

Community Programme Impact Report

January 2019–December 2019

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
COMMUNITY PROGRAMME	2
WHO WE SUPPORTED	3
OUR HOLISTIC APPROACH	4
MENTORING	5
CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES	6
GROUP PROFILE: MIGRANT WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUP	7
FLORENCE'S STORY	8
WELFARE AND ADVICE SUPPORT	9
MARIA'S STORY	9
STRATEGIC PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS	10
VALUING VOLUNTEERS	12
MEASURING IMPACT	13



“This is my second home... it is a place I will always remember and I will always have in my heart and never ever forget.”

“They are open, they welcome everyone, they understand the people and care for them.”

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the UK continued to face the challenges of the UK's hostile environment immigration policies. Cuts to legal aid, lack of effective representation, indefinite detention, deportation, expansion of the immigration controls into public services including the NHS and unjust immigration and social welfare systems are all factors that have contributed to growing destitution, poor mental health and isolation. Those coming from a background of war and displacement have sadly faced only further insecurity and trauma.

The Community Programme at Migrants Organise has responded to this climate and continued to take a holistic community based approach that responds to the specific needs of each of our members. This report describes the different complementary strands that combine group-work, mentoring and casework support. Our members constantly shape our services and indeed many have themselves become lead volunteers.

Community Programme



welfare

ongoing advice and support
for debt, destitution, housing,
healthcare, etc.



legal support

ongoing legal advice and support
from a direct access accredited
immigration barrister



mentoring

to provide emotional support
and combat loneliness



classes & activities

to learn new skills and develop
a sense of community



mental advocacy

strategic project to ensure access to
justice for migrants who suffer from
mental illness and lack capacity



outreach

to increase awareness and
support migrants in raising
their voice

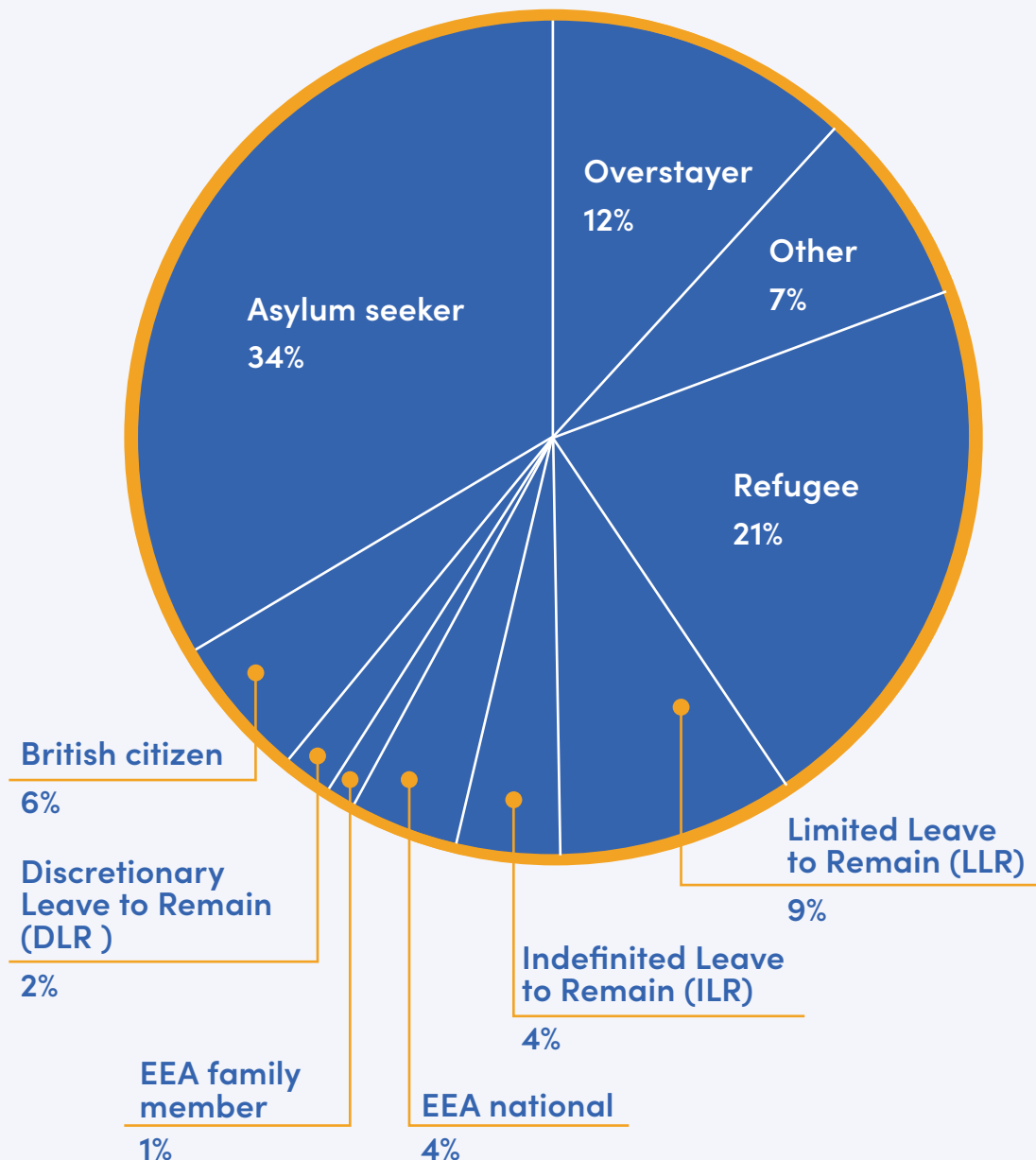
WHO WE SUPPORTED?

