

ANNUAL REPORT



2021/
22

Latin
American
Women's
Aid

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“Women are messed over, not messed up! We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them”

(Hanisch, 1968).

This continued being a very difficult year for black and minoritised women survivors of violence, with the UK still living the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, compounded poverty and marginalisation, as well as the continuation of austerity measures and a hostile environment for migrants and black and minoritized communities. LAWA has continued being creative in responding to the context and service users' needs, tirelessly ensuring the provision of quality services and appropriate support despite the increased demand. In this period LAWA has consolidated its team and structure, ensured the efficient management and support of three refuges, strengthened partnerships, and continued strongly informed by its values, while navigating the challenges put on to us by the current environment.

All this work would not be possible if it wasn't for the hard work, commitment and passion of our staff, interns and volunteers and as a Board we express our gratitude to all of them. We know that this coming year will be harder for black and minoritised communities with economic recession around the corner, massive increases in the cost of services and fuel, and the continuous breakdown of social policies. We know LAWA's services will be more needed than ever, and we will work hard to continue supporting and empowering the most marginalised women, creating change and providing life-saving services.

SUSANA KLIEN
CHAIR OF THE BOARD

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

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This past year was another challenging but encouraging one. Challenges bring problems to solve but also opportunities to change and improve; COVID and Brexit are still with us, and we are still managing the consequences of it.

In addition, the legal system has created a very challenging space to work and support survivors in the UK. The legal system is going backwards to support women & children's survivors of gender violence to the point where the basic safeguarding measures to be put in place by courts are failing survivors.

The demand of all our services is still high, however, there are specific increasing needs in the areas of immigration, housing, and family law because of the massive cuts of legal aid since 2012.

We were able to get a continuation of the emergency funding on the second year of the pandemic, we have been able to secure another 5 years funding from the National Lottery that allowed us to diversify, maintain and respond to new challenges in our service delivery. We have been able to manage our new third refuge for a year now despite the difficulties during the pandemic thanks to the support of all our funders and housing association (Peabody trust). Also, we were able to maintain our growing together program a space for our elder women despite the funding cuts in that area.

This year we put emphasis in developing our learning and engagement program and our staff force. We formally launched our internship program, the continuation of our volunteer program and published our Changemaker toolkit® that was the result of years of collective work. We are maintaining a very strong BME partnership work with sister's organisations throughout the OYA consortium.



LAWA has been through a lot of changes and challenges since 2015, including full decommissioned of our core services, institutional crisis, and two years of pandemic, though, we have been able to growth, diversify and respond in a more holistic way to the needs of women & children. I am particularly very delighted of the organisation therefore the team we have been able to build despite all the difficulties and challenges, and I am very proud to leave the organisation in a stable position to continue the journey of our core values of being lead and for Latin American women in the UK.

We are still facing the uncertainty of the political, social, and economic environment of the country, the challenges and crisis of the legal aid system that have created more gender inequality, the history and trauma of colonisation, genocide, and historical looting have made our intersections as a community more complex and difficult to navigate as migrant women of colour living in the UK.

The national future seems uncertain, however, LAWLA's future will be always fill with the hard work of amazing BME migrant women willing to strive fairness, intersectional & communitarian feminism.

YENNY TOVAR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHO WE ARE AND OUR IMPACT OVER THE LAST YEAR

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LAWA reaches now over three decades of experience in the provision of "by and for" specialist refuge accommodation and supporting services to women and children fleeing from different forms of gender-based violence, mainly Domestic Violence.

Our refuges are the only ones run by and for the Latin American community in the UK and in Europe. We are a grassroots organisation that is not only widely recognised by women in the community, but also highly trusted as attested by the over 1500 women and children that seek our support every year.

Alongside our refuge service, we run a VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) Advice Centre and community-based projects that allow us to reach more Latin-American women every year, such as the Change Makers and Growing Together.

This year we have carried out a total of 7925 interventions to 1543 women and children.

At LAWLA we make it a priority to listen to our service users and check in to see if our interventions are making the positive changes we hope. Through feedback and outcome tracking we can report the following impact of our work:

88%

said they wouldn't consider going back to their previous relationship

99%

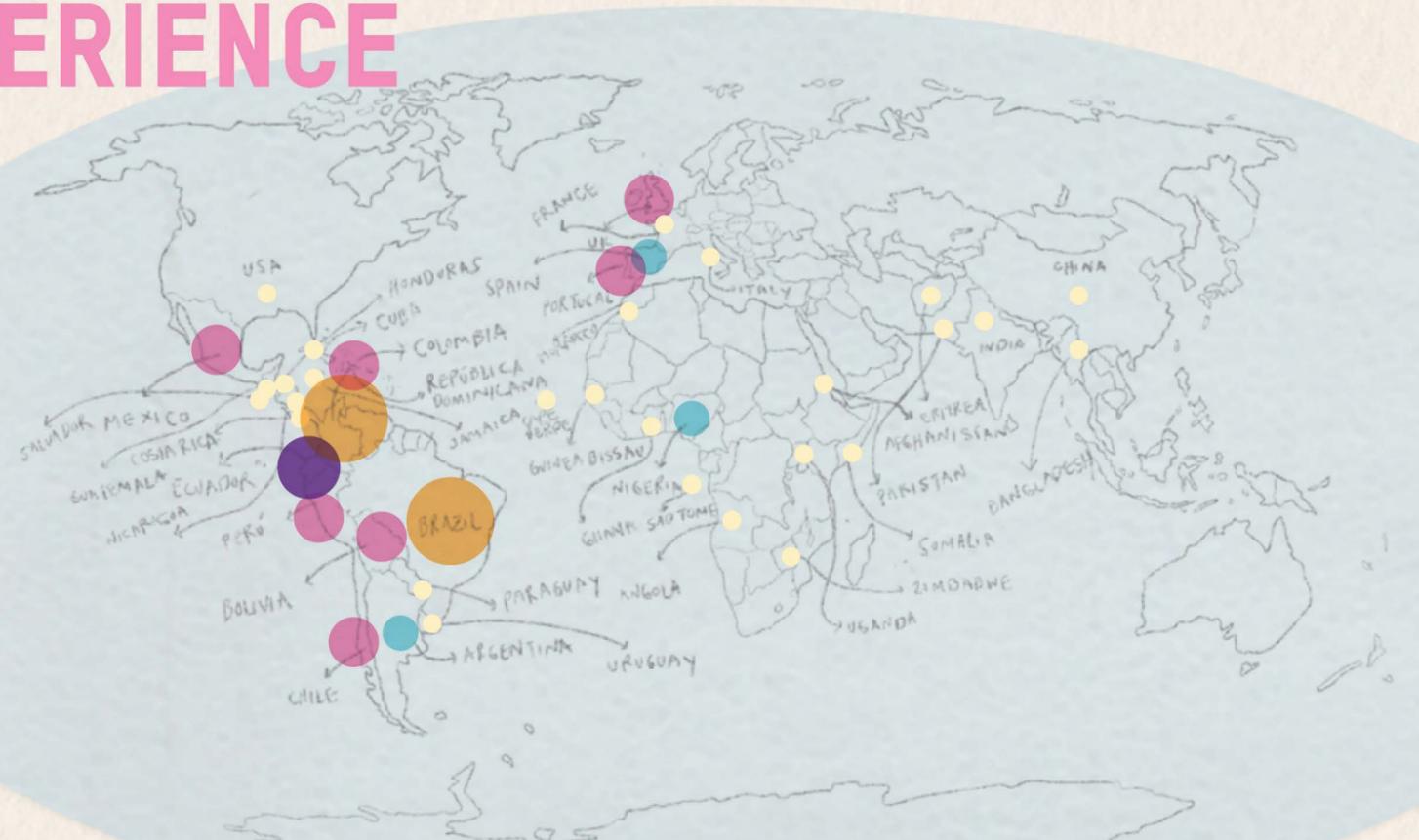
said it made a difference that the service was available in a Latin American/black and minority ethnic led women's organisation

