



Community Empowerment and Support Initiatives (CESI)- UK
Greenwich Nepalese / Gurkha Integration Project
(Funded by The Big Lottery Fund- Reaching Communities)

**Report on
Housing Rights Event Report**



Venue: Salvation Army Hall, Plumstead

October 25, 2013

Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Community Empowerment and Support Initiatives (CESI) is a Charity Organisation working for Improving the quality of life of the Nepalese community in the UK and particularly in the London Borough of Greenwich and raising awareness of the issues faced by the Nepalese community. CESI aims to achieve this by providing information, advice and signposting to enable the community to access a wide range of services available by statutory and voluntary service providers specifically for older people, young people and women. CESI organised this community event especially for the Nepalese Gurkha people, as part of "Greenwich Nepalese Integration project" awarded by Big Lottery Fund - Reaching Communities.

The community event was organised to provide Nepalese people with an opportunity to discuss issues related to Housing Rights with the official of Greenwich Housing Rights, a voluntary organisation. The speaker was Mr Chris Minnock from Greenwich Housing Rights.

This report highlights the questions raised by the participants and the answers given by Mr Chris, an expert in the housing rights. It draws together the key messages and analyses the issues raised during the discussion at the event.

1.2 Event Aims and Approach to Consultation

In preparing for the community event and to deliver them in the most effective manner, CESI sought to:

- provide a forum for Nepalese people to air their views on the issues related to Housing Rights;
- provide service of translator/interpreter to make participants fully understand their queries and concerns over issues raised;
- encourage discussion and consideration of all viewpoints;
- accurately record the response of event participants.

Section 2

Methodology and Overview

2.1 Venue and Attendance

The event was held at Salvation Army Hall, Whitehart Road, Plumstead on October 25, 2013. The event started from 11:00am and finished at 04.30pm, with 69 Nepalese people attending over the course of the day. The event was facilitated and interpreted by the Project Administrator Mr Arka Timsina.

Section 3

Community Event Programme

Agenda for the community event was prepared taking in to account that effective consultation/discussion should recognise that individuals will have different interests and concerns which they will want to explore and everyone should have the opportunity to express their views and have these recorded.

This open approach to discussion was reflected in a flexible community event agenda, where elements could be extended, re-arranged or curtailed to suit the needs of participants.

3.1 Registration, Tea & Coffee

During registration participants were given a pack which consisted of a set of event agenda, copy of handouts of presentation and event evaluation form. Refreshments were served.

3.2 Introduction

Project Administrator gave an overview of the background to this event and explained agenda for the event. It was also explained that a Question and Answer session would take place at the end of the presentation.

3.3 Presentation session

Mr Minnock of Greenwich Housing Rights (GHR) was the main speaker of this community event. He talked about areas of Housing Rights. In his presentation, Mr Minnock talked about the Greenwich Housing Rights first.

An Introduction to the Greenwich Housing Rights(GHR)

Greenwich Housing Rights is a voluntary organisation which gives specialist, independent advice on housing issues free of cost. GHR helps people to resolve housing issues.

GHR offers free, independent, specialist advice on all housing and its related issues. GHR focuses on resolving housing problems and campaigning on housing issues affecting the residents of Greenwich and the surrounding boroughs. It seeks to raise public awareness of housing issues and provides training to local organisations on housing and related areas of law and policy.

Mr. Minnock mentioned that when people first contact them, one of the experienced advisers assesses whether they can provide them with ongoing help. In many cases we may be able to provide advice on what steps they can take to resolve their housing issues. We also assess whether they need help from agencies specialising in other legal problems, and if so we assist them to access that help. If they do need ongoing help, we make arrangements for them to attend an appointment with one of our specialist advisers.



Participants of the workshop

In the presentation, the participants were briefed about the types of benefits they can get depending up on their situation and circumstances. Some examples of benefits that one can get which included the following:

What benefits can you get?

