



**Baobab  
Women's  
Project**

WAAH  
We Are All Human

# Annual Report 2017 – 2018



**I constantly feel inspired and alive to work with women supporting and helping one another in a system that discriminates based on nationality and status.**

**If we work together, and with other groups, not getting sidetracked by our differences, but find consensus on whats needed, we may see real change.**

**Sarah Taal  
Coordinator & Advocate**

**Advocates and Interpreters:** Bridget Obi, Gimbi Cham, Hannan Abdullah, Hanieh Navadeh, Rani Kaur, Sakunthala Wimslattha, Sumeya Omar, Tahira Jabeen, Talhatou Diallo

**Supporters:** Almamy Taal, Bridget Obi

Malka Al-Haddad, Joan Proctor, Salman Mirza

**Steering Group:** Includes advocates, interpreters, supporters and volunteers

**Trustees:** Beth Ash, Sadie Young, Stephina Phiri, Tahira Jabeen

**Former Trustees:** Almamy Taal, Iram Mushtaq, Nina Perrowski

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Baobab Women's Project is an Unincorporated Community Group, for Refugee and Migrant Women Seeking Protection in the UK, advocating from the West Midlands  
We are registering as a CIO or charity in the next year

## **Advocacy Advice and Support - Campaign, Change, Support Project.**

This project provides training for advocates, support for members of the women's community and campaigning about relevant issues, working at community centre's across Birmingham.



The project is needed to enable women to have dignity. We want to facilitate community knowledge making women more resilient to changes in funding of front line organisations.

The root causes of discrimination felt by women are complex. It can include violence before leaving their home, be it family, gender, political, social, sexuality or environmental. Or the discrimination and abuse they receive in the UK, by the state authorities, traffickers, families and communities because of their identity and need for protection or opportunity. It manifests itself everyday in depression, despair and destitution if women are not given hope and help.

Our project empowers women to stand on their own feet, and learn. Giving women basic support, and growing a reflective, outward speaking group that will shine light on women's experiences. We believe that knowledge and opportunity is a powerful tool of change.

We have trained three community advocates, and have four more on the upcoming course in April 2018. We were privileged with speakers, including the Hope Projects Legal Advisor Aliya Khan, retired GP Hilary Parle, as well as Sarah & Almamy Taal from Baobab, and Beth Ash from Coventry Peace House, addressing:

- 1) Introduction to Baobab, confidentiality, code of conduct, policies and casework,
- 2) Asylum-support & Social Service: No Recourse to Public Funds assistance and charity help. Rights and entitlements of each, how to access and challenge discriminatory decisions,
- 3) Legal support and the basis of the immigration system,
- 4) Health access and social inclusion from communities,
- 5) Case-study discussions and learning,
- 6) Campaigning, monitoring, personal development and self care.

Trainees are completing exercises that test their knowledge, and completing at least 6 months training, before they work independently. We have found that women are extremely committed and reliable. They are keen to attend information and networking sessions. support each other, as well as giving many good ideas to assist with the development of the project. Our vision of women advocates that are competent, well skilled and resourced, enabling and empowering other women is definitely possible, but at the moment we need a lot more time, funding and information to grow peoples understandings.

Advocates have been attending the drop in and working with 3-4 women each a week. They have been going out to community centres and enabling women to access specialist advice, including places like Shelter and Women's Aid.

Gladys was granted status, we helped her fill in the housing forms, and first apply for an NI. The phone lines took persistence and patience. We communicated with the hostel she was moved to to transfer her benefits there. We worked with a community centre to transport and store some items, and then organised some furnitures, white goods and a baby cot to her new accommodation.

Jackie was destitute and struggling, she had no legal advisor, and only spoke French. Our French speaking advocate assisted and read through her refusal, we got a legal case summery from Hope Projects, she made a plan and started collecting evidences. She took the evidence to local firm, and is now awaiting her further submissions appointment in Liverpool.

Monica was living in the Coventry Migrant Women's House. We referred her to the Hope Projects Destitution Fund, and gave case support to move onto section 4.

## Case Studies

Teresa was very traumatised by her experiences, we supported her to access legal appointments, mental health and psychological specialists. She has now got refugee status.