20%

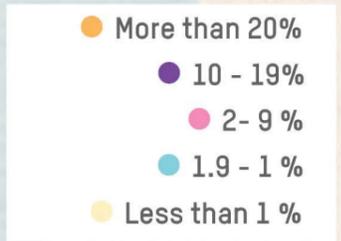
were previously supported by a generic women's organisation

SURVIVORS' IDENTITY AND THEIR INTERSECTING EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

All our service users are minoritised women, children and young people that face intersecting disadvantages that shape their abuse experience, and therefore withstand additional barriers when seeking support. Over the last years, the women from our community have been particularly affected by the implementation of Brexit policies that have left them in a sort of "limbo" with regards to their immigration status and their access to the welfare system. This has increased their vulnerability and the complexity of their cases, forcing them to stay in unsafe spaces and perpetuating the institutional violence.



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

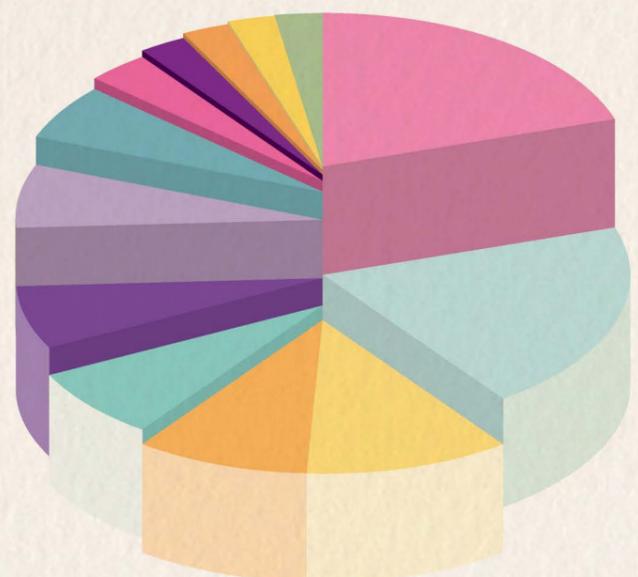


OUR SERVICE USERS

Upon beginning their journey with LAWA our service users complete our diversity and monitoring forms. This enables LAWA to keep track of the composition of our service users. This is why we know, for instance, that over the last year **the majority of women accessing our services were Brazilian (31,5%) and Colombian (20,4%)**. Most of them were aged between 25 and 50 years old (68%) and the majority identified as simply Latin American (24%), however **the ethnicities chart demonstrates that many of our service users identify with the many varied ethnic identities that exist in the Latin American culture** also, including black and indigenous. This highlights that the Latin American identity can cover a broad range of ethnic identities and it is entirely up to the women filling in the forms how they choose to identify themselves.

THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY OVERLAP, AND DEFINE THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES THEY FACE INCLUDING STRUCTURAL RACISM, HOSTILE ANTI-IMMIGRATION ENVIRONMENT, CULTURAL DISCRIMINATION, LACK OF SUPPORT IN INTERPRETATION SERVICES, LACK OF LEGAL AID, AMONG OTHERS.

AGE



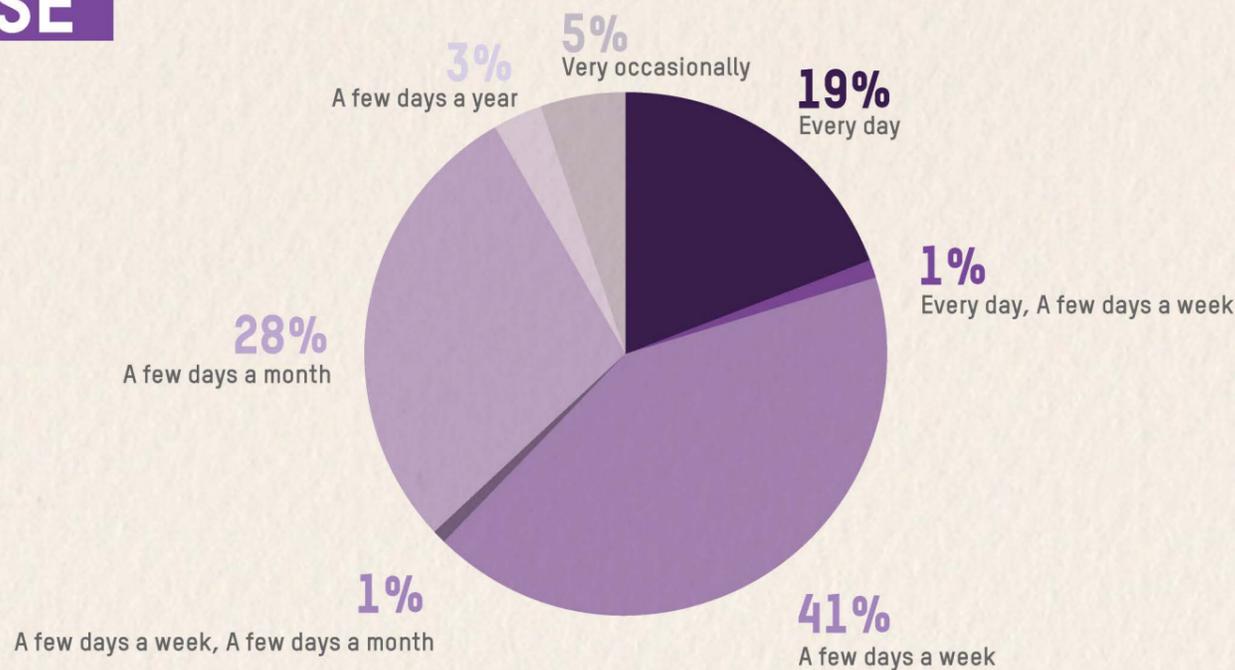
- 24% Latin American
- 11% Latin American: white
- 11% Latin American: Other
- 9% Latin American indigenous/white
- 8% Latin American: Black
- 8% Black/Black British: Other
- 7% Mixed Ethnicity: other black/Black African/White
- 4% Latin American: black/white
- 3% Latin American: black/indigenous
- 3% Latin American: black/indigenous/white
- 3% Black/Black British: Caribbean
- 2% Latin American: indigenous
- 1% Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian/Asian British: Chinese
- Asian/Asian British: Indian
- Asian/Asian British: Other
- Asian/Asian British: Pakistani
- Central Asian/Central Asian
- British: other

EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

As part of the data we gather, we ask our service users to share the type of violence they have endured. At the beginning of their journeys with us, women often only share the basic information they feel comfortable with. However, as trust is built upon, women often open themselves up and share previous experiences of violence, even within their childhood. You can see in the graphic that the vast majority report verbal, physical and emotional violence. These often overlap with one another, and as women learn that violence has different forms, they disclose additional experiences.

