

Case Studies from 2022 Annual Report – and more

A arrived in the UK in 2017 as a very young teenager from Afghanistan. He had become head of the family when his father was murdered, and was coerced by the local Taliban commander into joining their ranks. He witnessed torture and endured harsh conditions, captivity, beatings and forced gun training, all terrifying for anyone to experience, much less someone so young. Eventually he escaped and his mother scraped some money together in order to help him flee the country. After a frightening and dangerous journey he arrived in the UK and was placed in foster care, but when he was age assessed by the Home Office as over 18, he was abandoned by the local authority and moved to substandard and uninhabitable accommodation, an unfortunate example of how age assessments by the Home Office can put young unaccompanied asylum seekers at even greater risk.

A's mental health deteriorated, compounded by his experiences and trauma, and he attempted to take his own life. Thankfully, he was referred to the Baobab Centre, struggling immensely with poor mental health, grieving his father and separation from his family. He had little or no trust in adults, and was burdened with loneliness, hopelessness and fear. At the Centre he began attending weekly individual psychotherapy and was given real practical help and support with his age dispute and asylum claims. His mental health has improved, and he is noticeably more confident. His English language skills have improved and he is studying for qualifications in plumbing. His development as a young person is back on track, and he feels more hopeful about his future.

S, from the Gambia, never knew her father, and her mother died with HIV when she was eight years old. She went to live with her grandmother in a rural area, and no longer attended school. When she was 18, her grandmother arranged for her to join a man in London; she was kept as a domestic servant and was sexually abused. When she became pregnant, he became violent towards her and she fled with someone she believed would help. After a short time she was subject to domestic abuse again, and decided to go to the authorities and applied for asylum. She has been moved around regularly and was threatened with dispersal to Scotland. She currently lives with three

children in one room and continues to pursue her claim, supported by Lewisham Centre for Asylum Seekers (LEWCAS). She makes good use of the travel card from LEWCAS to see her lawyer, who is based in Stratford.

Y fled to the UK from Eritrea in 2013 due to fear of being prosecuted and detained for his religious beliefs. He was rough sleeping with no money to eat, suffering from depression and felt he was becoming mad. He struggled to find any accommodation. He attends church on a regular basis, where he feels safe and can pray for his family whom he left behind in Eritrea. Due to church connections he was referred to Housing Justice's Hosting Project in 2016. Since then he has lived with various hosts, engaged in ESOL classes, attended his local church and felt safe and calm, with more stability in his life. The destitution payment has enabled him to travel to church and to appointments, and buy food for himself and his host to make traditional Eritrean meals. This makes him feel like he is giving back to those who have supported him through an incredibly turbulent time. Recently Y was thrilled to receive his Leave to Remain after a nine year wait, and can now work towards building his own life and being reunited with his family whom he's waited "a lifetime to see again".

The Jewish Council for Racial Equality (JCORE) has been running the JCORE Unaccompanied Minors Project (JUMP) since 2007. G, a young asylum seeker from Sudan supported by JUMP, arrived in the UK two years ago. He is currently housed by the Home Office, and a passionate and hardworking full-time college student. The hardship fund met a critical need for mobile data, allowing G to access an online course to train as an interpreter as there is no wi-fi in his hotel.. As a result of his journey to the UK, G is able to speak many languages, and this course will be critical to his future employment once he has asylum status. JUMP also provided food vouchers for the summer break when he could not access college meals and could not afford grocery shopping amid rising prices.

Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants (ICRM) is working with M who has experienced extreme abuse and is housed in a shelter outside of her established links with other abused women. She is putting together a fresh claim to try to access NASS accommodation closer to her established area, but

has faced many barriers. She had built her support network with ICRM prior to moving, and although she had to take the accommodation, she also had to give up all the other support she had built, including friendships and trusted health connections. She was provided with basic food but had no income to buy other essential items or travel. The LCRF grant has provided a little relief for her and allowed some dignity in helping her independence and to remain in contact with essential support and services.

M is from Ghana, living in Home Office accommodation. He has urine incontinence and there is only one toilet separated from his room by stairs. He also walks on crutches, so accessing the toilet is very difficult. He has requested relocation, but while his request is pending he has run out of disposable urine bottles given to him by the hospital. He only has an ASPEN card and cannot make purchases online. Using Destitution Funds Samphire were able to purchase him some reusable urine bottles to help until a GP could authorise an NHS prescription. Samphire are also assisting him to chase up relocation.

Y arrived by lorry in the UK in 2017. She received a positive decision on her trafficking claim, but her asylum claim was severely held up and she was never called for a substantive interview. The uncertainty had a devastating effect on her mental health and she has been twice been admitted to hospital for suicide attempts. Y is also heavily supported by Barbara, a therapist at |Notre Dame Refugee Centre (NDRC),(who has advocated on her behalf a number of times). Y experienced severe harassment and bullying by other tenants in her NASS accommodation, resulting in her not attending college or church, and not eating as she was too afraid to use the shared kitchen. /After weeks of correspondence (with Migrant Help, who work on behalf of the Home Office to arrange NASS accommodation) Y was finally moved into an alternative, more peaceful, NASS – a huge relief.

