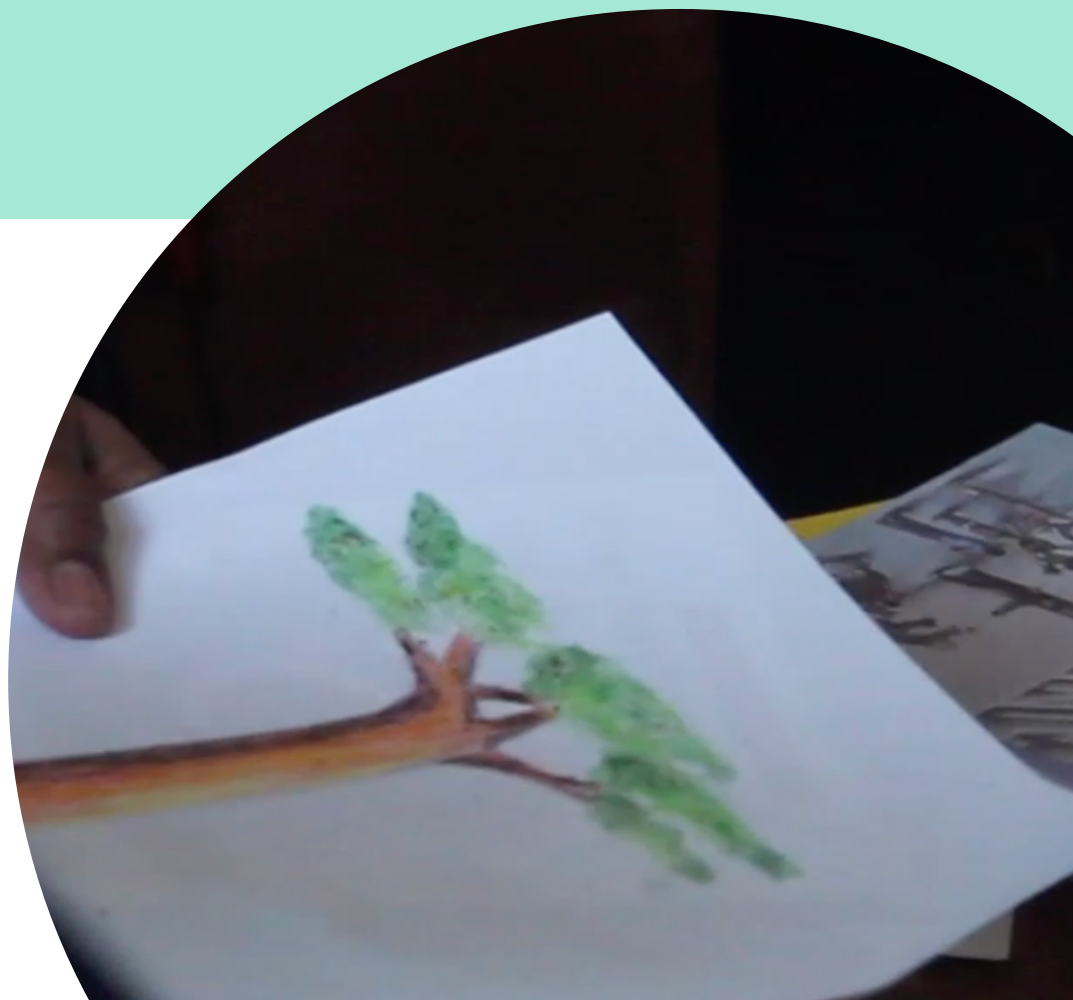




# Baobab Women's Project

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ANNUAL REPORT  
2019



# ABOUT US

In 2018-2019, the Baobab Women's Project was an Unincorporated Community Group, advocating and raising awareness in the West Midlands. In early 2019, we registered as a community interest company. While all of our activities benefit the community and are charitable, we wanted to become a company so that women can raise money sustainably, and those who contribute can also receive a living wage.