THE DATA ALSO SHOWS THAT WOMEN ENDURE EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE VERY FREQUENTLY AND IN THEIR DAILY LIVES: 41% REPORTED IT HAPPENED ON A WEEKLY BASIS WHILE 19% EXPERIENCED THIS EVERY DAY.

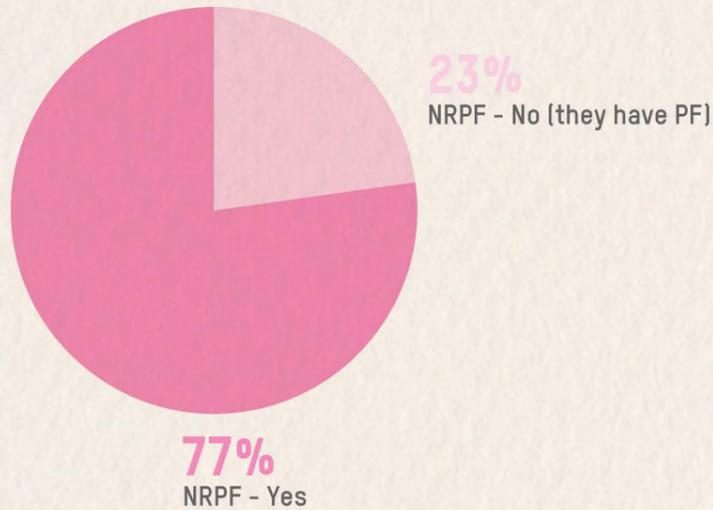
FREQUENCY OF ABUSE



TYPE OF VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED



FINANCIAL HARDSHIP



The impact of the pandemic also took a toll on women's access to their own income and, the implementation of Brexit policies had an immense impact on women's possibility to access benefits. This year 77% of women had No access to public funds. This is a shocking increase of 33% in comparison to the previous year.

60% of the women reported they had financial difficulties. For many of them, the closure of offices, hotels and restaurants during the pandemic meant a significant loss on income, as most of them work as cleaners and/or waitresses.

DIVERSE SEXUAL ORIENTATION



The vast majority of LAWA's service users are heterosexual, cisgender women. Only 5% of the women identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community. Through our LGBTQ+ specialist services, we are seeking to increase the awareness of LAWA's services as well as the understanding that violence also operates within same-sex couples.

FROM ALL THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVORS WE SUPPORTED OVER THE LAST YEAR, 62% REQUIRED AN INTERPRETER AND 24% EXPRESSED THEY WEREN'T COMFORTABLE AT ALL WITH SPOKEN ENGLISH. AT OUR DROP-IN SERVICE, 80% STATED THEY DID NOT SPEAK ENGLISH

CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS

A key barrier for our service users to access support and statutory services is often the lack of English skills and the need for interpretation. This barrier goes beyond language as it is not only the impossibility to communicate in their mother tongue but also they lack knowledge and experience to advocate for themselves within a system that is already complex to navigate.

From all the gender-based violence survivors we supported over the last year, 62% required an interpreter and 24% expressed they weren't comfortable at all with spoken English.

At our drop-in service, 80% stated they did not speak English

SPOKEN ENGLISH AND NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

62%
Require interpreter - YES



80%
Drop-in users: speak English? - NO



24%
Not at all comfortable with spoken English



THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC POLICY REGARDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HOUSING IN THE UK

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This period starts with the signing into law of the Domestic Abuse Act (on 29th of April 2021). LAWA participated alongside VAWG sector partners in several consultations, linked to the signing into parliament of this Act. The promise was that this piece of legislation would be a 'landmark' in the UK, expanding on a wide range of legal definitions to protect survivors. And while indeed new protections and support for victims is sanctioned through this law into our statutory frameworks, in its most fundamental sense the new act falls short of providing a desired outcome, as many women will remain excluded from safety on the basis of their immigration status, without any long-term solution.

As a BME refuge provider in London, one of the aspects of this new framework that links directly to our service delivery is the fact that the GLA (as the Tier One Authority in London), has been mandated with a duty to develop a strategy for specialist DA support for those who need domestic abuse safe accommodation. To inform the strategy development process, MOPAC and the GLA commissioned a Needs Assessment process, for which LAWA provided detailed information both through participating in several consultation workshops, as well as through a written submission collating information and figures from our services specifically at LAWA, but also narrative information provided by our OYA partners.

Findings from our 2019 research 'A Roof Not A Home' also contributed to the [Joint Recommendations to Parliament on the Domestic Abuse Bill](#), providing key arguments about the lack of safe and suitable housing options for BME VAWG survivors. We were calling, and continue to call, for a substantial increase in the supply of genuinely affordable housing to ensure survivors can access safe and suitable accommodation, including when moving on from refuge. Importantly, we were particularly vocal, alongside our sisters at Imkaan and others, about the value of recognising the specialism of 'By and for' black and minoritised womens' organisations.

Indeed, Black and minoritised women face severe housing inequalities, the specialist Black and minoritised sector currently provides 296 refuge bed spaces in the UK but demand in 2020-21 has demonstrated that we need an additional 1,172 bed spaces. Over 60% of current specialist refuge spaces are based in London, which leaves a stark national shortfall for Black and minoritised women fleeing violence. The women and children we support are regularly excluded from generic and commissioned refuges and are often forced into destitution or unsafe accommodation.

These are the kinds of concerns that we relentlessly keep raising at the different fora of which we are part of, such as the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board, convened very recently by the Mayor of London, and of which LAWA is an [associate member](#).

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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The VAWG Advice Centre provides specialised and culturally specific advocacy and support to Latin American and Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence (e.g., domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking etc.) by helping them to safety, empowering and rebuilding their life free of violence. We run face to face and remote sessions in Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

Our support includes liaison with statutory services such the police, social services, and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences, we assist service users in Family Courts and work in partnership with other non –statutory services to offer the best possible support to women and her children.

This year we supported **369 women with 2.985 interventions**. In comparison to the previous year, we provided 14% more interventions per

women. This showcases the increase in the complexity in the cases and the additional work we must deliver as part of our support.

Another service offered at the Advice Centre is the Drop-in, a service for the wider community to access support on welfare benefits, housing, employment, education etc. This year **241 women** accessed this service.