Jenny we helped fill a travel document form at a local drop in and signposted to the OISC registered Refugee and Migrant Centre for checking and sending off.

Rose already had a solicitor and was preparing a case. She was struggling with destitution, we referred her to the Hope Projects who housed her, we gave regular updates each month getting her the destitution fund. We then referred her to the Refugee Action CARE project to submit a section 4 application to get alternative housing.

We started the year sharing space with Salman Mirza's legal drop in at Brushstrokes community centre. The new Meena Women and Childrens Centre came to Birmingham in 2017, and we are actively working with women there, where we thought we would do outreach at different centres, we have found a home at Meena.

Baobab advocates stood in solidarity with campaign groups across the UK, including Coventry Refugee and Asylum Activism, Crossroads Women's Centre, Women for Refugee Women, WAST and the Women with Hope group to make the chance of change stronger.



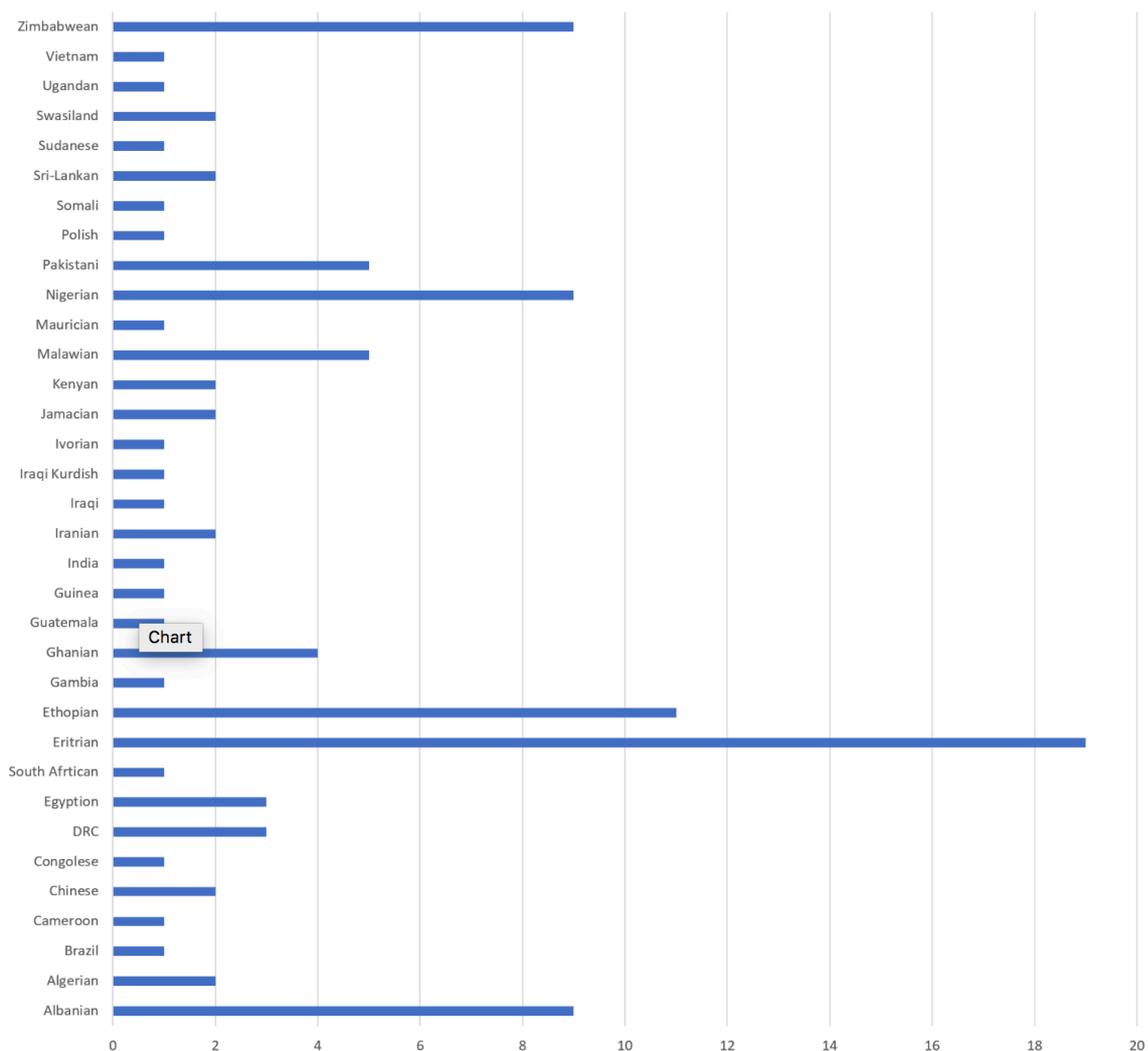
Agnes Tanoh, on behalf of Hope Women's Group speaking at the Women For Refugee Women Manchester Conference November 2017.