Our mission is to promote justice, enabling asylum seeking, refugee and migrant women (and other genders who identify themselves as women), in the UK to live sustainable, cooperative, fulfilling lives, free from violence and discrimination.

We believe in the dignity of all people, and that they should have access to social and economic opportunities, regardless of nationality and status.

Women we assist will have experienced hardship due to precarious immigration status, refusal of asylum, domestic or gender based violence, labour and sex trafficking, or domestic servitude.

The values of hope, love, and humanity permeate our practice.







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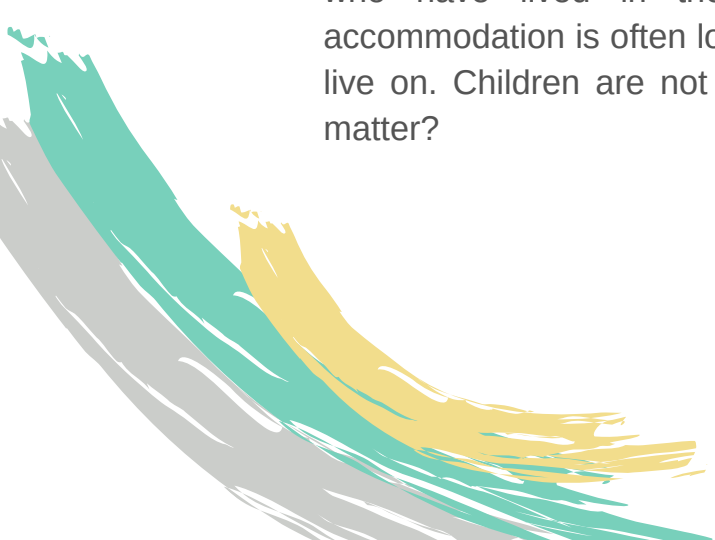
Baobab advocated with migrants who came from 42 countries in the last year, primarily Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The group included 199 refugees, refused refugees, documented and undocumented women, with 147 children, and a few partners. We believe that change can only happen when people directly affected by injustice are leading. Our aim is to involve women accessing help in activities that educate and empower.


Some refugee women fled violence, statelessness, or refugee camps, some sought opportunities for education, or to visit family. Sadly, many experienced sexual or domestic exploitation on their journey to the UK. We support women who have suffered gender violence to get support from specialist agencies.

Refugee lives are dehumanised here; they are numbered, interviewed, statemented, given asylum support, at times left in dirty accommodation, with bed bugs, cockroaches, and mice. Asylum decisions can take a long time, some delayed because of third country removal directions. A number of women did get refugee status, to then experience British poverty while finding their feet. Most survive and thrive in time, but it's a confusing time that women need help to get through.

When women seeking protection are refused they are re-traumatised, evicted from their accommodation, left destitute. They are often exploited and abused when destitute. Women must find new evidence to support their cases, relive the past, and try to document their existence. We assist them with casework, and connect them to places that can provide a home and financial aid, and being supported by women who have also experienced destitution alleviates anxiety and depression.

Undocumented women with children should have access to section 17 support from the local authority. They have British children, or children who have lived in the UK for 7-10 years. The quality of that accommodation is often low, and the level of financial support very hard to live on. Children are not entitled to free school meals: does every child matter?





We value partnership, we work with many organisations locally and nationally, plugging the gaps together in an ever leaky bucket.

Women are studious, skilled, or keen to gain skills. Baobab Women are a mix: human rights activist, journalist, carer, interpreter, manager, mother. One member is now a traffic warden which I regularly tease her about - it's a step up though. Women are resilient, talented individuals, who all want to live and work. We support the Lift the Ban campaign, but it doesn't go far enough.

