

# reuse2u91



## Reuse Synergies and Opportunities in North London

### Expanding Reuse Provision in the NLWA

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for LCRN September 2009



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## **1. Introduction**

In the first quarter of 2009, London Community Recycling Network (LCRN) was commissioned to map the extent of knowledge sharing, and identify any potential for improved collaboration, between the various third sector reuse organisations serving the NLWA area. The purpose of the research was to develop practical opportunities to maximise reuse in the NLWA area. This report documents LCRN's findings and suggests actions NLWA can take to increase reuse in its area by working with third sector reuse organisations and improving those working relationships in practice.

This work builds upon previous work commissioned by the NLWA and by the NLWA in partnership with the GLA and others and delivered by LCRN. In 2007/08 LCRN conducted an appraisal of the operational procedures at ReStore Community Projects (ReStore)<sup>1</sup>, the largest furniture and fridge reuse organisation in north London, and worked with ReStore staff and trustees to implement changes recommended as a result of the appraisal. This led to significant improvements to ReStore's warehouse operations, furniture and fridge throughput and marketing strategy. In the same period, LCRN researched third sector reuse activity, opportunities and barriers across London resulting in the 'Third Sector Reuse Capacity in London' report published by the GLA in July 2008<sup>2</sup>. That report found that reuse provision in north London was less than in some other parts of London. The strategic, pan-London recommendations in that report have also informed the current commission.

## **2. Aim and Objectives**

The aims of the study were to recommend ways of expanding reuse provision in north London and explore the scope for coordination of third sector reuse organisations across north London. The original objectives of the study were to:

- identify third sector reuse and recycling organisations which are the key stakeholders in delivering expanded reuse services;
- visit each key stakeholder to conduct a survey and site assessment as a basis for a comparable position statement;
- facilitate meetings between key stakeholders to enable immediate collaboration opportunities;
- analyse synergies and potential partnerships that would enable more materials to be diverted up the waste hierarchy;
- develop ways of involving key stakeholder organisations in Give and Take days delivered by the north London boroughs (with the aim of providing them with another outlet for unsold furniture);
- assist ReStore in securing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) on reuse services with Barnet, Enfield and Waltham Forest Councils.

### 3. Methodology

The work was targeted at third sector reuse organisations serving the NLWA area. Most charity shops were excluded, as were 'for profit' organisations collecting door to door. However larger charity shops offering bulky collections were included, along with TR Aid, the principal textile reuse organisation serving the area. Potential key stakeholder organisations were identified drawing on desk based research of local business service directories and of the memberships of LCRN and of the Association of Charity Shops. Each organisation identified was then contacted to establish the extent to which they were providing reuse services in north London.

At least one site visit was made by an LCRN researcher to each of the eight key stakeholder organisations identified. Each visit involved a site assessment, a detailed interview with the reuse project manager and completion of a standard questionnaire (see appendix A). Completed surveys are stored electronically at LCRN for reference (see Appendix B for summary data).

The calculation of tonnages collected and reused by the key stakeholder organisations depended on the different ways in which the organisations recorded their activities:

- i) Three organisations use a database to record actual quantities of products and materials collected and delivered or sold for reuse.
- ii) Two organisations keep a paper record of the number of items collected and delivered, to which the FRN national average weights<sup>3</sup> were applied,
- iii) Three organisations do not count the reuse items (furniture and appliances) collected, but were able to estimate the number of van loads they collected per day or per week which were correlated with the FRN national average weights database.

The FRN national Average Weights Database is a national framework developed and maintained by national charity FRN and sanctioned by Defra, WRAP and LARAC. Regular tests carried out by the FRN to validate annual updates of the Average Weights Database demonstrate that fully laden, the 3.5 tonne vehicles used by the organisations surveyed carry, on average, 32 bulky items weighing one tonne. This average has proved to be accurate compared with sample van loads tested by weigh bridge in north London.

