possessed by the organisation and its volunteers and staff along with the close relationships it fosters with external groups allows it to respond to young peoples' needs very well. An excellent example of this are the links between the boy's group and the legal drop-ins from several organisations such as Coram or South London Refugee Association, and the mental health advice from Compass."*

*Young Roots stakeholder*

- a) **Regular group sessions:** As previously identified, the regularity and stability of group sessions in Croydon and Barnet enables people to travel to them confident in the knowledge that they happen in the same place, at the same time and on the same day each week (apart from the girls' group which was monthly and where the venue and time changed depending on what was planned for the session). Additional funds to cover an extra project worker and venue hire have now however been secured to enable the girls group to run weekly from 28<sup>th</sup> September at the same venue as the Friday group. The groups can help to give shape to a week and provide something to look forward to, for example meeting up with other young people - both established and new friends.
- b) **Variety of activities, groups and trips:** Young people, external stakeholders and project team members consistently advocated the value and importance of continually checking and responding to the interests and ideas of the participants when organising activities. Most felt that as this approach has been practiced in the past, young people have remained interested and engaged, often taking an increasing role in the planning and running of activities, particularly as their confidence and language develops.
- c) **Stability, continuity and accessibility over time:** The stability and continuity of Young Roots as an organisation (and a project team) and the regular group sessions has meant that young people can develop relatively long term trust based relationships with team members as well as their peers. Initially, they may be regular participants and visitors in activities and groups and then over time can begin to engage less frequently. This is often because they have successfully established friendships, social networks around school or college and other routines or commitments. Frequency of engagement with Young Roots can also reduce as a young person's language and confidence improves or during periods of stability in their home and school life. However, we also heard that young people often re-establish contact with Young Roots when difficulties arise, for example in home life, relationships with foster carers or with key workers and social workers or in their immigration and asylum situations. The informal and non-time limited nature of the relationship and engagement has meant that many young people have been provided with an anchor or reference point through known and trusted places and people that they can return to for help, advice or simply conversation and contact at any time but especially when issues arise (in some cases over several years).

*"They do the best partnership work in the area – they are especially good because they reach people not already being seen by other agencies – i.e. those who are not already 'plugged in' to existing networks."*

*External stakeholder*

- d) **Partnership relations and perception:** Young Roots is very highly regarded and valued by partner agencies for its collaborative and supportive approach. The reputation, relevance and the quality of the work was consistently highly rated in interviews on online survey responses. Support for continuation of this work was universal. Stakeholder organisations also consistently affirmed the need for increased generic case advocacy and support with many suggesting that Young Roots is well placed to respond to this need.
- e) **Project ethos and commitment to young people:** Young people consulted repeatedly expressed their appreciation of the non-judgemental and supportive atmosphere in the groups and activities. The staff, interns, volunteers and other participants were in the main felt to be extremely open and friendly and people were able to 'be themselves'. Participants particularly appreciated this environment compared with that of school which tended to be experienced as less tolerant of difference and generally felt to be more hostile.

*"Volunteers are always enthusiastic and helpful and are vital in helping Young Roots stretch much further and help more young people than it could otherwise. Volunteers with language skills in refugee community languages have also made a huge impact in assisting young people."*

*Young Roots stakeholder*

- f) **The Young Roots team:** Consultations with young people, partner organisations and Young Roots trustees consistently acknowledged the energy and commitment to young people's welfare in the general work of the project. Several Trustees have been involved with Young Roots for more than five years, and two have been involved for more than ten years. The Project Manager is both a founding member of Young Roots and also a former Trustee. The dedication of Trustee and team members, often coupled with continuity of involvement is probably a contributing factor helping to ensure that the values, ethos and principles underpinning engagement and work with young people are embedded and reflected with a team approach and was commented upon by partner organisations. The project team also benefits from having a diverse base in terms of experience, age, cultural and professional or educational background. Three former beneficiaries of the project have recently been invited to become Trustees of the organisation. This approach helps enable excellent engagement and rapport with participants.
- g) **Volunteer contribution:** The vital contribution of volunteers and interns was recognised and gratefully acknowledged in consultations with paid colleagues. Several volunteers, interns and former project users have gone on to secure paid roles within the organisation or with related projects. Aside from the significant amount of time that is contributed by volunteers and interns, it



is also clear that they enrich the project with additional energy, skills, languages, ideas and enthusiasm. Some concern was expressed that the volume and nature of the work Young Roots is currently engaged with is dependent upon the contribution of volunteers and unpaid interns with inherent risk and problems if (and when) key individuals move on. Some interviewees expressed a preference for offering paid rather than unpaid internships though this has not been possible to date. Despite the currently unpaid nature of the intern roles there has been strong interest from graduates and others wishing to offer services and expertise in order to gain experience and insight that would prove valuable and relevant to future study and career development.