We raise awareness about the reality of the asylum system; in short that it is not fair. Expectations of the process and resulting decisions are that they be legally just, but appear instead to be a matter of chance. Obtaining adequate legal representation is essential, yet too often women are not advised competently, affecting their perceived credibility and chances of being offered protection. Working with partners to address these issues in a structured and coordinated way is necessary. We aim to build capacity and confidence of Baobab advocates and members, involving more women with lived experience in this.

Migration has changed a lot in the UK since immigration policies opened up to former colonies after World War II, however the treatment and perception of all newly arrived people remains exclusionary and discriminatory. Do human rights exist? We play into a system that discriminates, legitimising it's existence while seeking to address policy inadequacies. Advocacy is essential to provide support to those experiencing institutional racism through hostile immigration laws.

We lost our drop in and advocacy, training, and social communal space when the Meena Centre closed in February 2019. The roof was stolen 3 times, allowing heavy rain into the building. We have found a temporary space at Elmwood Church and Hobmoor Community Centre, but are looking forward to Meena reopening and working with them again.

Coordinator and Advocate

**SARAH TAAL**





# BAOBAB TEAM

Coordinator & Advocate  
Sarah Taal



## Community Advocates

Support and assistance to women at the drop  
in and 1-1 via appointments

Rani Kaur

Sakunthala Wimalathissa

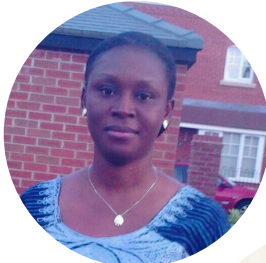
Talhatou Diallo

Hanieh Navadeh

Gimbi Cham\*

Hannan Abdullah

Tahira Jabeen



## Interpreters

Espoir Njie

Orit Zeydi

Muna Mohamed

Aida Mazrreku

Gulla Barin

Anam Zafar

Danawit Kasahun

Gaja Maestri

Rosamma Joseph\*

Community advocates  
are also interpreters







"Without the support of Baobab I don't think me and my family would have been able to get to where we are. I thank them for their everlasting support"



## Sakunthala's Art

sales raise funds for our project

"I grew and learnt so much in the time I volunteered. The positive energy is indescribable, despite the difficult cases that are faced everyday."

"The love, compassion and hardwork from everybody in the organisation gives me hope and energy to move on. I am so grateful for having the opportunity to work with them"

**8**

ADVOCATES TRAINED, 2  
ENTERING FULL TIME  
EMPLOYMENT, 6 CONTINUE  
ADVOCATING

**1885**

APPOINTMENTS DURING THE  
YEAR, 558 1-1 APPOINTMENTS,  
620 DROP IN APPOINTMENTS  
AND 707 FOLLOW UP CALLS,  
EMAILS AND ACTIONS

**42**

DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES  
SUPPORTED, MAJORITY  
ERITREAN AND ETHIOPIAN,  
ALSO WOMEN FROM  
CAMEROON, CHINA, INDIA, DRC,  
ALGERIA, ZIMBABWE, ALBANIA,  
KURDISTAN, NIGERIA,  
PAKISTAN, & IRAN

**199**

WOMEN ADVOCATED WITH  
2018-2019

**108**

LEGAL SUPPORT CASES

**114**

HOUSING AND SUBSTANCE  
CASES

**30**

HEALTH SUPPORT CASES

**67**

LINKS TO OTHER  
ORGANISATIONS

## YEAR IN FIGURES

**£11,667**

DISTRIBUTED IN DESTITUTION  
FUND GRANTS

**147**

DEPENDENT CHILDREN  
SUPPORTED

**12**

VOLUNTEERING DAYS  
COMPLETED PER WEEK,  
BETWEEN OUR VOLUNTEERS.  
INCLUDES DROP IN, ATTENDING  
APPOINTMENTS TO OTHER  
AGENCIES, TRAINING,  
NETWORKING AND TALKS.

