



West London Equality Centre 2020-21 Annual Report



*Advancing
equality and
humanity
for all*



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About us

Established in 1963, the Southall International Friendship Association was formed by the local community in opposition to the racism ethnic minorities faced. Through the formation of Ealing borough in 1965, Race Relations Act, numerous name changes over decades, the essence of the organisation still remains the same: supporting vulnerable members of the community through the expertise of our volunteers.

As a charity the West London Equality Centre's (WLEC) public benefit includes the poor and disadvantaged. Ealing ranks as the 3rd most ethnically diverse borough in London. 70% of births in Ealing in 2010 were to mothers who were born outside the UK. Due to such language barriers that many migrants face, they often struggle with daily living. This can include dealing with the council, private landlords and making applications for visa/citizenship. Material deprivation is also a common feature for most of our cases. Trust for London (2020) found that the number of evictions and unemployment in Ealing is above the London average.

Therefore, what exists is a deficit in protection for the vulnerable. There is an existence of a cyclical problem whereby clients face a legal issue, but can't afford to seek legal advice or understand the gravity of their circumstances, which in turn worsens their circumstance. Thus, leading to fall into more legal problems.

Due to cuts in legal aid, many people are left stranded. This is where our diverse staff and volunteers come into play. The range of our services also varies greatly. Staff are trained in a number of legal areas including hate crime, EUSS applications, tenancy evictions and council matters.

Working at WLEC, you will often hear the term the 'growth mindset'. There is a strong emphasis on the development of our volunteers. The legal clinic opens its doors to those who seek such guidance. Having also faced discrimination and social deprivation, our volunteers view WLEC as a 'safe space'. Most of our volunteers are students from the University of West London, however we also have skilled volunteers from a number of backgrounds, whom we deeply rely on for their support.



“Our work targets the poor and disadvantaged, and the newly arrived”



Areas we serve



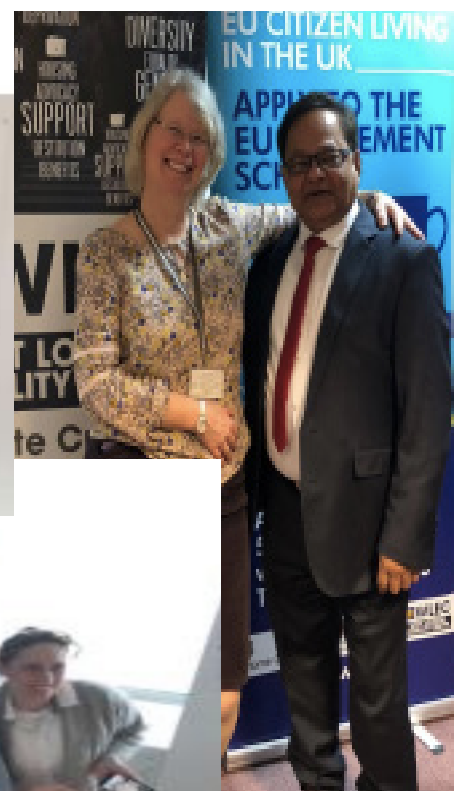
Remembering Ricky

In 2020, the former CEO Ricky Singh sadly passed away to the Coronavirus. A mentor, friend, and leader to current and former staff and volunteers at WLEC. His departure created a vacuum that will never be filled. Ricky's involvement within the community is a testament to his legacy. WLEC's strength today largely stems from this. This page is dedicated to Ricky Singh.

"Ricky and I until March that year would often sit by his desk in our office, discussing something or other, and both have tears in our eyes with pride when volunteers would pop their heads in to ask us a question and we could see how inspired and motivated they were helping people resolve their issues." - Babara Karayi

"I look forward to dedicating my license as solicitor to... Ricky." - Achelous Obi

"Ricky's hard work and dedication to WLEC will never be forgotten by all who had the privilege and pleasure of knowing him." - Hilary Panford