'If they did not help me, I would end up on the street.'

In 2019, we were able to support 429 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from 71 different nationalities and living in 20 London boroughs.

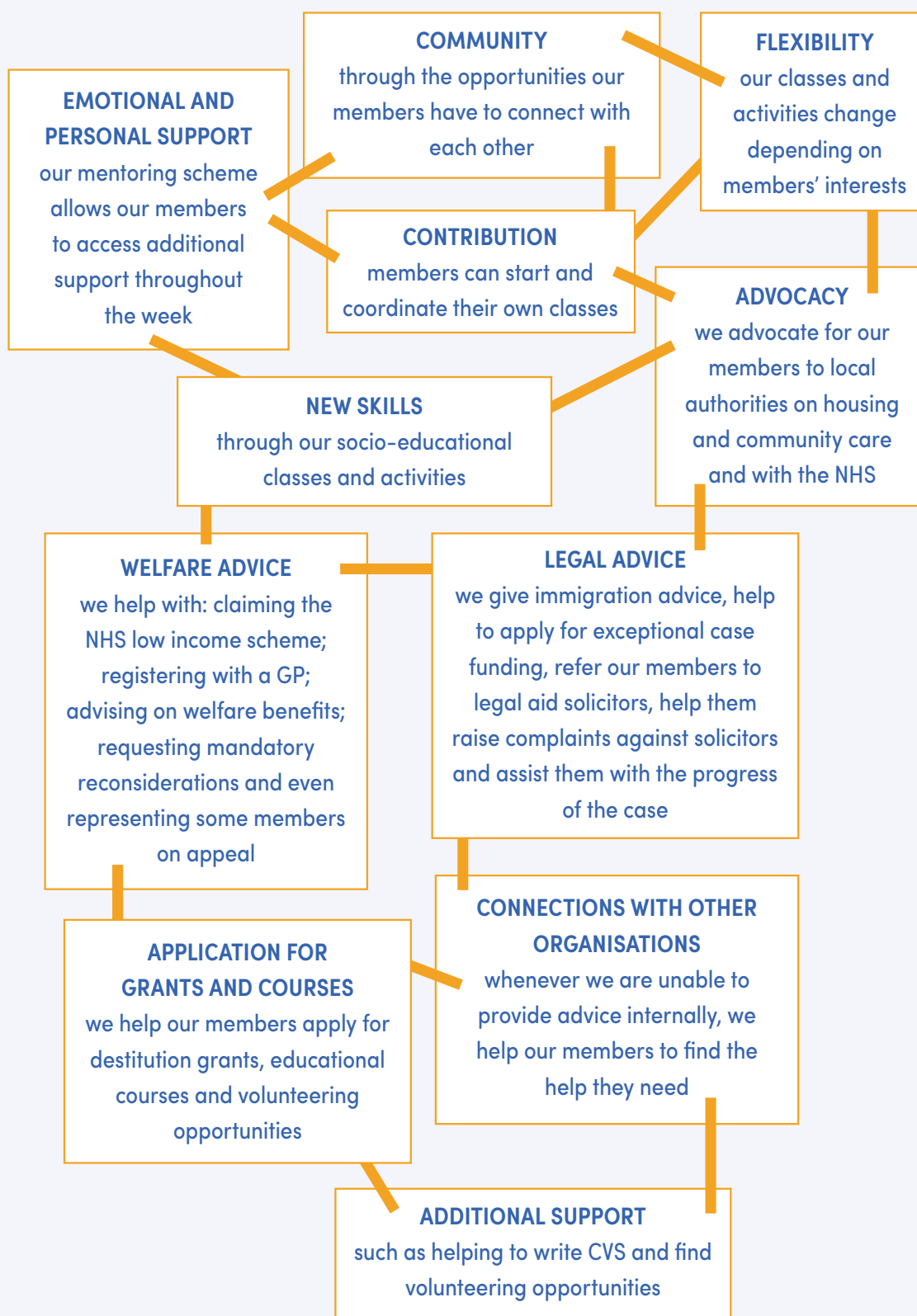
We accepted 186 new referrals of which 96 were people who found us through the word of mouth. 90 people were referred to us by professional organisations including migrant and housing charities, mental health organisations, immigration solicitors and trafficking support organisations.