**34**

VOLUNTEERS ADVOCATES,  
INTERPRETERS, SUPPORTERS,  
FUNDRAISERS, TRUSTEES AND  
STEERING GROUP MEMBERS



## MEET KATIE

**Katie, a 29 year old single woman from Nigeria was refused protection, & received an eviction order for the 29 March. She spoke English well, & contacted Baobab on a friend's advice**

Katie sought legal advice: she wanted to submit further representations as soon as she could. She knew why the Home Office had refused her claim and evidence was already on its way to prove her need for protection. We advised her to focus on her representative's legal knowledge, and provided her with Right to Remain and Legal Action for Women self help books.

We initially thought she could stay in her section 95 support, based on further submissions, and submitted a quick appeal, but soon realised thanks to the ASAP advice line that we needed a section 4 application. We applied for section 4, and with 1 week between first contact and eviction, Katie's blood pressure was sky high. We asked for the help of Bhatia Best, they took the case on and started the court process to challenge the decision time delay.

'I kept and keep on learning new and sensitive stuff from you. Thank you my Teacher, you taught me a lot, I appreciate that.'

Katie was very distressed about the prospect of losing her home. She was keen for information and we gave her regular updates and emotional support.

Katie was very proactive, calling Migrant Help regularly. They contacted the Home Office on her behalf. We emailed the Home Office and G4S with queries on decision making and updates from the court process, repeatedly asking that they not evict her. With no news, Bhatia Best proceeded and got a court order stating that support should be provided immediately. It arrived at 1pm on her eviction day, she should have left the house by 12.

We gave Katie a travel grant for taking her fresh claim to Liverpool. She continues to stay in her house, with voucher support, awaiting the decision on her right to protection.

**74% said we respond to them with fast action**



# GAYNOR HOLLIS ACUPUNCTURE

## Five Element and Toyohari Acupuncture for Health and Balance Gaynor Hollis BA (Hons) Lic Ac MBAC

What: Any symptom, (headache, anxiety, exhaustion, back pain, insomnia) is the body trying to communicate that it is out of balance and needs some assistance in functioning at it's best.

How: Five Element and Toyohari medicine treats the root cause of disease and helps your body restore an optimum level of health and balance naturally. Gentle techniques ensure that treatments are relaxing, enjoyable and generally pain free.



Gaynor is passionate about treating patients through acupuncture on a physical, psychological and emotional level. All her patients are treated as unique individuals.

As a student Gaynor set up and ran a specialist acupuncture clinic at The Haven Wolverhampton for survivors of physical, sexual and domestic abuse. She now works with charities in Birmingham providing support to survivors of physical and psychological violence and is committed to working with patients to help them transform their lives.

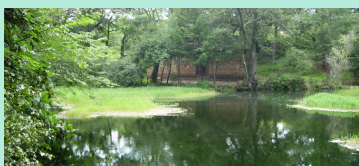
*'I had never heard of acupuncture until Sarah talked about it to me. This came at a moment in my life when all I could think of is why am I living.'*

*'When I finally met Gaynor and we had the first session I slept like a baby, something strange to me. When I went for the second session I asked her if it was magic, she laughed and said no.'*

*'Acupuncture brought me back to life and I saw a reason to move forward, I could not stand on my feet continuously for one hour before, but now I stand for more than five hours without pains.'*

*'I will recommend acupuncture to anybody going through any form of challenge in life.'*

[www.gaynorhollisacupuncture.com](http://www.gaynorhollisacupuncture.com)



# MEET AMINA

**Amina, a refused asylum seeker from Benin, was 36 years old and pregnant. She was living at a friend's house, sleeping on the sofa. One day her friend told her she could no longer stay. She was made homeless.**

Amina called a friend she met when she was in Coventry for help. The friend gave her Baobab's number, and the coordinator connected her to a French speaking advocate. While she was in London, her advocate contacted NACCOM projects, trying to get a local place, but could not. She came to Coventry to stay at the night shelter. Baobab secured her a place at the Coventry Migrant Women House and helped her to register with the GP, get a midwife, and find the local hospital.