# Advocacy Activities and Figures

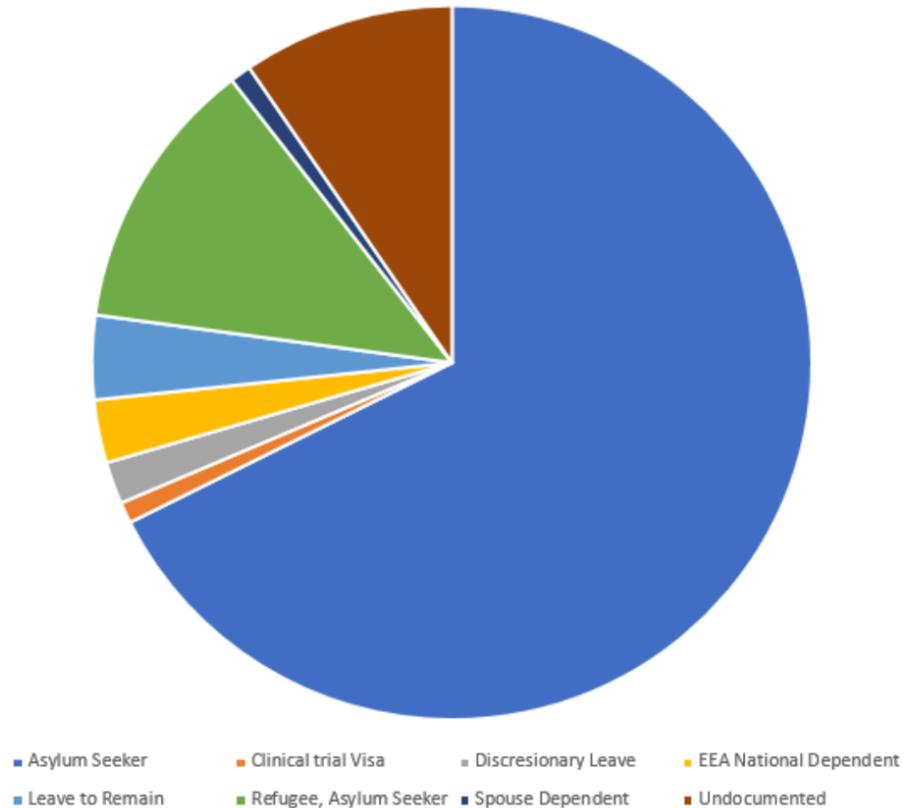
From April 17 - March 18, we helped 109 women, with more than 260 appointment spaces, 266 recorded face to face appointments, including 1-1 confidential sessions, advocate shared space sessions, and over 300 hours of admin, phoning or emailing, following up previous work.

**Charities and organisations we refer to and work with included:** Action for Children Centre, Adavu Project, Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP), Anawim, Freedom From Torture, Hope Projects, Carriers of Hope, Citizens Advice, Elmwood Church, KARIS Neighbour Scheme, Kushinga Gardens, Maternity Action, Meena Centre, Migrant Help, Narthex, National Referral Mechanism Salvation Army, Refugee Action, Rape and Sexual Violence Project (RSVP), Shelter, St Chads, Smethwick Food Bank, Women’s Aid and the Zakat Foundation

## Country of Origin



## Type of Status in the UK



**Volunteering or Job seeking support includes:** signposting to Doula project, Birmingham Voluntary Service Centre, the Job Centre, Restore’s Equipping refugee for work, Refugee and Migrant Centre interpreter vacancies, helping to write CV’s and completing Indeed online applications.