*“Participation is not just an ideal but a reality. Young people have been involved in planning, staff recruitment, and evaluation. They are engaged and challenged recognising their abilities. There is no element of condescension.”*

*Young Roots stakeholder*

- h) **Participative principles, practice and management culture:** A commitment to the principle and practice of encouraging and enabling the participation of young people in identifying, organising and taking part in activities, group sessions and trips was expressed and valued by the project team in consultations. This has been a core principle and approach and one that is modelled and prioritised at trustee and manager level. The long standing practice of asking young people for feedback is evident through the availability for review of both quantitative and qualitative data spanning several years. Similarly, there is also a history of regularly asking young people for their ideas and preferences for future activities and trips. An investment in consulting and asking for views on priority needs is reflected in the numbers invited to participate in this evaluation. In doing so, 67 young people have been encouraged and enabled to influence the future direction of Young Roots. The participative approach is also valued by the team members and volunteers with many commenting that they felt encouraged, involved and listened to when sharing ideas and views around planning and decision making. Team members felt that they could ask for and receive advice, support and guidance when needed although they were also aware that the manager and whole team is working with limited capacity. Team members also felt supported and empowered to try different ideas and approaches.
- i) **Training:** Paid and unpaid team members commonly described access to training as one of the strengths of working with Young Roots and the Bridging London Project. Training courses attended by team members (and in several instances run more than once to enable access) have included: The rights and entitlements of young refugees and migrants (CPD certified); Mousetrap Creative training for Youth Workers; Mina Fazel training - Some simple psychotherapeutic tools to use in schools; Access to HE for young asylum seekers and refugees (RSN); Beginners Guide

To Advocacy & additional training specifically for young asylum seekers (Coram Voice); First Aid Training for Adults - Red Cross;; Seminar on Working with Undocumented Young People – CCLC; Training from Soundmix for YR staff & volunteers - running sessions with instruments and using music for games & workshops; Level 1, 2 and 3 Safeguarding Training Croydon – CVA; Online equalities training; Safer recruitment practices (Barnet Local Authority); First Aid at work (Red Cross); Arts Award training; 10 week Introduction to Counselling Course; The Rights and Entitlements of Separated Children – Coram; Mental health of young refugees and asylum seekers training (Compass).

## 7) Challenges – stakeholder feedback

- a) **Meeting individual support needs and project capacity:** The Bridging London Project has primarily been funded to establish and deliver group sessions, activities and trips for young asylum seekers and refugees from bases in Croydon and Barnet. These activities have generally been well supported achieving regular and ongoing engagement with growing numbers of young people. Through the development of contact, trust and relationships young people have been enabled to share their needs and ask for help in such areas as asylum and immigration, mental and emotional health, legal support, housing, social services, education and health. Referrals and signposting by partner agencies and others working with the same client group are ongoing, with records confirming 194 individual referrals since the project began. Whilst there are currently other services and sources of support for young unaccompanied refugees many of these providers are under immense financial pressure and are struggling to meet the needs of clients or fulfil statutory roles and obligations. Accessing entitlements and support has become harder for asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and anyone unfamiliar with ‘the system’ or who cannot speak English. The Young Roots team provide individual assistance as much as is possible (with limited capacity) and have built up a strong knowledge base and skill set through ensuring access to up to date information, relevant training and supervision. Staff also advocate on behalf of young people and help them to resolve problems, access entitlements and other appropriate support. Stakeholder feedback and referral records also confirm that the project team makes timely, effective and appropriate referrals to specialist services, for example legal advice providers and counselling organisations providers based on individual needs. Currently there is not however sufficient staff capacity because there is no dedicated worker or role to properly resource this area of work despite the evident need. The team is as a result stretched.
- b) **General capacity (team) and sustainability:** Young Roots and the Bridging London project is steered, managed and staffed at all levels by highly motivated, passionate and hard working