**"Relieved to now access healthcare and advice without fear of sleeping on buses or in parks"**

When she reached 32 weeks, we submitted a Section 4 application which was granted in less than 10 days. We clearly wrote on the form that she was booked for delivery in Coventry, and had additional health issues including blood clots and diabetes. We confirmed with the Home Office team authorising the support that she would be dispersed locally, and were assured her dispersal area was Coventry. The G4s team said they would pick her up on the 9/02/19.

Amina waited all day, missing an important appointment at hospital, but they did not come or call. She was attending hospital almost every day, and missing her appointments left her very upset.

The same day, Baobab wrote to the Home Office and the G4s team manager to report the incident. They apologised and stated that they would pick her up the next day, with a destination of Coventry. She was picked up and taken to a B&B overnight, and to our surprise the next day they moved her to a hostel in Liverpool.



**96% of women said we helped them understand**



Amina was depressed and anxious. She had an appointment the next day at Coventry University Hospital, had lived in Coventry when she was receiving asylum support, and had prepared some baby items ready for delivery there. She had a network of friends who spoke French, as well as health care support.

## 7.4 Pregnancy / New Mothers - Dispersal Guidelines

Pregnancy, birth and new motherhood have a significant impact on a woman's physical and psychological health, but the nature of that impact varies considerably between individuals. No single solution is likely to be in the interests of all pregnant women and each case should be sympathetically considered on its own merits and solutions sought in consultation with the woman

Every effort should be made to protect the health of pregnant women, new mothers and their babies. Caseworkers who are responsible for dispersing pregnant applicants should seek to minimise stress to the woman during her pregnancy.



## UK Visas & Immigration

## Healthcare Needs and Pregnancy Dispersal Policy

**This document provides instruction to staff dispersing asylum seekers/failed asylum seekers and their dependants who have healthcare needs, or who are pregnant or new mothers.**

Baobab contacted the Home Office and G4S, but there was no response. We approached Bhatia Best Solicitors and discussed the case with Gerry at Maternity Action.

Gerry had already raised this issue in the NASF asylum support sub-groups. She said that the Home Office maybe in breach of their own guidelines on dispersing women away from maternity care, particularly those with additional medical complications.

Bhatia Best solicitors sent a pre-action letter to the Home Office which received no response. They then lodged a case against the Home Office in court, and the Home Office were ordered to move her back on the 8/3/19. Migrant Help, who operated her hostel, received an email advising of the move, but the midwife at the hostel opposed the relocation at such a late stage of pregnancy (due date of 11/03/19). The midwife advised that after the birth of the baby, when they were both fit to travel, they could move back to Coventry.

Amina had her baby on the 15/3/19, and remained in hospital for 3 weeks due to high blood pressure. Amina had very few baby items as she was transported with only two bags from Coventry. She didn't have a local network, and felt extremely alone. Even basics like getting baby formula, were difficult and distressing. She had to buy some at the hospital, asking health staff for funds as she hadn't been issued an Aspen card. She remains in Liverpool and has been connected to local support groups there for assistance.

and represent themselves better



# TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF WOMEN'S PROBLEMS

Baobab uses the body of evidence from women accessing services to highlight dominant issues and problems that they face, linking it in with the wider campaigning and awareness raising within the refugee and women's sector.

Women with lived experience have a clear understanding of and emotional connection to issues.

We researched and wrote two joint reports in 2018-2019, making new partnerships for promoting these documents, and attended awareness raising events. We also used poetry to spread the message. We want to develop this more in 2019-20.

We want to increase women's capacity to understand and influence their own lives, empowering them to iterate their issues.