Director and chair reports

Director report - Edmund Akeju - *It is with a mixture of emotions that I present you the WLEC annual report for the year 2020/21 in the capacity of director of the organisation. From joining this organisation as a volunteer law student several years ago, I am proud of the tremendous work that WLEC does in our community; in the advocacy for equality and human rights for the disadvantaged, challenging discrimination, deprivation and destitution in our interventions, assisting and supporting vulnerable people in the fight for individual rights, helping to positively impact outcomes and overturn adverse decisions.*

I also rue the seismic disruption to the organisation caused by the death of our beloved director, Ricky Singh, in March 2020. I believe I speak for everyone in the organisation in saying that this was a particularly heavy blow, and one that we would rather not have experienced given a choice. If it were within human powers, we would move earth and mountains to see Ricky remain here and present, such was the value he represents to us all. WLEC owes a lot to his dynamic leadership; his vision and passion has seen us through some significantly difficult phases of our recent history. We miss him every day.

Our human resources in volunteers and core staff, with varying skill sets, are essential to the services we deliver. Our volunteering programme has continued to be an extremely successful model providing opportunities for candidates to be trained and up-skilled in a busy legal environment under the supervision of highly qualified legal professionals.

Quite importantly, our work and volunteering model extends much more beyond the work experience. I see it as being intrinsic to not only developing the next generation of Rickys, but also in providing that important entry access to the legal profession for our student volunteers.

I have seen this model work in providing support to unemployed young people, helping them to build key skills of teamwork, confidence, communication, and meeting targets. Thereby, helping them in going on to secure paid employment roles following their time with WLEC. My vision is to see this continue, increasing our capacity with fully qualified professionals organically grown within WLEC.

While largely we are in a good place, full credits to my preceding directors. I am thankful to Barbara Karayi for her fantastic job in steadying the ship. Our employed staff numbers have increased in line with the funded projects that we undertake, solely or in collaboration with partner organisations, such as the EU Settlement Scheme [EUSS] project for vulnerable people, the Help Through Crisis [HTC], the Private Tenancy Advice Service, [PTAS] and our bespoke Hate Crime advice and caseworking support service now extended to cover Ealing, Hillingdon, and Hounslow boroughs.



I recognise the immediate challenges at hand, not least in ensuring appropriate office space accommodation is secured; this is quite essential to our operational model, in servicing clients' needs, meeting project deliverables, ensuring continuity in building capacity and training needs. I see this as an immediate priority. My vision for the organisation is to continue to harness and stand on the shoulder of the many years of collective experience, built on a long history of service delivery to disadvantaged members of all ethnicities in our catchment area, and ensuring that WLEC continues to deliver high quality casework and advice in line with our AQS Quality Mark accreditation.

I recognise and thank immensely our board of trustee members who have shouldered enormous responsibilities over the years and the decisions taken to ensure continuity of the work. Huge thanks also to our corporate funders, The National Lottery Community Fund, Trust for London, Henry Smith Charity. I am also thankful for individual supports and the University of West London; our dedicated staff and volunteers, past and present, whose contributions have been instrumental to the work we do. This is our enduring strength and confidence for the future years.

Chair report - Ian Potts - *In this my final report I wish to thank Barbara Karayi for acting as interim Director for the last year. She had stated that she did not wish to continue in the post indefinitely and since the year end we have appointed a new Chief Executive. Our financial year 2020/1 has shown a net surplus of £48,051 (2020 £67,660). For this I would like to thank Ms Karayi and our new treasurer Ms Caroline Lumb.*

Funding this year has come largely from the Big Lottery Fund's Hate Crime Project, Help Through Crisis and the EU Settlement Scheme which has been extended twice, also the grant for our core provision from the Henry Smith Charity. We would like to thank all these contributors for supporting our work. Throughout the year we were unable to provide our face to face services and as last year provided services by phone and internet. Since the year end the University has provided us with an office space but we can't have clients or volunteers in there.

Former acting director report - Barbara Karayi

We have survived an anxious and sadness filled pandemic year at WLEC, against the odds, but being an amazing team, we are still here, and in a better state than ever, and since April back in person. The space we have within UWL now is considerably smaller and it has been a challenge to timetable staff, volunteers, clients so as to keep in mind social distancing, mask wearing and testing regimes.