Where detailed tonnage data was not available, total tonnage figures were estimated using the number of van loads each day/week. The calculation takes into account lost operational days for bank holidays, sickness and maintenance down time to avoid over estimation. It is worth noting that in organisations other than ReStore, consistent detailed collection information was not available. Monitoring of items collected and tonnage is not considered a priority by the three charity shops who see their prime function as fundraising. Sales and other relevant charity shop data could not be shared due to commercial sensitivities. Where variance within reported tonnage figures occurs, this may be attributed to disparities between totals calculated using average weights of lorry loads rather than recorded numbers of items aggregated through the FRN Average Weights Database. The related margin of error identified in the survey analysis in this study was 2.75%.

All tonnage cited in this report relates to items and materials reused rather than collection-only data. Where not available using delivery and sales data, tonnage reused is derived by subtracting the tonnage disposed of and the tonnage recycled from the total tonnage collected. Note that while collection tonnage relates only to items and materials collected within the NLWA area, items and materials may be actually reused beyond the NLWA area. For this reason this study cannot make statements about *amounts reused within* the NLWA area. Instead reference is made to *'amounts collected for reuse'*. This phrase in no way indicates that the tonnage figures used here were not reused, simply that that reuse may have occurred beyond the NLWA area.

## 4. Key Findings

Eight reuse organisations were identified as servicing the NLWA boroughs: see appendix A

<b>Organisation Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Tonnage reused</b>
ReStore Community Projects	Tottenham	156
Homestore (Quaker Social Action)	Newham	78
Forest Recycling Project	Walthamstow	20
North London Hospice	Walthamstow	19
Salvation Army	Walthamstow	60
British Heart Foundation	Leytonstone	78
TRAID	Wembley	311
Computer Aid International	Arnos Grove	150
<i>Total collected and reused 2008-9</i>		<i>872 tonnes</i>

The total weight of bulky items collected for reuse by the eight principal reuse organisations in the NLWA area in 2008/9 is calculated to be 872 tonnes, around 15% of London's total. The information gathered about the services delivered by these organisations is outlined below. Fuller information is at Appendix B.

### 4.1 Coverage

The current coverage of reuse services in the seven north London boroughs is mapped in appendix B. Compared with other parts of London, particularly south London, the NLWA area is relatively poorly served by existing reuse services. Barnet and Camden have, along with Havering, the fewest reuse organisations servicing their borough in London (cf GLA 2008).

### 4.2 Collaboration

When asked about knowledge of other reuse organisations in the NLWA area, five out of the eight had an awareness of two or more. Two did not know of *any* of the other organisations before the current study. Collaboration, communication and coordination between existing reuse organisations is correspondingly low. Three of the eight projects are in regular communication with each other regarding recommendations, referring donations and swapping stock. These are ReStore, FRP (Forest Recycling Project) and Homestore. Each of these projects is a member of LCRN and the national FRN (Furniture Reuse Network). Infrequent contact goes on between Walthamstow Salvation Army and the Forest Recycling Project on occasions of passing on donations of WEEE. TR Aid, as a specialist textile reuse and recycling organisation, does not work closely with any of the other services.

Few perceived benefits of collaboration were identified by the majority of informants at the outset of the study. The most common potential for collaboration was identified to be cross-referring people wanting to donate furniture onto other projects. Less popular options were swapping stock, or sharing ideas or ways of working which could strengthen or otherwise advantage organisations. In three cases informants indicated a sense of competition for scarce resources in terms of donated furniture stock and for customers who visit to buy.

While operational procedures vary, six out of the seven projects do operate a service over 5 or 6 days per week which allows a high degree of flexibility in collection, sales and delivery arrangements.

### **4.3 Current economic climate**

Four out of the eight projects reported a down-turn in collections of goods for the reuse market. In the case of two projects (British Heart Foundation and Computer Aid International) this drop in collections also represents a significant drop in turnover. The reason for these two projects' more notable decline in comparison with the other projects in north London is their dependence on large volumes of throughput to meet their overheads. The British Heart Foundation was not prepared to release statistics about this but only to give a general indication of the decrease.