individuals. Our impression is that the willingness and ability of team members to put in long hours, work flexibly and go beyond the requirements of their role or job description in order to meet the needs of vulnerable clients, is both a necessity and a key element of what makes Young Roots and the Bridging London Project successful and special. Whether such a culture and approach is sustainable (or desirable) over time with changes in external environment and staffing is dependent on a range of factors. Young Roots evolved from an organisation established 11 years ago, and has proved to be both effective and sustainable. Whilst consultations confirmed that paid and unpaid team members are happy and feel supported and empowered in their roles and within the management structure, evolving casework needs and roles mean that general team capacity is increasingly stretched. There may be insufficient paid time within the Project Manager and Project Coordinator roles to cover all the necessary tasks and activities that are essential to project delivery– for example project administration, referrals recording, volunteer and paid worker supervision, fundraising, planning and training. This is not to say that we observed or were told of any short fall in quality or effectiveness in any of these roles or activities – recent award of the London Youth Bronze Quality mark (which includes checks in all the areas mentioned) demonstrates the projects commitment to and success in achieving good practice. The strain on ‘paid time’ capacity is largely redressed through the willingness and ability to date of team members at all levels to ‘go the extra mile’ in their roles and work within the project. Volunteers are also vital in providing additional administrative support. There is awareness of this challenge at manager level and efforts are being made to secure funding that will enable the increase in casework needs and team role in this area to be properly resourced. The Project Manager role and job description has also been recently reviewed and in future will not include direct work with young people, thereby enabling a greater focus on project and organisational management.

- c) **Reliance on interns and volunteers:** Whilst the nature and volume of input provided by unpaid interns and volunteers greatly adds to the value, capability and impact of the project, there is a shared sense of over reliance on their input. The individual, one to one support and advocacy role that has evolved over time but without dedicated resourcing is already placing significant strain on team capacity and eats into the time that coordinators and other team members would otherwise spend on organising and maintaining groups, outreach work, trips and activities. Loss of key volunteer and unpaid intern support would impact badly in several areas of resourced and non-resourced activity.
- d) **Barnet activities and context:** Whilst the majority of young asylum seekers and refugees supported from the Croydon project base are living in or are easily and frequently visiting Croydon, the Barnet project base engages with and seeks to respond to the needs of some young people who live and/or study outside the borough. These young people are mainly in Brent where

there are many unaccompanied asylum seeking children, some of whom are looked after by Barnet children's services but housed in Brent (in 2014 63 unaccompanied asylum seeking children were looked after by Barnet and Brent and 52 former care-leavers living in Barnet). Barnet itself is large with no easy or obvious central place for bringing people together. This has presented some challenges for project delivery here and has impacted upon accessibility, models of working and capacity (with more travel time and costs both for young people and project workers). However, the local project has responded to this challenge by working flexibly and creatively with partner organisations (e.g. a college with a larger number of unaccompanied asylum seekers) to maximise accessibility, engagement with young people and responsiveness to the needs and issues arising. Certainly activities provided by Young Roots in Barnet such as the Whitefield School lunchtime peer support group and youth groups remain well attended.

The project activities most consistently engaged with in this area have been those organised in conjunction with colleges and supported housing projects (for example a peer mentoring scheme with the local college was very successful). The capacity strain and absence of dedicated and properly resourced casework and advocacy roles described below are applicable in both Barnet and Croydon, although the geographical and demographic factors above need particular consideration in future planning by Young Roots.

- e) **Legal advice access and availability:** Increasing difficulty in accessing good quality legal advice was one of the main support needs identified. Legal advisers, Young Roots team members and practitioners in other organisations that fed into the evaluation told us that as changes in legal aid entitlements continue to impact, fewer legal advisers are able to offer the services needed and those that do are under increasing strain. Requests have been made for Young Roots to consider developing a legal advice role or partnership arrangement with a reputable provider. There may be value in Young Roots exploring this idea.
  