- **If you are not working:**
 - *Jobseekers Allowance?*
 - *Income Support?*
 - *Employment Support Allowance?*
 - *Child Tax Credit?*
- **If you are retired:**
 - *State Pension?*
 - *Pension Credit?*
- **If you are working but on a low income:**
 - *Working & Child Tax Credit?*
- **To help pay the rent and Council Tax:**
 - *Housing Benefit?*
 - *Council Tax Benefit?*
- **If you are unable to work because of health problems:**
 - *Statutory Sick Pay?*
 - *Income Support?*
 - *Employment Support Allowance?*
- **If you have a baby:**
 - *Child Benefit?*
 - *Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance?*
- **If you are disabled:**

- *Disability Living Allowance (under 65)*
- *Attendance Allowance (if over 65)*
- **If you are caring for a disabled person:**
 - *Carers Allowance?*

3.4 Question and Answer (Q&A) Session

A Q&A session took place at the end of the presentation. Most of the participants raised their issues and concerns related to Housing and Welfare benefits. One of the main focuses of discussion was to get support for older people as they feel very isolated and there are no elderly support centres nearby where they can go and meet with other people and pass time. Responding to the issue, Mr. Arka Raj Timsina, Project Administration told them that CESI has got 10 computers in its meeting hall where they can come and learn how to use computer to talk to their families who are abroad and also listen to music and read and listen to updated news and events.

Housing Benefits

You could get Housing Benefit to help you pay your rent if you're on a low income. Housing Benefit can pay for part or all of your rent. How much you get depends on your income and circumstances. You can apply for Housing Benefit whether you're unemployed or working.

Question1: How can I apply for a council house?

Answer: each council have list of council tenants who applied for to rent a council house. Council has policy to follow while allocating house to the people. Some of the policies are follows.

- To be illegible for council house one has to be living in the borough for at least five years.
- Must have permanent residence permit (e.g. Indefinite leave to remain) status granted by the Home Office.

Note: These rules do not apply to the families of ex-army personnel. However, as there is long list of people in waiting list, they have to wait until they get one.

There are 14,000 people in waiting list for council house.

There are other housing schemes such shelter housing which is normally given to elderly. In shelter housing council provides support services. One can apply for shelter housing if they are in desperate need for one. They do not have to be long waiting list for council house.

Question1: Will I be illegible for housing benefit while living together with family members/relatives?.

Answer: One cannot get housing benefit if he/she lives with relatives in the house owned by the relatives and the house is free hold.

Question 2: What can I do if council refuse to grant housing benefit even I am illegible for it?

Answer: Illegible people who have denied of housing benefit can challenge/appeal against the decision of council or such body in very short span of time (generally within 2 to 3 weeks) via Citizen Advice, Law centres, and Housing Rights.

Question 3: Where I can contact if my housing benefits that are being given by council are not sufficient?

Answer: One can go to Citizen Advice Bureau if housing benefits are insufficient.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Question 4: What I can do if winter fuel allowance is not sufficient?

Answer: Winter fuel allowance is reduced. Now one can get from £165 to £200 only.

Question 5: Land Lord wants more house rent than what I get from council.

Answer: Council pay you lump-sum room rent to cover rent as well as fuel costs. You have to check with council on how much room rent you can get before making an agreement to rent rooms. Council has fix room rent in specific area within the borough.

Rented room/ rented House/flat

Question 6: What will happen if I rent out my council house?

Answer: If you let a room from your council house, the council would deduct the rent of that room from your total rent payment. Therefore, do not hide any benefits like that.

Question 7: How much housing benefit I will get?

Answer: If you rent a room and live in that room with shared kitchen, bath and other facilities that you will get only the rent of that room.

Question 8: can you tell us why the estate agents do not let property to the people like us who live on council benefits?

Answer: There are various reasons for landlords are becoming reluctant to rent their property to people who are living on council benefits. Some of the reasons are as listed below.