For others the economic downturn has had a lesser effect. The lower volume of reuse collections has actually resulted in a quicker response time to a more manageable volume of calls and so from a customer perspective, the service has improved as a result of the financial situation.

The lower volume of household waste reported across London also relates to lower numbers of items of furniture and appliances entering the waste stream. Tonnage collected from reuse and recycling centres by ReStore, reduced from 46 tonnes in 2007/8 to 34 tonnes in 2008/9 . One likely explanation is that households are holding on to furniture longer rather than buying new replacements. A fall in the rate of furniture entering the traditional reuse channel via the seven projects is also perhaps affected by other factors not related to the recession but by the growing popularity of other (free) reuse forums such as Freecycle and Give & Take days. This is an observation made by the manager of ReStore to explain the reduced volume coming into the project in 2009. ReStore advocates the varying methods of reuse to give the public a greater choice of reuse activity.

Forest Recycling Project based in Waltham Forest reported no down-turn in reuse volume. A significant part of their reuse activity is paint and organising give and take days across four boroughs. The number to items handled and the number of people participating has not gone down during 2009.

Charging the donor for a collection is practiced by ReStore, all others collect items donated by households free of charge. ReStore has noticed that the level of donations to the project has not been reduced significantly since their introduction of a £10 charge in 2008. However there are other factors which might be skewing the results such as increased marketing by ReStore and the introduction or increase of bulky waste collection charges by London boroughs.

### **4.4 Developing reuse collection contracts with the waste collection authorities**

In the first quarter of 2009 progress has been made by two organisations, ReStore and Homestore, (with the assistance of LCRN under a separate contract) in setting up service contracts with LB Camden, LB Islington, and LB Hackney. The work attributable to this report contributed to developing The long standing (2005) arrangement between LB Enfield and ReStore which was thus extended from 2 days to 4 days per week in 2009.

LCRN representatives held two meetings with LB Waltham Forest in 2009 to establish interest in reuse activity a follow up meeting is to be arranged with the purpose of deciding on arrangements between the LB Waltham Forest and ReStore. A schedule of local authority contract work by ReStore is attached as Appendix C for information.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Barriers to collaboration**

The research found that whilst there are some informal arrangements for collaboration between some of the reuse organisations in north London, no organisation has yet specifically volunteered to do more with their peers to enable more materials to be diverted from the waste stream. The reuse organisations surveyed vary considerably in terms of scale, objectives, current challenges and operational procedures. Each organisation sees itself as special and uniquely positioned to fulfil a particular niche market. All of these factors are effectively barriers to collaboration, and indeed to considering collaboration; there being no natural impetus to meet together for mutual advantage without the facilitation and motivation of a third party such as LCRN.

### **5.2 Potential for Collaboration**

As a result of their participation in this research, the organisations surveyed did identify a number of possible synergies and opportunities for collaboration to increase reuse across the NLWA. Organisations have in common aims to maximise the convenience of their services to the public and to maximise the capture and quality of items for reuse. There is furthermore a shared desire to communicate to potential reuse customers that reuse is synonymous with quality.

Increasing the current low levels of joint working between reuse organisations could potentially help provide a service in areas where there are service gaps. Some organisations expressed a willingness to explore the possibility of specialisation within their operations, which could enable complementary service design within an integrated reuse framework for the area.

Some organisations also expressed a willingness to share vehicles and even potentially, to coordinate collections and deliveries to minimise waste-miles. Building on this there was a willingness to consider passing on referrals and other customers to other organisations according to geographical proximity to facilitate quicker response times and other efficiencies, if suitable incentive and reward mechanisms could be developed. Improved and coordinated approaches to training, recycling (material that cannot in the end be reused), retailing and interface with Freecycle and Give and Take were also identified as areas for potential synergy.

Practical ways in which some of these opportunities might be developed include the secondment of staff and volunteers between organisations to enrich their reuse skills and experience (although sensitivities around 'trade secrets' were expressed by some organisations, so this is not yet a recommendation of this study). Some of TRAIID's unique network of 80 collection points in NLWA may have the potential to be harnessed for other product streams, such as portable WEEE.