**Health or pregnancy worked with to:** Clinical trials, Gaynor Hollis Acupuncture, GP registration, complaints and communication around barriers to healthcare, Midwife support, Mental Health teams, Doula Project, Narthex, Spring to Life IAPT project.

**Destitution and House assistance:** Coventry Peace House, Coventry Migrant Women’s House (CMWH), Hope Projects Housing and Destitution Fund, Zakat Foundation, Birmingham Community Hosting Project (BIRCH), Migrant Help, Initial accommodation, Section 4, and section 95 asylum support. Private landlords, Council Housing, Ashley Housing, Spring Housing, Temporary accommodation team, Hostels, Travel-lodges.

**Home Office contact:** ARC card request, Asylum support: relocation requests, section 95 support initiation and eviction intervention, and section 4 dispersal, reporting requirement phone calls and faxes. Home Office letters to support cases, highlighting trauma, and violence against women.

**Welfare applications:** Child benefit, Child Maintenance, Housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit, JSA claim, Universal Credit claim, Income Support.



**G4S:** housing reporting and following up maintenance issues, house resident dispute mediation. Bullying advice. Delivery of new mother emergency food parcels. Negotiating extension of time after successful asylum support appeal.

**Asylum Support Tribunal:** Asylum support court and ASAP referrals.

**Social Services:** Children's section 17 assessments, safeguarding adult referrals.

**Solicitors:** working with 11 different reps' including Aman Solicitor, TRP, Hope Legal Project, ASIRT, Brushstrokes, Bhatia Best, Coventry Law Centre, Birmingham Community Law Centre, J M Wilson, Fountain Solicitor, Lifeline Options.

**Misc:** Chasing biometrics, divorce information CAFCASS, legal factsheets, college complaint, MP approaches and references for jobs for supported women and advocates.

## **New Funding from the Big Lottery**

We have just received funding to extend our drop in, we are recruiting new volunteers, including a coordinator, welcomer, chef, 2 interpreters who will work with the LUSH advocate team. We also have funding to allow volunteers to do research into important issues.



## Birmingham University - Maternity Research

Two members, Ihouma and Saku have been working with health and NRPF research at Birmingham University. Ihouma did much of the preparation work, putting together the interview schedule and participant information sheet in collaboration with other project members.

We have set up interviews with women we are supporting and helped them with their NHS debt charge problems. Research findings will be published in 2018-2019.

## Birds without Sky Book Launch

Malka Al-Haddad published her book, to support Baobab Women's Project, as well as City of Sanctuary movements in Leicester and East Lindsay.

Photo credit: Ambrose Musiyiwa / CivicLeicester.



On the 21st February, more than 60 people gathered in Leicester Central Library for the Leicester Writers Showcase event in partnership with Leicester City Council to launch a new collection of poetry written by Malka Al-Haddad. It was a wonderful and moving event and celebration of the talent and contribution of a local asylum seeker and a collective of volunteers from Birmingham to Lincolnshire who collaboratively brought this publication to fruition.

We are proud to know Malka, and hope to run some creative arts events with her this year. We can promote the work in school, and definitely need a local Birmingham Launch!

## Maternity Action Training



Organised with Gerry Hicky on the 20th March, to inform and teach us about maternity rights for migrants and refugees. Very useful and well attended by advocates and people from other local organisations. It warmed up as the day passed!

## Accounts

Our unrestricted income and expenditure looks quite large compared to last year, but its not really! We had our bank account closed unexpectedly and Lloyds kindly paid us compensation for the inconvenience. We loaned some money to new refugees while they were waiting for their benefits to start - and got it all repaid back in our account. There was also a relatively small compensation payment for one of our members after we complained about her representative, which went in and out.

Thanks to Geoff Wilkins a continued supporter, and Belgin Quick, newer supporter for allowing us expenses for organising meetings, the occasional bus fare for destitute women, or volunteering expense outside our funded advocacy.

We received the LUSH grant in June, and started slowly. We found it hard to complete all the advocacy and casework for women, while taking days to do training and support. We recruited advocates and planned our 6 weeks training in September, and have been on a roll since then. We started our drop in in October at Meena centre. We ran our second training in March 18, and will run over the grant by 2-3 months, so should finish in August 2018.

