

POLICY & ADVOCACY NEWS

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Developing Community Researchers at the University of Birmingham (UoB)

Working with IRiS, and Lisa Goodson coordinating UoB's Community Research (CR) Program; Baobab Women's Project hope to upskill a group of Community Researchers (CR's) aligning their research capacity with that of other CR active organisations like Brushstrokes and Ashiana Community Projects. Both of which now have teams of CRs trained and accredited to Level 3 in research methods through the Community Practitioner Research Program (CPRP).

In partnership with UoB, Baobab has effectively managed groups of Community Researchers on different projects for over 10 years.

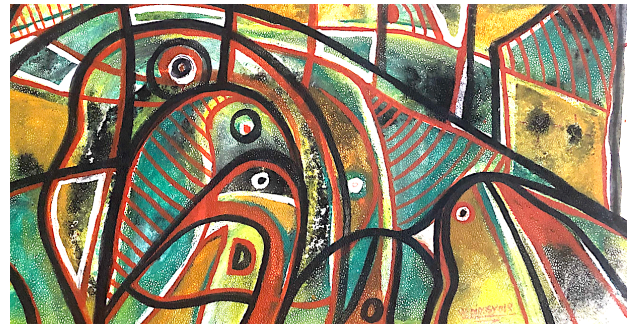
Despite this success, UoB has never had the financial means to offer accredited training to a group of service users. Being able to upskill a team of women at Baobab supports the UoB's key mission of building research capacity across key NGOs in Birmingham and beyond.

Baobab have 14 women with lived experience keen to attend this training, learning new skills and potentially enabling them to identify and carry out research that is relevant to them and their communities. Many women have been involved with Baobab for years, as advocates, interpreters, group members and on the management board. There is a huge potential for growth in this area.

Lisa Goodson & Sarah Taal

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Project Update

In the last 6 months casework continues to be abundant and challenging. The complex cases that highlight the need for improving policy implementation in practice continues.

Our end of project report was finalised this December, making recommendations for change around the identified themes that have permeated our work. In preparing our report we collaborated with Pip Mcknight from Birmingham University who's editing the text and improving our policy asks. It is being designed and will be published early in 2024.

In the last 6 months we have found that many women, previously waiting up to 5 years for a substantive interview, are being interviewed and are receiving positive decisions on their cases. This is a breathe of fresh air for us all, and alleviating a lot of mental distress associated with waiting. It is however bringing new challenges when granted protection with the transition period, especially for those not given their correct documentation. A small number of women are finding move on benefits and housing delayed, but are still facing evictions from SERCO, the local asylum support provider.

We have been to regional stakeholder, university and voluntary sector groups, continuing to build positive links to other people and projects.

Author: Sarah Taal



Policy Areas Focused on

Our project provided casework to 81 women on the policy areas below since it started, in the last 6 months we advocated with 37 women.

Gender Issues in Asylum Claims

Nearly every woman we meet has experienced gender based violence (GBV). The retraumatization of re-telling their story for protection claims, or being subject to further abuse when destitute remains a core focus of our end of project report.

Destitution

We worked with 25 destitute women homeless, facing eviction, or evicted from Home Office accommodation.

Legal Representation

We assisted 35 women with legal issues. Quality representation is the biggest challenge women face. Many former legal aid firms we have worked with are now only taking private cases. Women are being left to represent themselves. We are closely working with TACTIC and Hope Projects to assist with protection claims.

Asylum Accommodation

Ending support without correct documentation is the biggest issue with asylum support, the normal dispersal, and delays to requests remain. We assisted 14 women with asylum support problems this period.

Mental Health Access

We worked with 18 women and mental health support. Referring many directly to counsellors as NHS services do not materialise.

PhD Research on Care Networks

As a PhD student at the Anthropology Department of University College London, since September 2023, I have been carrying out fieldwork in London, Birmingham and Wolverhampton for my research project on networks of care and support among asylum-seeking women in the UK. I'm particularly interested in how women awaiting a decision on their asylum application come together in solidarity and collectively find ways to navigate their lives in new communities, and am keen to learn more about the ways in which they build friendship through their involvement in education.

Baobab is one of my field sites. Every Wednesday, I conduct participant observation for my PhD research as an education coordinator at Baobab, connecting women with learning opportunities. My role has actually been more eclectic than expected, as the needs of service users are vast and varied. I have learnt so much from Sarah, Bridget and Mireille, as well as the women who come to the drop in service, about the challenges they face during asylum – whether it's delays in receiving support from the Home Office, difficulties with access to legal aid or healthcare – and the solutions that the team comes up with quickly, to ensure that every woman is promptly equipped with all that they need to lead a rich, resilient life.

What has been particularly striking and relevant to my project is how the women who attend the drop in often end up helping one another. For example, while we work with one woman to fill in a Home Office document, another service user who doesn't know her might help to keep an eye on her children. At other times, a service user might help to translate for another woman from the same country, if they attend the same drop in. These are just some of small gestures of generosity and togetherness that I have witnessed at Baobab, which go far in resisting the often chaotic and unpredictable legislative changes introduced to the asylum process.

I hope to deepen my relationships with women at Baobab, collaborating on my research with them in a way that prioritises inclusivity and social justice.

Amandas Ong



Community Advocacy

We have opened a new drop in service at Jericho Foundation to work alongside our advice line, as the main points of access for women to get support. To get an appointment women need to call 07847 271022, or drop into Jericho (term time only) Wednesdays between 10am-1pm. Or email advocate@baobabwomen.co.uk If we cannot help, we will refer to another agency.

Bridget does financial resilience empowerment work for newly settled women. Sarah does NRPF and asylum work for undocumented. Mireille works with women who have experienced domestic abuse and have NRPF. They are supported by volunteer community interpreter advocates speaking Farsi, Amharic, Arabic, Tigrinya, Albanian, Urdu and Hindi, as well as student volunteers on placement.

Accounts Team

Our accounts worker Talhatou is working with Third Sector Accountancy on improving our financial planning and processes. She continues paying destitution grants, volunteer expenses, as well as working on CMWH funding and budgets.

Development Work

Beth and Sheva funded by [Rose Rise](#) are focused on organisational development work.

Beth has brought in new funds, giving feedback on ongoing grants as well as improving our administration and processes. We are now a registered living wage employer.

Sheva has recruited new members to our board of Directors, through an engaging workshop session. Directors will be finalising our strategic plan within the next 6 months. She continues skilling up women with lived experience and meets directly with women at our Wednesday drop in to develop a Baobab membership and get feedback on services.

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News

Bibby Stockholm: Asylum seeker, 27, who died on barge identified as Leonard Farruku

Seddon, from [BBC News](#) reports on Leonard Farruku, an Albanian asylum seeking man who died aboard the Bibby Stokholm on 12 Dec 23. The death has led to campaigners asking for a independent investigation, who have wider concerns about conditions on the barge.

Supreme Court ruling end of the line for Rwanda policy

The [Law Society](#), 15 Nov 23 issued a press release that: *'The Supreme Court, the highest court in the United Kingdom, today ruled the government's policy to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda is unlawful, backing the Court of Appeal's judgment.'*

PM remarks on Supreme Court Judgement: 15 November 2023

Rishi Sunak on the 15 Nov 23 said *'I do not agree with this [Supreme Court Judgement] decision, but I respect and accept it... We have been working on a new International Treaty with Rwanda... Ensuring that people cannot further delay flights bringing systemic challenges in our domestic courts... the Rwanda policy is a necessary deterrent... it is important that the Supreme Court today confirmed... that removing asylum seekers to a safe third country is lawful.'*



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