### **5.3 Potential tonnage impact of improved collaboration**

It is difficult to quantify the potential increase in diverted tonnage that could be derived from closer working at this stage, but this study estimates that it should be 20%. More detailed analysis is underway.

## **6. Recommendations:**

Five immediate actions are recommended for the NLWA to increase reuse tonnage in the short term within current levels of operational capacity of the seven principal reuse organisations serving the NLWA:

### **6.1 Create a joint communications plan for the principal reuse organisations in North London**

The common thread mentioned by projects in terms of improvements that could be made was collaboration in marketing to the public for donations of furniture and appliances. This is particularly relevant at the time of recession to capture a diminishing volume of reusable items from entering the waste stream. However, another reuse leaflet is not enough.

A joint communications strategy and campaign is needed in order to promote the concept of reuse to all boroughs, communities and ages, alongside promoting each organisation. The strategy and subsequent publications should be lead and co-developed by communications professionals.

### **6.2 To convene a summit meeting to decide on collaboration**

As a result of the research LCRN is to convene a meeting of the eight project managers, to be held at the NLWA offices. This meeting will take place later in 2009 than originally planned due to the fact that projects didn't immediately see the need for or benefits of meeting, although as noted above, it is now anticipated that this may be useful.

The agenda of the proposed meeting will be based on the opportunities for collaboration identified as a result of the research (outlined in paragraph 4.5). Such a summit meeting will also provide an opportunity for NLWA to present on their waste strategies and aspirations for reuse in the area. The meeting can also be used by LCRN to highlight the support offered to social enterprises under the REalliance programme which might assist in this work.

### **6.3 Create a central database for donation offers**

An agreement should be reached to formalise the cross referral between projects on offers of furniture and appliances. This is also a useful exercise to build the rapport between them. Secondly a central database for managing furniture offers from the public is the most effective way of reducing the number of missed reuse collections.

The afore mentioned two measures would be largely inexpensive. However if correctly instigated would result in a large increase in tonnage collected.

### **6.4 Organisation specific support**

ReStore is the largest furniture reuse project in north London and has the largest capacity for tonnage diversion. It is recommended that they are further supported in negotiations towards a Service Level Agreement (SLA) on reuse services with Barnet, Enfield and Waltham Forest Councils. There is also large potential for collaboration between Forest Recycling Project and Computer Aid International in attaining SLAs for IT recycling. FRP no longer recycle IT but have the knowledge to assist Computer Aid. It is recommended that organisations are assisted in developing strategic and operational relationships with housing associations and other public institutions to increase both donations and demand for reuse.

## 6.5 Develop 'Give and Take' day partnerships

There is large potential to develop ways of involving ReStore (and other reuse organisations) in Give and Take days delivered by the north London boroughs, with the aim of providing them with another outlet for unsold reuse items. The current service from ReStore is now providing a transport service to Camden, Enfield, Barnet Homes and Haringey for Give and Take days by providing the transport of bulky items from the Give and Take Day to peoples' homes for 5 events.

ReStore's involvement in Give and Take days has increased this year. FRP will also this year organise whole events for Waltham Forest, Hackney and Haringey amounting to 6 events. In addition to the above the NLWA has recently advertised a contract for delivering a series of four shared (cross-borough) Give and Take days across North London during October 2009.

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LCRN September 2009

(Endnotes)

1 'Joint Waste Strategy Update', NLWA 2008: <http://www.nlwa.gov.uk/admin/uploads/20080625/REPORT%20-%20JOINT%20WASTE%20STRATEGY%20UPDATE%20-%20June08.pdf>

2 'Third sector reuse capacity in London', GLA 2008: <http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/environment/reuse-fullreport.pdf>

3 'FRN Average Weights Database', FRN 2009': <http://www.frn.org.uk/pdfs/2009%20FRN%20average%20weights%20list.pdf>