We were successful in a Big Lottery grant which will enable the drop in to continue into 2019. Our only big spend was on computer equipment, and some insurance before April. We are running the advocate and drop in support together as the space is growing we need this extra help. We will need a larger ongoing funder for this work before April 2019.

Our Hope fund payments look like we overspent, but if we give a grant for someone destitute in the current month, we claim it back next month, Therefore we are slightly out of sync. We have given out nearly £6000 in destitution grants this year. Which supports around 6 women per month, at £20 per week. This is a lifeline for their survival.

We want funds to develop an acupuncture clinic at the drop in, as well as Zumba and Yoga classes to relax women and make them laugh.

We are extremely busy, and need some paid worker hours to make sure we are doing a competent job, in a timely way. This is going to be our main focus for our accounts next year.

**Baobab Women's Project**

Year from 1 April 17 - 31 March 18

**Receipts and Payments account**

	Unrestricted Bids/Donations £	Hope Projects HDF	Event Cooking & Groups	Crowdfunder	LUSH	Big Lottery	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds £
<b>Receipts</b>								
Funds received	1,597.91	5,747.34	794.75	534.08	7,060.00	9,960.00	24,096.17	25,694.08
Bank interest	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total Receipts</b>	<b>1,597.91</b>	<b>5,747.34</b>	<b>794.75</b>	<b>534.08</b>	<b>7,060.00</b>	<b>9,960.00</b>	<b>24,096.17</b>	<b>25,694.08</b>
<b>Payments</b>								
Volunteer Expenses	340.00	0.00	165.00	0.00	1,340.46	0.00	1,505.46	1,845.46
Travel (not volunteer travel)	185.61	0.00	155.00	0.00	23.80	0.00	178.80	364.41
HDF / Special Fund Payments	0.00	5,869.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5,869.05	5,869.05
Admin / Publicity	86.68	0.00	0.00	494.00	266.16	0.00	760.16	846.84
Internet / Phone/ Computers / Equipme	165.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	392.94	1,037.90	1,430.84	1,596.75
Networking / events	54.15	0.00	0.00	40.00	81.00	0.00	121.00	175.15
Room hire, drop in	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	300.00	1.00	301.00	301.00
Sessional worker	0.00	0.00	140.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	140.00	140.00
Paid worker costs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Food / Refreshments	88.46	0.00	180.00	0.00	0.00	89.27	269.27	357.73
Misc	688.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	688.52
Insurance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	150.83	150.83	150.83
<b>Total Payments</b>	<b>1,609.33</b>	<b>5,869.05</b>	<b>640.00</b>	<b>534.00</b>	<b>2,404.36</b>	<b>1,279.00</b>	<b>10,726.41</b>	<b>12,335.74</b>
Funds brought forward from previous period	120.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	120.00
Net of receipts/(payments)	(11.42)	(121.71)	154.75	0.08	4,655.64	8,681.00	13,369.76	13,358.34
Funds carried forward to next period	108.58	-121.71	154.75	0.08	4,655.64	8,681.00	13,369.76	13,478.34

## Next Year's Aims

We have built solid foundations and there are many emerging opportunities. We need some management and organisation which comes with paid staff.

We need to offer more focused and specialised support. We want to develop our links to other organisations who we have referred to and received referrals from throughout the year. We know destitute women suffer rape and sexual violence, and want to try to prevent this by working with other partner agencies that focus on women and gender issues. The crisis destitution cases need network building with BIRCH, and Refugees at Home for some community hosting and continue engaging with Hope Projects Housing and Destitution panel, Refugee Action, Red Cross and RMC. Immigration advice and working with solicitors is very important, raising knowledge so women are better equipped to understand how to get the most out of their representatives. We know there is a new migration doctors of the world health project coming to Birmingham Meena Centre, we want to learn how to advocate better for women on health issues. We need to support from well trained and knowledgeable people. Our advocates are amazing, but we need to add some immigration, debt, welfare, health and activism experience into the mix.

Women in the system are helping each other, we believe their strength and knowledge, linked to others, is the key to success.

We want to attend more trainings and develop our network, working with local and national organisations, researchers and campaign groups.

**Thanks to our group members, volunteers and supporters, we would be nothing without their dedication, solidarity and love.**





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