- f) **Working with young people and teenagers:** Project team members were clearly highly motivated and enjoyed and gained a great deal of satisfaction from working with the young people involved in Young Roots. Teenagers are not however always easy to work with. In addition to the usual social, emotional and physical changes experienced by any young person, young asylum seekers and refugees are often coping with and adjusting to a multitude of other issues, ranging from loss, separation, trauma, upheaval, social and cultural isolation as well as language barriers. Many of the young people Young Roots work with may also have very unstable and chaotic lives where their living conditions are not easy or consistent. People may be moving around a lot and living away from family for the first time. This can prove challenging when arranging outings where people have to meet in different places and at different times of the day. Participants are not

always reliable and may have signed up to come to an event or outing but do not attend at the time arranged. This is a particular problem when spaces are limited and people who have applied to attend have been turned away. Staff do however take time and trouble to chase people up and remind them of up and coming events taking every possible measure to help young people to attend. Both staff and volunteers seem to have an excellent understanding of the challenging environment in which many of these young people live.

## 8) Stakeholder messages and our comments on future needs and development

*“There is a need for far more one-to-one case work support for young asylum seekers and refugees (YRAS) especially those who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children. There has been a recognised need for young people to have an advocate they can turn to with a range of issues; proposals for an independent state-funded 'guardian' have not been accepted by the government, until this time there is a huge gap in one-to-one advocacy/advice and support.”*  
*Young Roots stakeholder*

All young asylum seekers and refugees, foster carers (and one parent), Young Roots team members and stakeholders in partner organisations were asked what they felt were the main needs of young people and areas for Young Roots to prioritise or develop in future planning and fundraising. The future ‘needs and priorities’ questions included in both evaluation interview and online survey format were ‘open’ questions and not formatted to invite or enable category or tick box responses. However review of the interview notes and survey narrative clearly identifies strong themes and a very high level of consistency in respondents’ answers with the following inter-related needs and priority areas for project continuation or development being most prominent:

- a) **Continue providing activities and groups for young people:** This was a theme in all respondent answers. The groups, trips and activities provide invaluable opportunities for often isolated, traumatised and vulnerable young people to have fun and to enjoy and use opportunities to develop and maintain friendships and peer support networks. This is the foundation upon which relationships and trust between young people and project workers (and peers) are built and maintained. The nature and quality of these relationships coupled with long term project accessibility and lack of restrictions and rules relating to frequency or duration of young person engagement are crucial in enabling them to share their issues and problems with the project team and access help when and as the need arises.

**b) Develop and resource the individual support role and capacity (casework and advocacy):**

Whilst the highest number of requests and suggestions from young people for future development and priorities were for the continuation of groups, activities, trips and help with English language, more than 90% of team and partner organisation respondent answers also emphasised a need for Young Roots to develop and resource their individual casework, support and advocacy role and capacity. Individual support and advocacy (through which a young person's request or need for help is responded to) has evolved organically as a much needed function in the project (for example linked to accommodation problems, accessing statutory and specialist support, accessing good legal advice, health support and education). However there is currently no dedicated role or resource for this activity and it therefore places a significant strain on project workers' time and capacity. Young people told us that groups, activities, English language improvement, and the opportunity to share problems and issues with known and trusted adults and when necessary and have help from project workers in solving them or in accessing mainstream or specialist services provided by others were all of importance to them.

Several external stakeholders in partner organisations also told us that ideally, Young Roots would develop more of a capacity to provide or improve access to advice and help of a legal nature for young people. This form of support is much needed by many young people but is increasingly difficult to access. However they acknowledged that this would be a new area of work for Young Roots and the requirements in terms of resources and supervisory provision may be very difficult to meet. Development of a casework and advocacy role within the project would at least offer the possibility of supporting young people in finding and benefitting from good quality legal advice when needed (assuming there is sufficient external provision). This may be an area for closer partnership working and project development in the future.

- c) Continue to support the development of English language skills and confidence:** One of the top four needs articulated by young people was for help to learn and improve their skills and confidence in communicating in English. The importance of being able to communicate confidently and effectively in English as a prerequisite for building independence, developing social and support networks and realising education and employment goals was also echoed by other stakeholder groups. Most young people identified improvement in English skills and confidence as being one of the top changes attributable to their involvement in Young Roots Bridging London project with many reporting that promotion and the use of English as the common language in activities, trips and groups was the main factor contributing to this. When asked for suggestions on how to improve Young Roots activities, several suggested or requested the use of English as the common language should be more strongly encouraged or required.