Five years later she was finally granted Refugee Status. (What happened next however is unfortunately a perfect example of the 'out of the frying pan, into the fire' experience of many newly granted refugees. While Y was initially ecstatic, the move into mainstream benefits and housing was difficult. NDRC assisted her with benefit and housing applications but she was moved in to

highly unsuitable 'supported accommodation' with ex-offenders, an example of local authorities treating all 'vulnerable' residents in a homogenous way, (ignoring the intersections and particularities that are specific to many women). NDLC helped Y to lodge a successful legal challenge, and she will be rehoused in accommodation more suitable for her complex needs. She is feeling much more positive about the future, and attending college full time.

Brackets indicate possible cuts in a long case.

F, who has a disclosed mental health condition, was granted Leave to Remain after ten years of waiting. She was given a month to leave her Home Office accommodation and no support to find somewhere else. She lost her small asylum support income, and the worry about being made homeless, having no money, and the future of her two sons at college significantly increased her anxiety and depression. Thanks to LCRF's grant, Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) were able to provide emergency food parcels, and supported her with housing and welfare benefits casework, applying for Universal Credit and making a homelessness application to the local authority. They also supported her with wellbeing activities and regular check-in calls. The family are currently living in temporary accommodation out of borough, impacting F's ability to stay connected with their established groups, and on her mental health. and she is struggling to live on Universal Credit and does not want her sons to have to drop out of college. AFRIL have supported her with budgeting, and she has joined their women's group that has included a sharing session on free things to do in London with children and how to make low incomes go further.

D, a single mother with four children from Nigeria, applied for asylum a few years ago and has been living in temporary accommodation. Recently she was granted refugee status and was offered permanent unfurnished accommodation. She applied for Universal Credit but her application took a long time to be considered as she did not have a BRP card nor a national insurance number. With the grant received from LCRF, the African Refugee Community (ARC) were able to provide her with food, telephone credit and data as she needed to be in contact with many agencies, fares and sanitary products. The family greatly appreciated ARC's practical support while waiting

for their state benefits; they spent time cooking and eating together, and their confidence and general well-being increased. Recently D got a job as a cleaner, and started to volunteer with ARC, supporting women struggling to integrate due to language barriers and domestic violence. She is now an ARC Champion and offers a few hours a week to visit and support the most vulnerable ones. LCRF's grant had a very positive impact when D was struggling and crying in silence.

H fled her country because she was expected to take on the hereditary role of an FGM practitioner which she could not countenance (she was an FGM survivor herself and had lost her sister to FGM) , leaving her at great risk. When she came to the Cotton Tree Trust (CTT) she was in great distress, street homeless and without money or any means of support. LCRF's grant enabled CTT to provide food, toiletries and phone top-ups while they found her a place to stay, where she is now receiving medical and psychological support while her claim is processed.

S and her five year old daughter had been through harrowing trauma both before coming to the UK and while living here, including severe domestic violence, a period of street homelessness in London, and extreme deprivation as a result of unresolved immigration issues. Hackney Migrant Centre was able to provide supermarket vouchers and mobile credit to support them, while also ensuring they were referred to an immigration solicitor who is working on resolving their immigration issues to find a route out of destitution and insecurity.

M, an Afghan member of Citizens of the World Choir became severely ill and had to be admitted to hospital for two weeks. He has no family in the UK, no accommodation (he lives purely by sofa surfing with friends) and had only one set of clothes. Thanks to the LCRF grant, the choir was rapidly able to supply him in hospital with a change of clean clothes, a set of pyjamas, slippers, soap, shampoo and phone charger, as well as some halal food snacks, which dramatically improved the conditions of his hospital stay, as well as giving him a second set of clothes and nightwear. He told us: "I can't forget this kindness at such a very, very bad time in my life."

OR (if you need something to fill a short space)

B, a young member of Citizens of the World Choir (CotWC) was extremely cold in unsatisfactory accommodation during the winter. With funds from LCRF, CofWC was able to provide her with a kettle and hot water bottle to help to keep her warm at night.

Women against Rape (WAR) has been supporting C since she first came for help in 2010. She had come to the UK and claimed asylum soon after arrival in 2004, including reporting her experience of rape by soldiers in detention in DRC, but she was highly traumatized and her case was dismissed by the Home Office and the judge at her appeal on the basis that her evidence was “vague”, without taking into account the known impact of trauma. Like many women who come to WAR in similar circumstances, she had had poor legal representation and no expert medical or country evidence to back up her case. Since then she has been struggling to reopen her case, and eventually, with WAR’s help, found new lawyers who helped her to prepare a fresh asylum claim with proper expert evidence, including from WAR. Horrifically she was refused again by the Home Office, who refused to take into account this new evidence, instead repeating the accusation that she was “vague”.

As a result of this, C is again facing an asylum appeal over 18 years since she first arrived. During all this time she has been destitute and homeless, including at times street homeless. Technically she could now apply for NASS support but is terrified of being sent out of London, away from her networks which are her means of survival and coping with her situation. She is currently housed by a charity but has no access to funds. She is a valuable volunteer at the Centre, which she thinks of as her second home. She has access to second hand clothes and food which are regularly donated by local people.

Single mother R from Nigeria had been moved by the Home Office several times in the school year and each time placed in accommodation more than an hour from her children’s school – which happened to be very near to West London Welcome (WLW)’s centre. WLW helped her to pay for Zip cards so that the children could travel, and also gave her travel money to accompany them

to school and then come to the centre for the day, to volunteer, take an English class, and access advice and support services. Without permission to work and on the meagre allowance given her by the Home Office, the travel money from LCRF is a big help with her budget and her mental health, in being able to remain a part of WLW's community and see her friends. She is now a key volunteer leading outings and helping to run the centre's café.