To ensure accessibility and avoid additional risks to women who are not safe at home, we provide different ways by which women can access our services. This includes the helpline, webchat, WhatsApp, and support via email. Through our helpline, we received 2,800 calls and via the webchat we spoke with 332 women. Even after the lockdowns, we continue providing remote access to services particularly to those women who have difficulties travelling due to lack of money for transport, pregnancy, disabilities, work commitments and other compelling responsibilities and circumstances. During this year 76% of women attended our drop-in sessions remotely and only 24% attending face to face sessions.

SPECIALIST SERVICES AT THE VAWG ADVICE CENTRE

IMMIGRATION ADVICE

In June 2021 LAWA successfully secured funding to open a new service: an OISC Level

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN



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2 Immigration Adviser. This has been of great benefit for our service users. We have been supporting **126 women** since the start of the project.

We have been able to deliver immigration advice to vulnerable women who are in critical situations where they depend on the perpetrator for their immigration status. We have found that many service users are unaware of the legal options available to them as victims of domestic abuse and for this reason they choose to remain in the abusive relationship. Having this service available has been hugely beneficial as it has allowed women to make independent and informed decisions, enabling them to flee the abusive relationship and be safe without worrying about their immigration status.

WOMEN AGAINST HOMELESSNESS AND ABUSE (WAHA) PROJECT

We have been implementing our advocacy work under the umbrella of our four-year strong WAHA project, which aims at improving refuge, temporary and permanent housing options to Black and minoritised women fleeing different forms of gender-based violence through promoting changes in housing policy and practice at different levels of Government. Through this project, and alongside our sisters of the OYA Consortium, we keep building the knowledge base around the barriers and successful practices surrounding the housing situation of BME women survivors of abuse.

Despite of the fact that Local Authorities are obliged by law to support women victims of domestic abuse (i.e. prevention of relief duty), in practice, women seeking housing assistance have to take reasonable steps to help secure their own accommodation. This is not a task that is always easy for survivors to undertake on their own, especially since the chronic shortage of social housing in the country has led to a (now widespread) use of the private rented sector (PRS) as the primary alternative provided to survivors. With soaring rent prices, our service users are put in a position of increased precarity and vulnerability (both at the point of exiting abusive relationships, and when moving on from our refuges). In other words, even though the duty by local authorities to support survivors of abuse is enshrined in law, in real terms we have been finding that local authorities are outsourcing that responsibility to the private sector, with the intermediation of non-for-profit organisations like us, who end up filling the gap of their statutory duty.

This result in a continued struggle for women due to extremely high rent prices compared to the low income they receive via universal credit, which makes it impossible to find suitable and adequate accommodation that can be covered by their income. In addition, existing requirements to rent for low-income families -such as the benefit cap (which the government should exempt for survivors of VAWG) further exacerbate the barriers faced by our service users.

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN



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While we continue to provide specialised legal housing and advice to women survivors of domestic abuse and other gender-based violence for them to access safe and appropriate accommodation; the project continues advocating and campaigning to change the way the housing needs of vulnerable women are met.

BME AND LGBTQ+ PROJECT

We are proud to see the positive results of the new phase that our LGBTQ+ Services and support project has taken since April 2021. Our LGBTQ+ Outreach support has considerably increased this year and was present in events across London, going above the projected numbers after the pandemic. This increase is effectively related to the post-COVID return of events across the city. The LGBTQ+ Support Worker has been in numerous events particularly those of our Latin American community. With the rise in presence of the LGBTQ+ Outreach in London events the project reached more than 200 people

and those lead to mouth-to-mouth signposting, receiving self-referrals for LGBTQ+ Women that needed VAWG support.

In our LGBTQ+ services, we continue to see the engagement of transwomen as the main service users of the LGBTQ+ community who need help and support. This steady number of assistances that transwomen receive from our services shows that their needs as a vulnerable, marginalised and discriminated against community has not ceased and rather needs the continuation of our project to access their rights and entitlements, such as housing, benefits, immigration status and more. Parallel to this, the intake of referrals of women who identify as Lesbian, and Bisexual is increasing and they have described how being part of the LGBTQ+ community while being Latin American has specific challenges of exclusion within the community. In all our cases, the challenges of language barrier, immigration status, and issues with benefits and income support are repeatedly present in the cases of LGBTQ+ women.



HOW DID LAWA SUPPORT YOU?

VAWG
ADVICE
CENTRE

“En todo momento me sentí apoyada por parte de LAWA en particular mi support worker. Estoy muy agradecida con el apoyo brindado.”

“Gracias a LAWA yo estoy bien y puedo estar en este país tranquila. Gracias a LAWA mi vida ha cambiado. Soy feliz ahora.”

“I am extremely grateful to LAWA. Thinking back in September 2021 (when I first called them), my life has changed a lot. I have received only great news since LAWA has been in my life: they helped me challenge my Universal Credit claim, settled a child maintenance agreement with my ex-partner, start studying English, and explore housing options. My life has changed significantly, and I will be forever grateful to my support worker.”

“LAWA has helped me to know my rights. I have never thought that a 'stranger' would care so much for me, and my situation.”

“Muito obrigada por tudo.”

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

VAWG
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VAWG ADVICE CENTRE TRENDS IN 2021-2022

We observe an increase of queries related to benefits and housing relating benefits (e.g., Universal credit, housing benefit etc.), homeless applications, especially of those EEA women with pre-settled status.

EEA women with settled status should normally pass the right to reside test, which will give them access to social welfare benefits. Unfortunately, the position is much more complicated for those women with pre-settled status, primarily because they are unable to prove their current or past economic activity or her EU family member through which she would have access to public funds. We advocate for pre-settled status holders especially those survivors of gender-based violence to have access to support differently, and we believe that their previous or current economic activity should not determine access to statutory support.

Additional interventions are required for EEA women with pre-settled status, access to service is extremely hard and we have observed how statutory services decide about women's entitlement to support based solely on their immigration status. There is a wide-spread tendency from statutory services to assume that EEA pre-settled holders are not entitled to support. Front-line workers spent a considerable amount of their working time proving or challenging statutory service's decisions. Statutory services approach proves the hostile environment toward migrant women.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE LOCKDOWN AND BREXIT:

Women are facing a growing demand of support under the current hostile environment as they are being excluded from statutory rights. Our services are increasingly based on advocating for women's entitlements to housing, social services support, benefits, legal aid and others, which are being denied to women despite their rights to access such support and our work has been to follow closely those processes to make sure that there is no further exclusion.

Opening back our offices full-time after COVID-19 was of great benefit for women who were in need of visiting us in our main office to seek support. Since we have been in our offices, we noted that at least one woman a day visits us seeking information about VAWG related support.

Widening the access of support to all women, coming back to our offices has been of great benefit, as online and phone appointments can be of limited access for some of our users due to lack of access to internet and phone credits, or even based on their preference to see our caseworkers face-to-face. On the other hand, our continuous online based support is giving extended access to support offsite, allowing those that work from 9.30 to 17.30 to receive assistance remotely. Our community highly benefits from this due to commonly having commercial working hours or living in far-off distances.