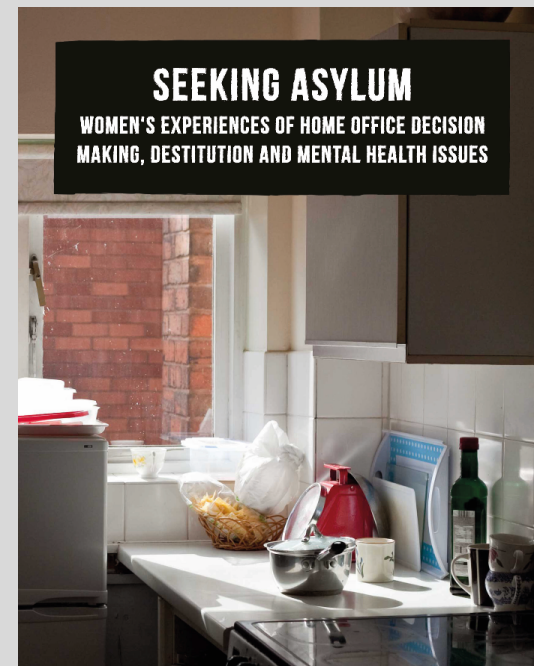


We will bring these voices of lived experience to policy makers and politicians as well as the general public, we believe that change comes from the top down and bottom up.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Finally Safe - Accommodation report
- CEDAW - IRAW Training, Shadow report & lobbying at the UN Geneva.
- Seeking Asylum - report into immigration, health and housing issues
- ASAP & Refugee Council's Women Seeking Asylum report interview and workshop contribution
- Lift the Ban talk at Birmingham University
- Maternity Action training & presentation
- Malka's Poetry Workshop & Event
- Poetry & Fundraising Workshop with Women with Hope
- Knowledge Broker Workshop
- Interpreter Training for Volunteers



Centre for Voluntary  
Sector Leadership



C&G CITIZENSHIP & GOVERNANCE  
RESEARCH AT THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Invitation to a free interactive workshop

*'Knowledge Brokers in Migrant Third Sector Organisations'*

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

## **Shadow report regarding Asylum Seeking Women in the UK in relation to Home Office Decision Making, Destitution and Mental Health**

*Report prepared in response to the eighth periodic report submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 18 of the Convention*



## MEET EMMA

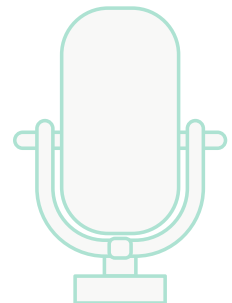
**Emma from Eritrea was struggling with her legal case. When she claimed asylum, she was fingerprinted in Italy and the Home Office tried to remove her to there. The Judicial Review that the solicitor lodged prevented that happening. Italy is a tough place to live, and women report poverty, sexual abuse, domestic slavery, and exploitation.**

She had been waiting for her substantive interview for over two years. Her solicitor had stopped communicating, she was 8 months pregnant, in need of a maternity grant, and wanted to relocate from her single woman shared house box room before baby was born.

"Keep it up to all advocates and volunteers, I am very happy."

We emailed the solicitor and arranged an appointment with them, informing them that Emma spoke English well. We contacted the Home Office via migrant help about the maternity grant and moving homes. The maternity grant was provided at 33 weeks, and she received that before baby was born. We also referred to her to Meena and KARIS to get baby items, and the Doula project for birth support.

Baby was born, and we added him on her case as a dependent. We had the compliance department get in touch over the father's details, and provided her with this. We emailed the Home Office via Migrant Help over and over about her tiny room - after 6 months she was relocated to a mother and children's house.



They then scheduled her substantive interview. She received her interview appointment 3 days before it was due to happen. We suggested that her solicitor should have the tickets sent by the Home Office, but she was unable to contact them and came to our drop in. We called the solicitor, but didn't get through. We contacted the Home Office, who advised they would call back. We sent an urgent email complaint to the solicitor, and within 20 minutes the phone rang. The confirmation code was emailed to us, and Emma got her tickets. We gave Emma a Right to Remain interview preparation booklet and talked to her about interpreters and having confidence to tell the hard parts of the story she didn't want to share. She was granted refugee status within 2 months, and is now waiting for her biometric.