## Appendix A - Reuse Questionnaire

### Expanding reuse in north London: synergies between Projects

#### Name of reuse organisation:

1. Which items of Furniture and appliances do you collect?
  - a. Post codes covered for collections
  - b. Boroughs covered for collections
  - c. Days of the week operational for collections and deliveries
2. Average Number of items collected per month average?
  - a. How do you calculate this statistic?
3. Average Number of items sold or delivered per month average?
4. Are you aware of the NLWA and their strategy for waste prevention?
5. Which items are most commonly offered to you by the public?
6. Which items do you want most of?
7. Do you have a problem of surplus items – which ones?
  - a. What actions are you taking to increase the supply of the things you need?
8. Which items are not commonly offered as a donation?
  - a. Which items do you most frequently refuse to take?
  - b. How do you deal with this?
9. Do you want to find common solutions to common problems eg mattresses?
10. There are seven third sector reuse organisations operating in north London. Which of the following do you know about?
  - o ReStore
  - o Homestore
  - o BHF Leytonstone
  - o Salvation Army Walthamstow
  - o North London Hospice
  - o Forest Recycling Project
  - o Computer Aid International
  - o Are there any others?

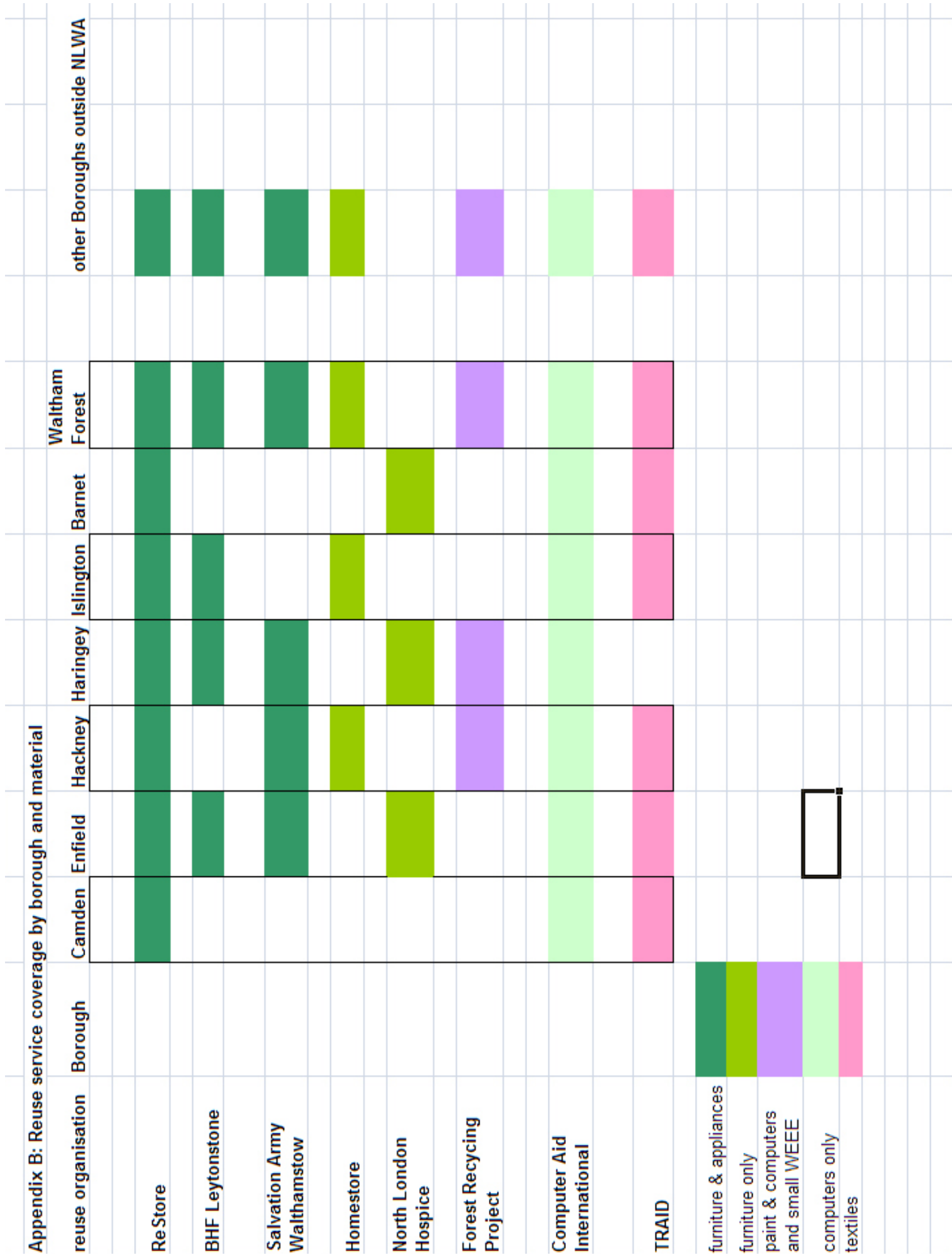
11. Do you see any opportunities for this group of projects to work together which benefits your organisation/ eg which of the following might be of interest to you?
- o Coordinate Collections arrangements
  - o Increasing Sales and distribution
  - o stock rotation between projects
  - o Publicity and promotion
  - o Volunteers recruitment campaign
  - o Staff/drivers sharing
12. What are the opportunities or potential opportunities you see?
13. What are the barriers to synergies between you?
14. Is your organisation in a position to collaborate with other reuse organisations in 2009 to gain mutual benefit?
15. How is the recession affecting your business?