- d) **Continue, develop and resource volunteering and intern roles but reduce and guard against project reliance:** There are multiple benefits to involving volunteers and interns in the work of Young Roots but high dependence and the impact of losing key individuals are of concern. However there is a great deal of appreciation of the range and strength of value added (e.g. time, energy, skills, financial worth, CV building and employability enhancement) from their involvement. There is a strong wish to retain, develop and resource their involvement although it is recognised that there needs to be adequate resourcing for rolling recruitment, induction, training, supervision and expense reimbursement. Whilst several workers commented on the accessibility and good quality of training opportunities for all team members, the recruitment, support and administration tasks relating to volunteer and intern support require a significant input of time. Overall responsibility for recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers and interns is part of the Project Manager's role, with Project Coordinators supervising the volunteers and interns that they work most closely with. Again, our impression (supported by stakeholder feedback) is that the necessary tasks and activities are covered, but as previously observed, capacity (time) is stretched. Recent review and changes in the Project Manager's role and job description should mean that in future the post holder will have more time available to allocate to these functions (as they will be doing less direct work with young people). If casework and advocacy functions can be supported with dedicated additional funding as is planned, this will also free additional time for volunteer and intern supervision across the team.
- e) **Continue the partnership approach:** Feedback on the approach and work of Young Roots and the Bridging London project from all 18 of the stakeholders in partner organisations was very positive. External stakeholders in partner organisations that have worked with Young Roots in planning and hosting events or activities have found good communication and collaboration increases the level of young person and engagement and they are keen for this to continue. Most other external stakeholders told us they that they felt that they had a good or very good understanding of Young Roots, its purpose and approach. Cross referral and signposting of young people based on needs between Young Roots and partner organisations seems to be working very well, enabling expert counselling services and other types of support to be accessed (although access to legal advice remains challenging). Partner relationships and communication is in many ways simpler in Croydon than in Barnet due to the higher concentration of young asylum seekers, refugees and related institutions and support organisations. General feedback however remains that the partnership approach is increasingly important, especially for the purposes of dovetailing different services and activities in a context of diminishing resources and increased potential for competition in securing funds.

## 9) Recommendations

The following short recommendations draw upon stakeholder feedback and key messages regarding future needs and challenges as described under preceding headings.

- a) **Continue Young Roots (Bridging London) groups and activities:** Stakeholder feedback from all groups consistently confirmed that the Bridging London project has made an important and real difference for young asylum seekers in all the ways outlined earlier. There is clear and ongoing need and demand for the group sessions, trips and activities amongst young people and those supporting and caring for them. The approach of involving young people in deciding and shaping activities, trips and groups should also be continued in order to ensure interest and engagement. This sustained interest and engagement is crucial to enabling relationships, trust and needs based work to develop.
- b) **Continue to encourage and support the use of English language in all groups and project activities:** English is already used as the common language in groups and activities and improvements in young peoples' skills and confidence in speaking and otherwise communicating in English were frequently attributed to this approach. Development of English language skills was cited as a priority and personal goal by many young people and as a necessity for being able to live independently and achieve longer term goals in the UK. We suggest factoring this aim and approach into planning, monitoring and evaluation processes for all groups and activities.
- c) **Develop and resource the individual casework and advocacy capacity:** This area of work has already developed and continues to do so due to the difficulties that young people experience accessing advice and support. Cuts to both statutory and non-statutory support mean that provision is diminishing. There is a clear need for Young Roots to secure sufficient funding to enable individual advocacy and casework to be offered by dedicated workers with time, training and resources (to ensure workers retain the necessary knowledge, information access and skills for the role).
- d) **Continue to review and ensure sustainable capacity and distribution for essential project functions:** Whilst the project is no doubt succeeding in its aims and making a real and positive difference to young asylum seekers and refugees, capacity is stretched. The need for, commitment and increasing role of the project in supporting individual young people with a range of case specific needs and to advocating on their behalf to enable access to rights, entitlements and necessary support is clear. In our evaluation, we gained the impression that this is putting pressure on (paid) time and capacity across the administrative and other operational functions of



the Project though voluntary input and team commitment to the project at all levels ensures its continued success, impact and viability. Feedback from across all stakeholder groups (including young people themselves, legal adviser and referring organisations) confirms that casework and advocacy is one of the main and most highly valued benefits of involvement with the Bridging London project. The need to continually review, plan for and ensure sustainable capacity and effective distribution of all the functions essential to project delivery remains vital. Young Roots planning and self-evaluation activities have recently included review of the Project Manager role and other team job descriptions resulting in changes that should enhance organisational and project capacity and impact (especially if plans and funding bids to secure additional resources to support advocacy and casework with young people are successful).