**94% of women thought we understood their problem**

## FRONTLINE IMMIGRATION ADVICE

This site works best in Google Chrome.

Welcome to the student access point for Refugee Action's online training for immigration advisers, provided by the Frontline Immigration Advice Project (FIAP).

Log in on the green bar.

Training is delivered in an online classroom setting using webinars and course content. Content remains accessible to students after the course. [\*\*View the new 2019 Course Programme and Refresher Webinar dates\*\*](#)

## COURSES

OISC Level 1  
(Immigration)  
OISC Level 1 (Asylum & Protection)  
OISC Level 2 (Asylum & Protection)  
OISC Level 2  
(Immigration)  
Immigration Advice - Awareness and Boundaries

We want to improve our ability to provide legal support and signed up to Refugee Action OISC Frontline Advice Training. This is very important due to the difficulties women have accessing quality and timely representation, sensitive to gender issues.

Shiza Khan, legal graduate, who had been part of a Migrants Organise legal project in London took on the project development. We aimed to have 3-6 OISC advisors by the end of the year, who would support drop in advocates. The course is difficult, and we need to secure funding before the project can progress, as well as finding a suitably qualified advisor to supervise our work.

Jabeen, Sarah, and Gimbi ran an introductory training, to inform and welcome our legal volunteers.

## OTHER TYPES OF CASES

**Family reunion or refugee women who had been granted the right to remain were located in Travellodge's across the region.**

Sometimes as far as Burton on Trent, Dunchurch a45, Kidderminster, often Oldbury, or Dudley. We complained to the housing department and in some extreme cases, to MP's. Lichfield and Coventry Quakers stepped in and set up some trips for women in dire straights, and helped us pressure MP's and housing head of services for accommodation moves.

"Be open  
2 days a  
week"

We started working with Crisis, the homeless charity who came and supported our drop in at the Meena Centre. We still refer women into this excellent resource.

We started getting more and more **women needing benefits support**; women wanted to understand their universal credit or housing payments and debts, which can be very complex. We referred into the children's centres to get floating family support workers, the Nishkam centre, Aishana, KARIS Neighbours Scheme, Birmingham Settlement and Citizens Advice. There are a number of agencies providing this advice, but we still had women return to us asking for more help. Language and understanding is something they wanted particular support with.



This put a lot of pressure on our volunteers and interpreters. We are not skilled benefits advisors and the system is a mess. Rani attended a universal credit training course, and passed this information onto others in our morning meeting, and to members of CARAG community in a talk. We need to develop this work.



**Housing repairs are another major problem.** We signpost to Shelter, or in two very bad cases straight to McGrath and the Community Law Partnership solicitors. After 6 months complaining about an indoor waterfall in her son's room and mould growing up the walls, Mary was moved from her ground floor leaky tower block to an upstairs flat while repairs were undertaken.

97% of women rated our advocacy good or excellent



# FINANCIAL SUMMERY

## Baobab Women's Project

Year from 1 April 18 - 31 March 19

### Receipts and Payments account

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total Funds £
<b>Receipts</b>			
Funds received	1,236.54	17,733.94	18,970.48
Total Receipts	1,236.54	17,733.94	18,970.48
<b>Payments</b>			
Volunteer Expenses	176.94	4,473.86	4,650.80
Coordinator Expenses	0.00	690.00	690.00
HDF / Special Fund Payments	537.12	11,151.80	11,688.92
Admin / Publicity	1.00	508.84	509.84
Office Equipment	0.00	1,047.13	1,047.13
Networking / events / training	188.84	2,466.97	2,655.81
Room hire, drop in	0.00	2,159.00	2,159.00
Sessional worker	0.00	2,295.00	2,295.00
Paid worker costs	0.00	0.00	0.00
Food / Refreshments	0.00	806.71	806.71
Team Building / Supervision	55.00	681.44	736.44
Misc	49.20	27.80	77.00
Total Payments	1,008.10	26,308.55	27,316.65
Funds brought forward from	108.66	13,369.68	13,478.34
Net of receipts/(payments)	228.44	(8,574.61)	(8,346.17)
Funds carried forward to next period	337.10	4,795.07	5,132.17

Our accounts are inspected by a qualified accountant and they are satisfied that the invoices, receipts, credits and bank statements produce an accurate statement of Baobab Women's Projects financial affairs.