**Survey conducted by:**

**Interviewee representing the organisation:**

**Date of meeting:**

# Appendix B - Reuse Service Coverage



## Appendix B - Reuse Questionnaire Response

Project	Operational days per week	No. of vans	Larger items reused per year <sup>1</sup> (NLWA)	Frequent problems	No. of NLWA projects known	Collaboration ideas	Tonnes reused in NLWA (est.)
ReStore	5	3	7250 (5000)	slow sales – lack of space	2	joint marketing with other projects	156
British Heart Foundation Leyfonstone	6	2	10,000 (2500)	need free tipping need more furniture	0	collecting stock from others only, no reciprocal arrangement	78
Walhamstow Salvation Army	5	1	2400 (1920)	need more furniture tipping volume high	0	stock rotation	60
Homestore	5	2	3328 (2496)	none recorded	2	stock rotation marketing	78
Computer Aid International	6	-	33,800 (7800)	dramatic fall in donations of I.T. equipment	4	marketing to increase sales of computers moving stock to outlets shared volunteer placements	150
Forest Recycling Project	6	2	paint 70,000 litres	funding issues lack of premises computer project closed no safety labels on settees, dealing with beds as waste	4	paint reuse outlets	20
North London Hospice	2	(1)	(600)		1	white goods referral stock rotation	19
<b>TRAID total</b>	5		not known <b>20,316</b>	increasing textile bank sites	0	use reuse organisation sites for textile banks	<b>311</b> <b>872</b>

### Appendix A: survey responses to questionnaire

#### (Footnotes)































<sup>1</sup> The number in brackets relates to reuse collections in the NLWA area. The number outside of the bracket indicates that the charity also conducts reuse activities elsewhere

## Appendix C - Restore Contracts Matrix

**ReStore** Community Projects  
 18 Ashley Road, London, N17 9LJ.  
**T:** 020 8493 0900 **F:** 020 8493 0109  
**E:** info@restorecommunityprojects.org  
**W:** www.restorecommunityprojects.org



### Schedule 2009/10

Type of Collection	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>Bulky Collections</b>			 		 
<b>Voids</b>					
<b>LBH TAT</b>					
<b>Refrigeration Collection</b>			 <b>N17 &amp; N8</b>		 <b>barnet homes</b> working together
<b>Haringey Waste Refrigeration SLA</b>					
<b>CA Site Collections SLA</b>	  <b>LondonWaste N7</b>		 <b>N17 &amp; N8</b>	  <b>LondonWaste N7</b>	