Immigration Status



OUR HOLISTIC APPROACH

Our holistic approach combines a number of strands including one to one mentoring support, group-work classes and activities; welfare and advice including specialist immigration advice; and tailored initiatives that meet specific gaps in provision. Taken together these improve people's practical and living situations; develop their resilience; lead to better health and wellbeing; and improve wider community cohesion. It is an intensive process where we spend significant time with each individual.



MENTORING

- Helps open doors and improve access to resources
- Enables sense of belonging through involvement in new spaces
 - Provides a constant in an uncertain situation
 - Supports members to set and achieve goals

Our mentoring programme matches members with volunteer mentors who help to support them personally and emotionally. Mentoring pairs were matched based on shared interests and met around once a week to socialise and share activities. This helped to reduce isolation for our members and provided them with a feeling of safety, inclusion and stability. Mentors helped support members with applications for jobs, college, English courses and homework. Crucially, it has improved members' confidence, language and interpersonal skills, helping them to build new relationships and assisting their integration in British society. Most importantly, they have gained new friends.

**63
MENTORING
MATCHES
IN 2019**

"Before I met my mentor, I spent three years having depression, very heavy depression, I did not focus on anything. He helped me to have confidence and be around people again."

Mentee

"I've learned a lot more about the barriers to progress for vulnerable migrants and the services that are available to them."

Volunteer mentor

Community Programme mentors were provided with training and regular supervision to help them to support their mentees in the best way possible. Many mentioned how struck they were by their ability to make a difference to the life of their mentee. Yet mentors have also found that the experience has been equally rewarding for them, helping them to gain transferable skills and an awareness of the difficulties refugees, asylum seekers and migrants face while trying to regularise their status.

"I think I've helped them feel that there is someone they can turn to, ask questions and raise concerns with. I think that they've felt that there is a community here that genuinely cares about their well-being."

Volunteer mentor





CLASSES AND ACTIVITIES

“It is a fantastic opportunity and privilege to be part of this wonderful group and to give something back. The trust our members have for us is special and means they feel comfortable sharing their stories. We are all different, but one thing that binds us together is our lived experience.”

Onome, member and facilitator of the Walk With Us Group

Our weekly classes and activities allowed spaces for members to socialise and gain new skills. Those awaiting asylum decisions could escape from this stress and make connections outside of the home. These activities also allowed our members to meet up and support each other. This is a large part of what characterises the programme’s sense of community. Several of our classes were led and facilitated by members and the programme of classes changes depending on the interests and needs of members.

“We are not just organising a group; we are creating a positive and safe family in a second home.”