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HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

VAWG
ADVICE
CENTRE

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IN COURT:

Other post-pandemic trends noted was the quicker and easier access to Court Legal Injunctions for women. Courts have facilitated online hearings in 24 hours from sending the applications, where women can be in a safe space and without the need to reallocate to the court facilities. Unfortunately, the negative side noticed of the Courts being in such short notice is that they do not have interpreters and some women are left to stand by themselves while speaking too little English in many cases, and our case-workers have to serve as interpreters for them.

Additionally, the higher level of interventions is related to the issues that women are encountering in accessing services that are predominantly offered online now, such as council support, housing services or GP appointments. Our workers must intervene based on the service user's needs and access those services online or on the phone.

These have impacts in the continuous amount of labour that we have to undertake, and time spent on tasks that previously were easier and quicker done by the service users. Unfortunately, we have seen how these remote services are putting women at risk. For example, recently a woman had to go to the Council because she was homeless with her 4-year-old child after an episode of sexual and domestic abuse, and because the Council was providing only remote services, she was left homeless. She was able to call us, and we liaised with other charities to find her refuge as social services did not fulfil their duty of care.

98%

stated that the advice provided helped them increase their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and their legal options

96%

said they feel more confident

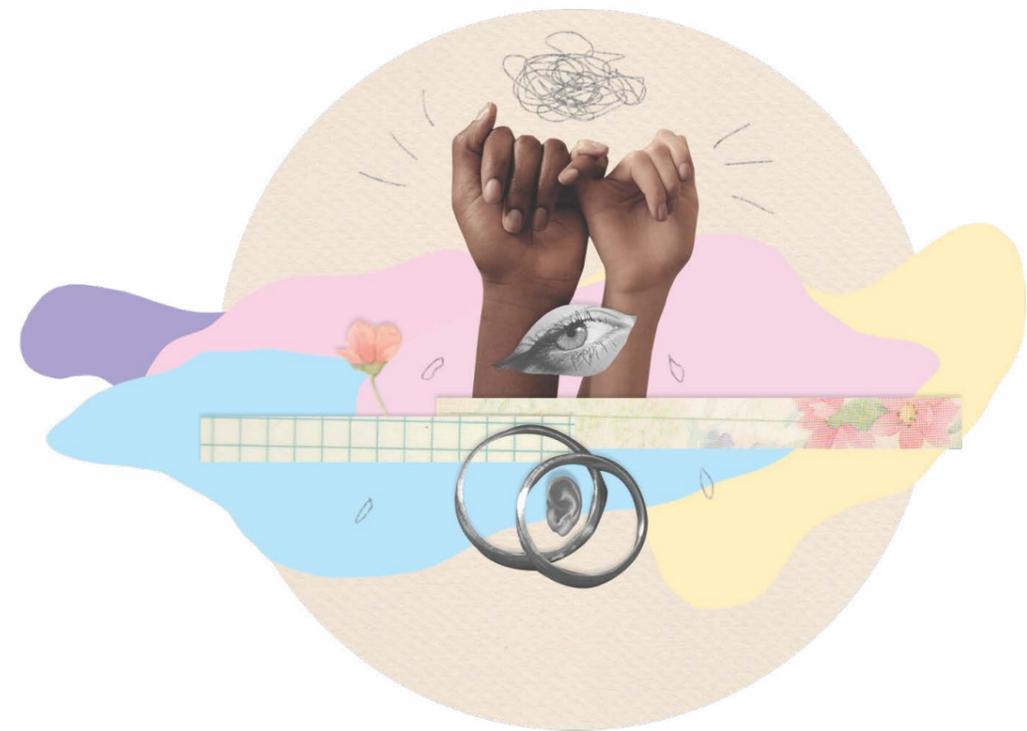
92%

stated that the advice provided helped them increase their knowledge about their rights, options and services in the UK

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

VAWG
ADVICE
CENTRE

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WOMEN'S VOICE – A CASE STUDY

Milagros*, is a 30 year old Bolivian National. She has been married to her wife Lauren* for the last two years. Lauren is a lesbian transwoman. Milagros and Lauren met in a dating app, and they started a long-distance relationship. After one year into the relationship Milagros moved to Holland to meet her girlfriend. The couple married while living in Holland and one year later they moved to UK.

After only three days upon Milagros's arrival to Holland, Lauren started to trigger arguments without a reasonable motive. She would yell at Milagros and get annoyed for very little things. Milagros was very scared of her reactions

because it was intense and aggressive. At the beginning, Milagros thought maybe it was just for that day, but it became a regular behaviour. Milagros recalled all the moments when her wife was calling her names for no reason. During their stay in Holland Milagros started to notice that her wife was behaving in an erratic manner. In addition, she learnt that her wife had been depressed for years and that she was taking medication. She was very controlling, manipulative, she undermined and was isolating her spouse. They decided to move to the UK and Milagros thought that this would help her wife with her depression and that the emotional, physiological abuse will stop. That never happened and Lauren's abusive behaviour towards her spouse worsened.

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

VAWG ADVICE CENTRE

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The first incident of physical abuse took place when Milagros was six months pregnant, and the couple had an argument. Lauren got very angry, grabbed Milagros and pushed her down the stairs. Fortunately, neither Milagros nor the unborn child were affected by the fall. When she was on the floor Lauren choked her, Milagros lost her sight for seconds. She managed to escape and locked herself in the bedroom.

There were times when Milagros had to end calls with her family to avoid unnecessary arguments with her wife. Additionally, Milagros was never allowed to go out by herself, this was because Lauren was jealous and controlling. She was only allowed to go out if Lauren was with her. This started to affect Milagros' mental health which worsened over the following two years. Lauren convinced her wife not to talk to anyone about their problems and told her that she just could only talk to her. With this behaviour she was isolating her further.

The abusive behaviour worsened when their child was born. Lauren would prohibit Milagros to spend time with the child and she even prevented her from feeding their child. The situation became so unbearable, that Milagros decided to seek support to flee the family home. She knew it would not be easy, she was scared because she depended financially on her wife and her entitlement to be in the UK was linked to her being married to Lauren.

The first contact Milagros made with LAWA was over the phone. She was assisted by the Advice Centre team, and a plan was agreed for Milagros

and her baby to flee the family home. Through the DASH assessment, we assessed Milagros's case as high risk, and we provided the different options she had to leave the house. We identified further needs regarding her immigration status and changing conditions so she could access benefits, possible additional support regarding child arrangement, access to financial support, mental health needs and need to access to English classes.

Following Milagros's decision, we referred to a refuge space. Previously, we had made the reports of domestic abuse incidents to the police, application for a protection measure for Milagros and the baby were submitted to the family court. Milagros was referred to LAWA's in house counselling service and her case, due to safeguarding concerns was referred to children social services, family solicitor etc.

LAWA followed up on Milagros's Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) Concession application, onto her Indefinite Live to Remain (ILR) application as a Victim of domestic Violence.

Now, Milagros is at the refuge considering engaging in formal education to pursue her art career; and she and her child are safe and healing from the trauma.