- e) **Explore paid student placement potential:** Additional project capacity might be accessed through the provision of placement opportunities for student social workers or youth workers. These are often in high demand and colleges or universities may expect to pay fees of several thousand pounds per placement. Student supervision by practice supervisors is often required but can be organised on an internal or external basis depending on the situation.
  
- f) **Continue and explore collaboration and partnership approaches:** Young Roots is considered to be an excellent partner or network colleague and to play a vital role both as a referring and signposting organisation but also as a project to which others can confidently make referrals. Several partner organisations expressed interest in exploring closer partnership working in different areas. Both formal and informal partnership work and collaboration can be appropriate and functional, especially in the context of service and funding cut backs in both statutory and non-statutory sectors.

## 10) Concluding comments

We hope that this report and the evaluation process has provided a useful assessment of the impact or 'difference made' by the Bridging London Project to date. We also hope it provides useful material in the form of stakeholder comment and our own analysis of issues and needs that will prove to be useful in future project planning and development activities. Young Roots' Trustees and team members in paid and unpaid roles have engaged with us openly, reflectively and supportively throughout the evaluation, for which we are grateful and respectful. There is a shared, clear and passionate commitment to working with young asylum seekers and refugees, to identifying and meeting their needs and to the principles and practice of giving them voice and involvement in the organisation's future direction and work. We wish them every success.

*Richard Malfait and Sophie Cottrell*

*R.Malfait Consultants Ltd.*

*Independent evaluations, project and management support*

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**Appendix 1: Contributing stakeholders**

<b>Stakeholder Name</b>	<b>Job Title (or YP gender)</b>
1. Laura Armstrong	ESOL Coordinator, College of North West London
2. Tiago Brandao	Coordinator (and counsellor), Compass
3. Online survey (name not stated)	Coram Children's Legal Centre
4. Rosalind Compton	Solicitor, Coram Children's Legal Centre
5. Online survey (name not stated)	Not stated, Counselling service
6. Dijana Rakovic	Project Manager, Counterpoint Arts
7. Marie Brown	Mental Health & Wellbeing Advisor, Croydon College
8. Chris Ampofo	Director, Housing Plus QARA
9. Simone Brown	Key worker, Housing Plus QARA
10. Helen	ESOL, Croydon College
11. Malte	Befriending Project Coordinator, JCORE
12. Darren Brine	ESOL teacher and Curriculum Director, John Ruskin College
13. Online survey (name not stated)	Not stated
14. Online survey (name not stated)	Not stated
15. Greta Nonni	Key worker, Pathways to Independence
16. James Taylor	Volunteer & paid Project Assistant, Soundmix
17. Maya Pritchard	Youth Caseworker, South London Refugee Association
18. Ewa Micuni	Full Service Extended School Coordinator, Whitefield School
19. Joan Thomas	Foster Carer
20. Mrs Khan	Foster Carer
21. Neelam	Foster Carer
22. Pearl Earle	Foster carer
23. Susan Simpson	Foster carer
24. Wossen Alem	Foster carer
25. Kalpana Kamalakumar	Parent
26. Roz Evans	Project Manager, Young Roots
27. Jenny Barnes	Former Trustee and Legal Adviser, Young Roots
28. Jon Mawby	Chair of Trustees, Young Roots
29. Pavle Popovic	Volunteer, Young Roots
30. Alice Griffey	Project Coordinator/Manager, Young Roots
31. Despina Tsiakalou	Croydon Project Coordinator, Young Roots
32. Djamal Naser	(Croydon) Project Worker, Young Roots
33. Eoin	Former Intern and Casual Project Worker
34. Fatma Ali	(Barnet) Project Worker, Young Roots
35. Hana Hamaz	(Croydon) Project Worker, Young Roots
36. Michele Kirschtein	Barnet Project Coordinator
37. Dein	Youth Work Placement student, Young Roots

38. Tina Macintyre	Volunteer, Young Roots
39. Charlene Jollivet	Placement student, Young Roots
40. Not stated	Volunteer, Young Roots
41. Not stated	Volunteer, Young Roots