We thank our accountant for their time inspecting the books.

The groups trustees have also approved the accounts.

Our most significant expenditure is for destitution fund payments to women who have been made homeless after a refusal of asylum or grant of status. These are primarily from the Hope Projects, who we partner with to provide safe housing and subsistence living expenses, but also the National Zakat Foundation. Our second main expense is volunteer lunch and travel costs, as all advocates are volunteers, this is the life blood of our work.

Our main restricted income this year included grant payments from Allan Lane for a development worker of £5000, Event income of £1425 and destitution payments of £11,308. We recieved a £9960 grant from Big Lottery in March 2018 which enabled our advocacy project to continue throughout 2018-19. Unrestricted funds were from poetry book sales, individual donations and trainings delivered.

Our current assets of laptops, phones, printers and office eqiupment allow our organisation to function. We have no liabilities.

Our reserves are low as we deliver services that rely on volunteer time, one part time director who gives more than she takes, and free room space from partners if needed. We have secured Help Refugees and Wisdom Factory core funding to continue our work in 2019-20.

# *Acknowledgements*

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HELPED US GROW

PARTICULARLY THE MEENA CENTRE FOR GIVING  
US A HOME, DROP IN AND 1-1 APPOINTMENT SPACE.  
ELMWOOD CHURCH FOR OUR TEMPORARY HOME  
WHILE MEENA FIND A NEW BUILDING.

HOPE PROJECT'S, BHATIA BEST, TRP AND  
BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE  
SOLICITORS FOR THEIR LEGAL ADVICE AND  
SUPPORT

HOPE PROJECTS, COVENRY PEACE HOUSE, CMWH  
AND FATIMA FOR HOUSING AND SUBSISTANCE  
SUPPORT FOR WOMEN.

CRISIS HOMELESS CHARITY FOR PARTNERING AT  
OUR DROP IN SESSIONS TO HELP NEWLY GRANTED  
REFUGEE S

## *Funders*

LUSH

ALLAN LANE FOUNDATION  
LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

HOPE DESTITUTION FUND

MALKA AL HADDAD POETRY

SAKUNTHALA WIMALATHISSA ART

SECRET SANTA STOCKING DONATORS

# *Partnerships & Networks Attended*

ASAP ASYLUM SUPPORT APPEALS NETWORK  
BIRCH (BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY HOSTING  
NETWORK)

CARAG (COVENTRY ASYLUM AND REFUGEE ACTION  
GROUP)

CMWH (COVENTRY MIGRANT WOMEN'S HOUSES)

COVENTRY PEACE HOUSE NIGHT SHELTER

CRISIS HOMELESSNESS CHARITY

GAYNOR HOLLIS ACUPUNCTURE

HOPE PROJECTS STEERING GROUP

LIFT THE BAN CAMPAIGN

MAMA ARTIST MUTUAL AID (LIVERPOOL)

MEENA WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S CENTRE

BIRMINGHAM'S MIGRATION FORUM

REFUGEE RIGHTS EUROPE

WEST MIDLANDS ANTI-SLAVERY NETWORK

WEST MIDLANDS DESTITUTION NETWORK

WOMEN WITH HOPE GROUP



In 2018-2019 Baobab Women's Project was an Unincorporated Community Group, from 1 April 2019 it is now a Community Interest Company.

We will build our experience, networks, increase capacity and develop within refugee and migrant women's community interests in 2019-2020.



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