*Names changed for safety reasons

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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In the past year, we supported a total of 81 service users (42 women and 39 children) to access safe, emergency accommodation in our refuges. Together, they received a total of 2,610 interventions. 87.5% of women stated that while in the refuge, they felt safe and secure.

When entering the refuge, the biggest priority is ensuring women and children are safe and settled. This might indicate a need for emergent interventions, such as MARAC referrals, urgent solicitor referrals (for family matters), and police reports. Moreover, a tailored, person-centred plan is created with the service user to empower her to make changes and move forward from the experienced violence. Some of the issues women often tackle include legal matters (immigration, family law), maximizing benefits entitlements, and securing long-term accommodation.

In the last year, we have seen an increase of service users struggling to access and maintain benefits due to the regulatory changes post-Brexit, which are grey and undefined, still to this day. An imposed barrier is the need to be working or have been recently employed, disproportionately affecting mothers (who are caretakers or lack the

financial security to pay for childcare) or those who have experienced financial/work abuse.

During this year, we have settled the third refuge, achieving a full functioning service. This new house has been a refuge mainly for young women without children. We have prioritised these spaces for them, as often they face additional challenges accessing emergency accommodation as they don't meet the thresholds in comparison to women with children.

It has been challenging to maintain the overall capacity. Some of the funding allocated to increase the service during the pandemic has come to an end although demand has not decreased. Worryingly, there has been a consistent increase in the number of DV incidents and offences in London since March 2020, the beginning of the pandemic. Since then, only 4 months have registered lower than average records, meaning that every month there has been above 7,571 offences and 12,479 incidents across London (MOPAC statistics, September 2022).

LAWA's refuge service is often a lifeline for women who otherwise have no one else to turn to. As their level of needs is greater, their cases are often rejected at other organisations who lack the experience of dealing with our experiences. The impact of our service is undeniable as 99% of the mentioned said it made a difference that the service was provided by their community and in their own language. Our houses are the only ones by and for the Latin American community and we are one of the 6 BME refuge providers in London.

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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LAWA Refuge Services



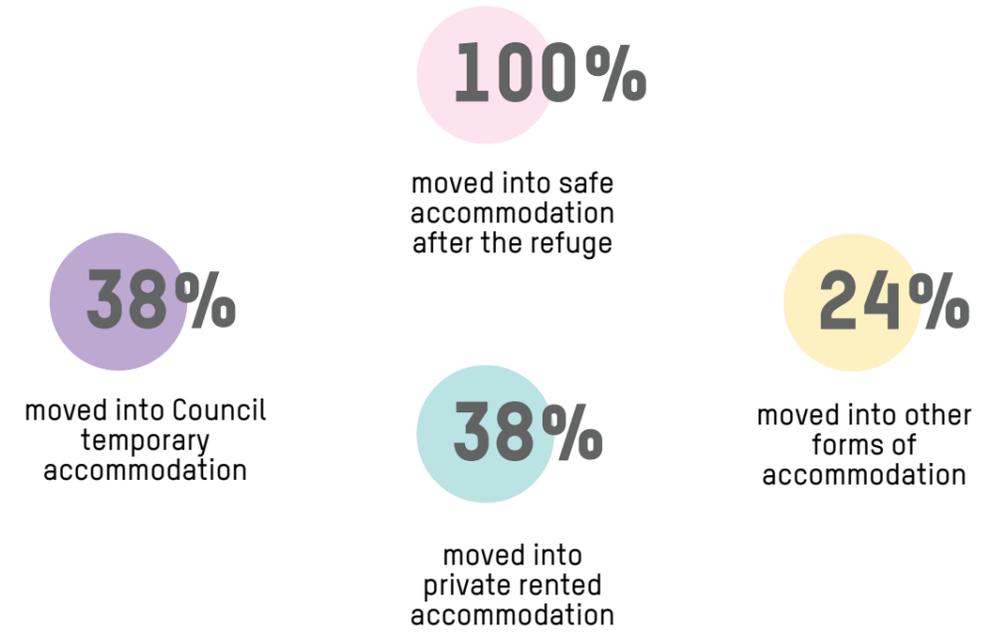
LAWA Refuge Services



HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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LAWA Advice Centre



HOW DID THE REFUGE IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE?

REFUGE SERVICES

"Gave me the time to find a new perspective in life as I was taken away from a dangerous environment I used to live. Given me the opportunity to redirect my future with a mindset."

"I think it was good because I needed a roof to live. Also, I feel well supported with the practical work I have to do."

"It was a good experience. My therapist helped me a lot in an emotional way. I feel very grateful towards the staff because I had no access to public funds, and I thought my situation was quite difficult. However, I felt I was able to do a lot of stuff, for example starting to work."

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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FAMILY SUPPORT AT THE REFUGES

As part of the refuges team, we have our Children and Young People emotional support worker, whose main focus is to provide emotional aid to the children that arrive at the refuges and to the families as one entity.

Moving into refuge accommodation is a challenging experience. This is also true for children, who, although they have an immense resilience capacity, often have experienced, or witnessed violence themselves and do not understand why they are moving away from home. They also need to learn to share spaces with other children and families and must adapt to new schools (when they are already attending school). By providing this service, we offer an integral and holistic support in a key area of work within women's recovery journey. Working with children at this stage often helps them to

manage their emotions and prevents further violence to occur as they grow older.

Our Children and Young people emotional support worker has 1:1 session with children, group activities, and mum-children sessions. This approach that combines different spaces helps children to heal, to accommodate better to their time at the refuges, as well as mums to have a healthier relationship with their children. The CYP worker also provides a space for mums to learn about the effects of violence on children's development, whether experienced or witnessed, and also aids women in building tools to counteract these effects. The worker will also help find other appropriate services that children can be linked into, such as Early Help Services, Speech and Language Therapy, other specialised therapeutic services, etc.

LAWA Family Support Services



HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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WOMEN'S VOICE – A CASE STUDY

Lucy is a 27-year-old Nigerian woman, who came to the UK as a refugee. She had been in the UK for 3 years and she was living with a friend in Southwest England when her partner asked her to move to London with him, which she did. After one of Lucy's birthdays, the perpetrator became abusive verbally, he smashed her birthday cake on the rubbish bins and became angry. It was at this point that Lucy felt the relationship start becoming abusive and breaking down. He would make threats about not getting him angry as a way to control her behaviour.

This escalated when she was pregnant with their first child, when the perpetrator started physically abusing her. When pregnant with their second child, soon thereafter, he strangled her. He also kicked her out of their joint property temporarily and was left to rough sleep with an infant and whilst pregnant. He was excessively jealous and controlled access to her SIM as well as whom she spoke to and when. Lucy approached her local children's service, who put her in touch with LAWA's refuges. The refuge conducted an assessment for the refuge as well as a risk assessment and safety plan. Although she was between contemplation

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

REFUGE SERVICES

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and preparation, she decided to leave and come to one of our refuges for the family's safety. Shortly after, Lucy left her house with her children and arrive at one of LAWA's houses. She was initially unsure of the step she took as she didn't know how she was going to move forward with 2 small children.