Thiru, member and facilitator of the Walk With Us Group

**IN 2019,
299 MEMBERS
PARTICIPATED
IN A RANGE
OF ACTIVITIES**

English classes (beginners, conversation and literacy classes)
Sewing class
Women’s group
Play-reading group
Voice group (The Walk With Us group)
Mums and Toddlers group
West London Women’s Group
South London Women’s Group
Creative Writing Group



GROUP PROFILE: MIGRANT WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUP

"I often feel upset and guilty that I had to flee my country leaving my child behind and this feeling is at times unbearable. By meeting other women who are going through similar experiences at Migrants Organise I have been able to feel understood and supported and to find strength to fight so that my child can join me as soon as possible."

Group Member

Many women who come to us for support experience isolation, mental health issues such as depression and PTSD, language barrier and social stigma. This is compounded by a lack of information which can make practical issues like registering with a GP and accessing appropriate health services difficult. Survivors of trafficking are exceptionally vulnerable and more likely to be at risk of further exploitation or violence without additional support.

In February 2019, we began a pilot programme to create a women's only space designed to respond to these specific needs. The project aims to improve the lives of 80 female asylum seeking survivors of trafficking and sexual violence through the development of a peer-to-peer support network. Our members chose creative and skills based project activities that support their wellbeing, resilience and connections. We currently have a main group open to women in all London Boroughs, a West London befriending group and a new group in South London.

Florence's Story

In 2019, Florence* was referred to Migrants Organise. Florence is an asylum seeker from Guinea* who, aged 13, was forced to marry a 50 year old man after her parents suspected she was gay. After fleeing on two occasions, she ran away from the police and crowds of people outside her house, believing they had found out she was in a relationship with another woman.

Florence was then trafficked to the North of the UK by two men who offered her work in Saudi Arabia and forced into prostitution. After escaping this situation, hospital staff referred her to the NRM. She suffered from depression, suicidal intentions and PTSD.

Once at Migrants Organise, Florence was provided with legal advice and matched with a mentor. In just six months through the Migrant Women's Project Florence has gone from being unable to speak at her first meeting to being a key member of the group, helping to organise activities and play a proactive role. She has also introduced vulnerable trafficked women to the group who were not on any radar of support.

*names changed to protect identities



WELFARE AND ADVICE SUPPORT

"I spoke to the staff who said they'd find me a solicitor, and apply for legal aid. They gave me a small grant and helped me find clothes for my boys. I thought maybe there is a hope."

**In 2019 we
opened 238
advice cases
of which
144 were
resolved**

Immigration status affects almost all available statutory assistance. Every distinct issue requires them to search for support in a different place. This can be a real struggle for those already dealing with mental health issues. Our members received ongoing legal support from our full-time Legal Organiser and a barrister from No5 Chambers. We provided support on immigration advice, asylum support, Section 17 referrals, social welfare, housing, community care, mental health, mental capacity and NHS overseas charges.

Maria's Story*

We have been working with a single mother from the Philippines who was a victim of rape and sexual abuse. She got pregnant as a result of the assault while working as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. The assault was perpetrated by another employee. When her employer brought her to the UK, she ran away and had her baby here.

On the face of it, she did not have any immigration claim. Although her working conditions were terrible, it did not yet fit the definition of trafficking. She obtained the job through an agency and there was even a contract. Furthermore, it was not her employer who assaulted her... It was also difficult to obtain instruction from her as her English was very limited.

She was referred to us through another advice charity. We spent multiple appointments with her to help her explore her options, which seemed incredibly limited. We had long appointments with her, with and without an interpreter, in order to explain her options and to explore every detail of her case.

We have been working with her for the past 6 months. In the meantime, she goes to our Women's group and we also assist her in obtaining social services' support. It was only after all that work and investigation that we finally can see that she has a claim due to the very significant obstacles that she and the child would face to reintegrate back in the Philippines.

Someone in her position, who is vulnerable, and was not able to fully articulate her difficulties, often falls through the net. Our holistic approach allowed us to provide much needed support.

*names changed to protect identities

STRATEGIC PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Our Migrants Mental Capacity Advocacy (MMCA) is a strategic initiative that supports vulnerable migrants who lack mental capacity to navigate the immigration system, at the same time building evidence for wider advocacy to change an often cruel and exploitative system. This is the only project of its kind in England and Wales and in 2019 we had cases around the country, including in Portsmouth, Manchester and Nottingham. Our support involves providing instructions to members' solicitors, litigating in appeals and undertaking strategic campaign work to challenge the current immigration bail and reporting condition regime. We have also created a network of professional litigation friends who can act in our members' best interests.