- Estate agents do not let property as there is delay in payment by council paid tenants.
- In market the rent of property is going up and council payment always remain the same or decreased over the time. So the land lords hesitate to rent to people who are on council benefits.
- Private landlords can ask tenant to vacate the property anytime after the end of the tenancy agreement, but they cannot push you out by force.
- If landlord ask you to leave, but you do not have place to go . In this case land

- lords have to follow the court to vacate his/her property.
- Even if court decide in the favour of landlord, the court will give you six week to vacate the property via authorised Organisation.
- Landlord cannot threaten you. This is an offense or criminal offense too if they harm you.
- Some landlords target newer communities so if you are threatened, call the police and talk to the council department.

Question 9: Can you tell me who will be responsible in case if property breaks, heating not working, water and sewage not working in private rented property.

Answer: In all privately rented house/flat/room, the landlords will be responsible for something but not for everything. Landlords are responsible for main building works, e.g. property including roof, walls, stairs alike major building works including central heating, windows, and doors. If landlords do not fix the major building works then you need to go to report to the council and court too. However, you will be responsible for all utility bills and management of those supplies from the service providers.

How to get service from GHR

**Greenwich Housing Rights,
36 Wellington Street,
Woolwich, London SE18 6PF**

Telephone: **020 8854 8848**. (Tuesday 2-5pm; Thursday 2-5pm and Friday 10am-1pm)
Fax: **020 8317 2316**.
Email: general@grhr.co.uk.

GHR's Drop in Advice Services run on the following days and times:

Mondays – 2-4pm at 36 Wellington Street;
Tuesdays – 5-7pm at the Town Hall, Woolwich;
and Wednesdays – 10am-12pm at 36 Wellington Street.

We run outreach sessions at the following locations on the following days and times:

- Middle Park Community Centre - 1st Thursday of each month, 11.00 - 13.00;
- Greenwich West Community Centre - 2nd Tuesday of each month, 10.00 - 12.00.

The outreach service is run in partnership with Plumstead Community Law Centre and Greenwich CAB. For an appointment please call Greenwich CAB on **020 8853 9499** or submit an enquiry at www.greenwichcab.org.uk.

Office hours are: 9.00am–5.00pm, Mondays to Fridays

Section 4 Participant's Views - Feedback and Analysis

This section records the results of participant's views and feed back of the event.

As noted in question and answer session, there was a good deal of discussion particularly during the discussion sessions and it was very encouraging to see so many points of view aired, reflecting different opinions of the local community.

At the end of the event a feedback form was distributed to participants, 45 of which were returned.

In general most of participants found the event interesting and useful. Some remarked on the lack of time and the need for more detailed information on a variety of issues.

4.1 General comments:

“Information of council housing were very helpful for us- please organise such event on regular basis”

“It has been great for us to know that “Greenwich Housing Rights” would help us to resolve problems with landlords and council. We will visit to GHR whenever we get housing related problems”.

“the topics discussed in the event were very relevant to us. Privately rented property, council housing schemes, and the role of landlords and tenants have been explained clearly- we have benefited a lot-keep this thing going”.

4.2 How did participants rate the day?

Out of 45 feedback forms received from the participants, most of them rated the event was “very useful” (75%) while a 24% considered it “*useful*”. The rate of less useful was quite low at 1%. Similarly the majority of participants (75%) rated that they have very well understood the event, while a 23 % considered it understood well. The rate of less understanding was quite low at 2 %.

Similarly the most of the participants (67%) have recommended that similar type of programme should be organised regularly in the future. They have also recommended that programme such as information on state benefit system, programme related to culture, women, elderly and youth should be organised in the future.

Event Schedule

October 25, 2013

“Housing Rights” Programme

11.00 - 11.30	Participants Registration and Tea/Coffee
11.30 - 11.35	Welcome to the participants and Objectives of the programme– Mr. Laxman Sah
11.35 - 12.05	Presentation by – Chris, Greenwich Housing Rights
12.05 - 12.35	Open Discussion
13.40 -14.10	Programme Evaluation
14.10	Lunch