Collaboratively with her case worker, she applied for legal measures to keep herself and her children safe as well as applied to access the benefits she was entitled to in order to secure financial independence. The refuge's family support worker aided her and her child's transition from their previous home, as well as navigated the effects of the traumatic home they were in jointly with Lucy.

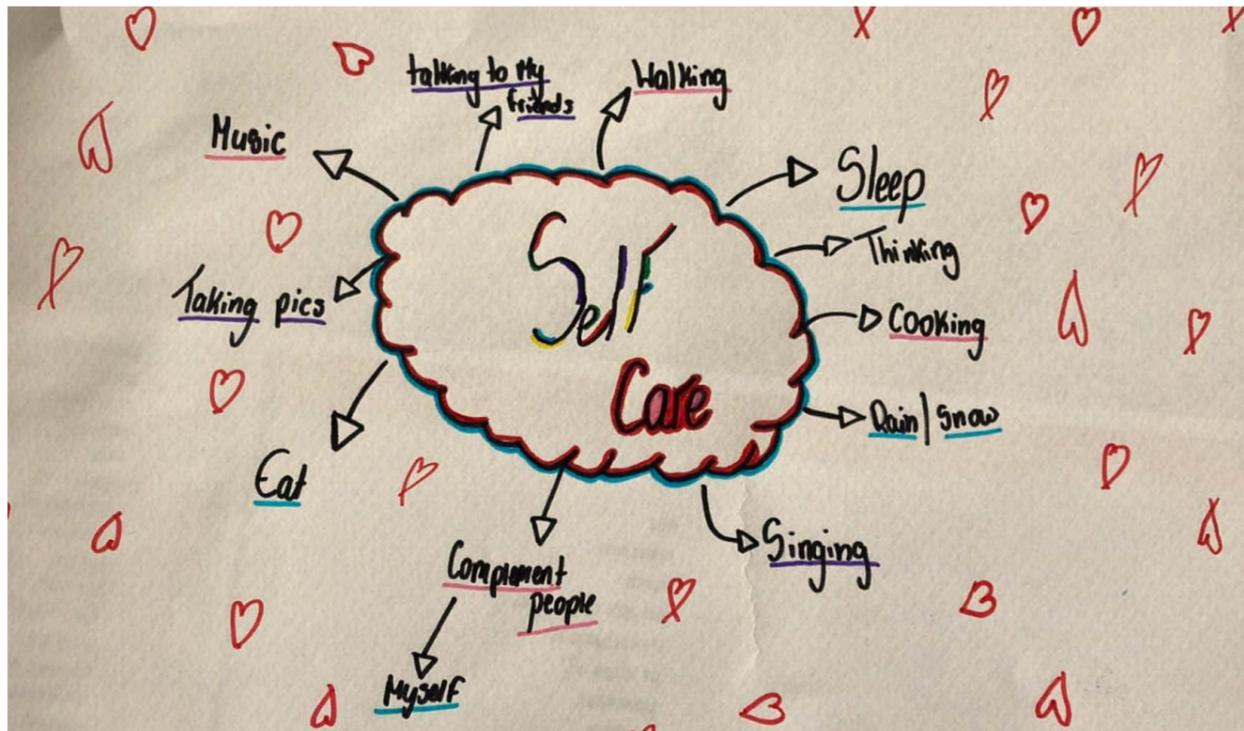
Lucy accessed the counselling service and was supported by the Children and Young People Emotional support worker, who helped Lucy and her Children transitioning as they arrived at the refuge. One of Lucy's children, Jamie, had issues with being away from mum for any period of time. Throughout her stay, they were able to work on how Lucy could help Jamie with getting used to being away from her for short periods and helping Lucy understand why this was happening. After 7 months, Lucy and her 2 children were supported by our housing legal adviser to move on to permanent accommodation. After raising the importance of being close to her support network, we successfully secured long-term accommodation in an area where Lucy didn't feel isolated and felt she could continue with her life free from violence.

Using our internal measurement tools, we have been able record an improvement of over 100% of her sense of safety for her children and of 100% with regards to her own safety.

*Names changed for safety reasons

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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75 Women were serviced by LAWA’s counselling service through individual counselling sessions with a total of 976 sessions.

LAWA’s in house Counselling Services offers psychotherapy in Portuguese, Spanish and English for survivors of different forms of gender-based violence. We adopt a culturally sensitive, trauma focused approach that supports Latin American, Black and minoritised women to recover their emotional wellbeing.

Our counselling service is free of charge and is a short term of 12 to 16 individual counselling sessions. We provide a safe, confidential, non-judgmental environment for survivors to explore, express and reflect on their traumatic experiences to enable them to rebuild their self-stability, self-continuity and self-confidence to trust their own decisions.

Wellbeing and Mental Health services

Within the pandemic, LAWA’s counselling department was offering counselling services over the phone and online video call sessions. The demand for the services grew and we were also increasing the capacity by continuing offering psychotherapy in those modalities and with additional volunteers. However, we have now resumed our face-to-face sessions which allows women to have a separate space to express themselves.

As we have kept both modalities, the service became more inclusive as we reach women that are unable to attend face to face sessions for physical mobility reasons or distance issues, the services have expanded to other cities where women had online counselling services.

WAS YOUR THERAPY USEFUL?

“For me it has been really useful especially in this hard and difficult process of separation of my ex-partner especially because the reason has been domestic violence, abuse and emotional and psychological mistreatment both against me and our son.”

“Yes, my therapy was very useful. The improvements were in my self-esteem and the hair loss that stopped.”

“Yes, the therapy was good, it helped me to understand things that were not clear to me in a relationship, to understand that you have to have commitment on both sides and learn to value myself.”

100%

said the relationship with the therapist was good or excellent

100%

said they felt the therapist supported them

100%

said they felt really listened to by the therapist

100%

said they were satisfied with the service

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHANGE
MAKERS

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This was a very special year for our ChangeMakers programme, as we were really proud to share with the community our #LAWAChangeMaker toolkit, which reflects the lessons and methodologies implemented during its five years of existence through many workshops, meetings, community rituals, and artistic initiatives. Hundreds of women have made LAWA their home through this programme, sharing generously and powerfully their experiences of migration, violence, hope, and self-determination.

The team also focused this year in taking up the 'train the trainers' methodology, which proved to be very successful! The Changemaker Coordinator passed on her skills and knowledge to 2 volunteers, one staff member (based at the refuges), and similarly, convened various collaborations with both members of the group and other supporters from the community.

The train the trainers approach proved to be quite successful as the volunteer/facilitator then moved on to deliver independent workshops

with the young girls of the #ChangeMaker Chavitas programme at Saint Gabriel's College. These workshops focused on the topics of Intersectionality, sisterhood and solidarity between women, self-care, art for healing and self-expression.

Throughout the different sessions, we engaged with 36 women and 23 girls and delivered 29 interventions.

We devised a programme of social media posts to disseminate the resource itself, and also devised a series of short entries ('The Feminist Academy'). Our digital and social media presence has increased thanks to the directed efforts in this area.