"I referred my client to the Migrant Mental Capacity Advocacy (MMCA) project because there was no other option. I represent immigrants who often do not have family or friends who can be appointed as litigation friends. The Official Solicitor does not act in Tribunal cases. The only other option in a Tribunal appeal might therefore be to seek to appoint the legal representative as a litigation friend, and I don't think this is at all an idea. The MMCA project was excellent. I am not aware of another alternative apart from them."

Emma Terenius, Solicitor at Wilsons LLP

In 2019 funded by the Strategic Legal Fund, we researched the lawfulness of Home Office immigration reporting conditions and how they impact on vulnerable migrants. This involved collating case studies through our Community Programme; undertaking legal research on case law, relevant legislation and Home Office policies; and sending out Freedom of Information Act requests.

Our research with the Public Law Project into the lawfulness of the immigration bail condition regime was used as evidence in a High Court Case in December 2019. The Full Report was published January 2020 and is available on our website here: <http://www.migrantsorganise.org/?p=28974>



**In 2019
we supported
40 migrants.
23 were matched with
litigation-friends
and 17 supported in
pre-appeal cases.
We trained
22 professionals**

"Migrants Organise's Legal Organisers, Brian Dikoff and the Community Programme team provided efficient and effective assistance to us in identifying a suitable litigation friend and in the helpful legal resources and ongoing advice they provided throughout the life of the case. They demonstrated expertise and connections to helpful partners that enabled them to quickly answer our queries in a complex case for an incredibly vulnerable client. Their input made a huge difference to our client who was granted indefinite leave to remain after a successful tribunal challenge, assisted by her litigation friend."

Central England Law Centre

In June 2019, we jointly organised our third annual seminar, 'Alternatives to Indefinite Immigration Detention', with speakers Stephanie Harrison QC; Eiri Ohtani, Project Director at The Detention Forum; Bella Sankey, Director of Detention Action; and Kama Petruczenko, Advocacy Network Co-ordinator at Refugee Council. The talk discussed detention policy in the UK and Europe, alternatives to detention and research into alternatives to immigration bail conditions.



VALUING VOLUNTEERS

“The relationships I have built with the clients are particularly rewarding. Being personally immersed in their issues, following up on their cases and feeling genuine relief when their issues are sorted has made me adamant on refining my own work and learning as much as I can in order to better cater to them. My time at Migrants Organise has been challenging, unequivocally informative, and massively rewarding”

Volunteer

During 2019, 91 volunteers supported the work of the Community Programme, bringing a diversity of skills and experience including law, English language tuition, mental health and psychotherapy.

We have continued our longstanding partnership with the UCL Centre for Access to Justice which combines their students’ legal education with the provision of pro bono advice to vulnerable communities. Every 6 months, we recruit 2-3 students to assist with casework, providing them with hands-on experience and encouraging them to do publicly funded work in future years.



MEASURING IMPACT

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation with our members at the heart is at the core of our delivery.

"There is an impressive number of Areas of Good Practice and across almost every heading... where the organisation has exceeded the requirements of the AQSv2 to a significant extent"

Javier Jaso, AQS Assessor

"Migrants Organise are constantly looking into how they can evaluate their service to demonstrate the positive outcomes they have delivered."

Linda Dhillon, Commissioning and Transformation Lead, Public Health Commission for RBKC and WCC

We are very grateful to all our funders and donors who believe in our vision and have enabled us to expand our reach without compromising our intensive holistic approach to meaningful integration. In 2019 we secured 11 grants, seven of which were from new supporters.

We would also like to express a heartfelt thank you to our amazing and dedicated team of volunteers. This crucial combination of financial and in-kind support has enabled us to continue our work and has put us in a good place to respond to the new challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

For more Information about the Community Programme contact:



francesca@migrantsorganise.org



www.migrantsorganise.org



@migtantsorg

If you are able to do so please support our work by making a donation



<https://www.justgiving.com/migrantsorganiseltd>

Migrants Organise Ltd

Registered Charity No. 1077116

A company limited by guarantee No. 3673737

Registered office: 2 Thorpe Close, London W10 5XL



January 2019–December 2019