93%
filled their expectations of the sessions

100%
enjoyed sharing the space with other Latin American women

FEEDBACK FROM DIFFERENT SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

"Son espacios de gran valor para la comunidad femenina en el mundo. ¡Muchas gracias por compartir sabiduría!"

"The workshop was really good, and I learned a lot!"

CHANGE
MAKERS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHANGE
MAKERS

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Change Makers Programme



Change Makers Programme



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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GROWING TOGETHER

The group Growing Together continues to be a beacon of hope and joy for our community. Its objective is to create a safe space led by and for Latin American Elderly women (50 + years) to help them feel active, connected and integrated to the community and each other, increasing their wellbeing. During this year, since face-to-face activity could progressively resume to levels similar to pre-pandemic times, weekly activities continued, now incorporating more in person meetings, which were very much needed and welcomed.

The focus was on tailor-made English classes, one to one IT lessons (to support autonomy and independence), skills-sharing (knitting sessions), birthday and holidays celebrations, outings and growing vegetables in their very own allotment.

The weekly activities are designed and agreed upon among the participants and take into account their interests. This approach has proven to increase the engagement from participants

and resulted in co-produced projects such as exhibitions to display the products they make in their knitting sessions, participation in film, art and other entertainment opportunities.

The group continues to form solid bonds of friendship and solidarity among the women involved, an objective that is complemented by psycho-educational activities delivered in collaboration with other community leaders.

During this time 63 women engaged in different sessions, and we delivered 52 workshops.

100% of the participants said the group helps her to not feel alone

100% said they enjoy doing things with their hands

FEEDBACK FROM DIFFERENT SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

GROWING
TOGETHER

“Agradezco a LAWA por sus diversas actividades en la comunidad, incluyendo a las mayores”.

“Es importante contar con un grupo de personas de la misma cultura”.

“Estamos juntas y nos olvidamos de todo de nuestros problemas porque estamos riendo todo el tiempo”.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GROWING
TOGETHER

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The group Growing Together Programme



The group Growing Together Programme



PARTNERSHIPS

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LAWA is part of the different VAWG and housing spaces in which we work tirelessly to ensure that the different needs of Black and Minoritised women are taken into consideration. In this effort, we are part of the following spaces: VAWG Business Group and the Violence Against Women and Girls networking in Islington represented by the Samira Project, the Hackney Violence Against Women and Girls Practitioner Forum and VAWG Strategic Board in Hackney, the Barnet Community Safety Partnership; and the London VAWG Consortium.

In addition to this, LAWA continues to be part of different partnerships for the provision of services.

OYA CONSORTIUM

The OYA Consortium is a Black and Minoritised refuge consortium compound of LAWA and three sister organisations, Asha, Ashiana, and LBWP. Imkaan, as the only Black and Minoritised umbrella organisation in the UK, is also part of OYA as a capacity building organisations. All OYA members are 100% 'by and for' the communities we serve, which is a unique characteristic of the OYA Consortium. We offer an intersectional and Black feminist approach, and our support is provided in 10 different languages, covering Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Persian, Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and English. Individually, each organisation has at least 30 years of experience.

SAMIRA PROJECT

The Samira project is funded by Islington, led by IMECE and in partnership with KMEWO and LAWA. We have been providing services under this project for over 10 years, offering a specialist service.

CASA PROJECT

Funded by the GLA, the CASA project is a move on accommodation initiative in London that aims to offer supported accommodation to women who are ready to move out of refuge accommodation. For two years, women are supported to continue with their journey as they recover from the trauma and rebuild their lives. This is a Pan-London initiative.

REFUGE WITHOUT BORDERS

Funded by the former Ministry of Housing and Local Government, through Islington Council, this project provided refuge accommodation to Black and Minoritised women and children fleeing gender-based violence. It was a partnership among the following Local Authorities: Islington Council (lead borough), Hackney, Lambeth, Barnet and Hammersmith and Fulham.

COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

[HTTPS://LAWADV.ORG.UK](https://lawadv.org.uk)



Over the last years LAWA has increased its efforts to have a stronger digital presence and create engaging content with our audience. During the pandemic, this became even more important, as most of the activities and outreach took place through digital channels. Over the last year we continue to work to reach a wider audience and, for instance in our website, we increase by 17.2% the number of users in comparison with the previous year.

In our social media channels, we have focused our presence on Instagram, increased our followers

by 15.1% more of audience in comparison to the previous year, increased our profile visits by 67.8%.

You can follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

More and more women continue to reach out to us online. Our webchat is an ongoing service and over the last year we supported 332 women that used the platform.

JOIN OUR TEAM

We often have new vacancies to join our team. We normally share the vacancies in our social media channels and our website. We encourage you to keep an eye out and send your application to any role that is appealing to you and for which you have the skills and experience. Please, remember that all our vacancies are open only to Latin American and other Black and Minoritised women. You can subscribe to our Newsletter to receive updates and information of vacancies!

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

We are constantly looking for positive and energetic Latin American and other Black and minoritised women to support us as volunteers. As a led by and for women of our community, our volunteer program is exclusively for Latin American and other Black and minoritised women.

This year we hosted 15 volunteers: 5 in our counselling service; 3 supported our VAWG Advice Centre; 2 in the areas of Research, Policy and Learning; 3 supported the community projects; 2 supported the areas of Communications and Translations .

Our volunteers benefit from a comprehensive induction and a number of core trainings to support their work at LAWA (and beyond!). They are also part of our social engagement activities (as/when possible) and are always welcomed in our offices and through our remote channels for support, supervision and companionship.

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Volunteers at LAWA



Diseño Gráfico
www.veronicaposada.com
 @veronicaposadaalvarez

They play an important role supporting our service teams to keep delivering quality services and we are immensely thankful for their contribution!

Latin American language – Spanish or Portuguese, and we request a minimum commitment of 6 months (8 months for counselling volunteers).

This is the feedback some of our volunteers have shared:

“Volunteering at LAWA has increased my knowledge of domestic abuse both within and outside of the Latin American community in London. It has made me more understanding and sympathetic towards other women suffering. It has also instilled in me a longing to continue advocating towards women’s rights more broadly”

“The best experience occurred throughout my volunteering journey and consisted of hearing the gratitude in service users’ voices after receiving our support”

We seek skills in different areas for different roles, thus we accept different professional profiles. It is preferable that you speak English and at least one

THESE ARE SOME OF THE AREAS IN WHICH YOU COULD SUPPORT US:

- Case Work Support
- Community Engagement
- Translation and Interpreting
- Communication & social media
- Counselling -you must be trained as a counsellor-

Check our website to download the application form and find out more information.



CLICK OR SCAN

LAWA Annual Report 2021/2022

WITH THANKS TO

- Henry Smith
- Rosa Fund
- Imkaan
- The National Lottery
- Trust for London
- City Bridge Trust
- BBC Children in Need
- Islington Council
- Hackney CVS
- Ministry of Justice
- MOPAC
- Comic Relief
- Impact on Urban Health
- DLUHC

**ALL OUR INDIVIDUAL DONORS
 ALL OUR SISTER ORGANISATIONS AND PARTNERS**