There were times during the lockdown when I drove to people's home to drop off office chairs, laptops etc, or where we have met clients in cafes for signatures, or had to go to check out an illegal eviction, never alone of course.

Despite these issues we helped over 3000 people via Help Through Crisis, our links to the Somali community via Ali, the EU Settlement Scheme, the Hate Crime Support Service, which had a special dispensation allowing us to use staff and funding for general Covid relief work.

We would not be such a team and be able to show such strength in adversity without the motivation and inspiration and the training we had from Ricky, and the loyalty show to WLEC by some key practitioner volunteers, eg Johanna Cargill, Jo de Souza, Rebecca Okoria-Sanni and Bernard Andonian, and lastly the continuity and back up provided by Trustees who had to make some quick decisions, and regularly turn up to our weekly training zooms. I am very happy that a new director has been appointed from within WLEC, Edmund Akeju, as we are a truly special team, which demands respect.

Our new treasurer Caroline Lumb started at exactly the right time when we had to switch everything to online, which she was familiar with, and provided much help and support with funding applications.

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Special thanks needs to be given to Ealing Council who funded some laptops, Ealing and Hounslow Community Voluntary Service (EHCVS) for advice and assistance, the National Lottery which allowed our funding to be used generally and then refunded our bigger and better Hate Crime Project, the Trust for London who allowed us to defer a project, the Henry Smith Charity for refunding our core work, improving lives via the “Financial Inclusion, Rights and Entitlements” and the “Accommodation/Housing support” priorities. Further, our consortium partners have been incredibly flexible as we had to adjust our ways of working. Ealing Law Centre and EHCVS are also acknowledged

Volunteer statements

The pandemic has seen much suffering, but nevertheless our volunteers have persevered, and have gained a wealth of knowledge and experience throughout the year. Below is a compilation of statements of what our volunteers have contributed and received from WLEC.

Florin Dragan - *It is through WLEC that I learned about Immigration law and the OISC, the entity which regulates its legal advisors to provide Immigration advice and services. After weekly training and much support from colleagues, I became accredited as a legal advisor with the WLEC. I even had the opportunity to secure a role as a Legal consultant (Immigration Law) which now allows me to do what I love and work remotely whilst still studying my post-graduate degree. WLEC also gave me the opportunity to network and make friends. I am now an expert in Immigration law and regulated to do what I love due to this amazing charity.*

I personally had the opportunity to advise upon and help with numerous EU settlement cases as well as non-EU family visas. As a team of volunteers, we often conduct interviews with vulnerable people and advise them on their circumstances whether it is a simple benefit check or assistance with a complicated immigration application. Other colleagues and I also put our knowledge of various languages to good use and act as interpreters to people who have limited English. The WLEC's diversity is what makes it such a great charity as we can communicate with and assist clients from all walks of life.

Haider Ali- *I am a student of law at University of West London. I chose to volunteer with West London Equality Centre to gain legal work experience and to contribute to my society.*

In this duration I have learnt how to effectively communicate to the clients, handle phone calls made by the different clients with different issues. I am also grateful for having the opportunity to shadow my senior colleagues in dealing with the clients in face to face sessions. These face to face sessions with different clients with different legal issues introduced me to effective communication and client dealing as a legal professional.

I am also acquiring the ability to manage confidential information. The foremost the WLEC team is very supportive, and the weekly training session has helped me gain more knowledge in the legal sector.

Kelly Johnson - *During my time at WLEC, I have developed my writing skills through drafting letters as well as my communication skills through meeting with clients. I have also gained so much confidence through the support and mentorship of the senior advisors at WLEC. I have learnt a lot through each week's training which has included discrimination, benefits, safeguarding and housing presentations. I have worked on a few cases including housing, employment and benefits matters. In a benefits claim matter, the client had been incorrectly assessed as no longer qualifying for benefits and I drafted an appeal to her mandatory reconsideration.*



This matter gave me an insight into the common failings of the benefits system in the UK. I am very grateful to have been given the chance to run my own cases early on. I am currently a third year law student at the University of West London, being involved in multiple extra-curriculars at the university, and I also work part-time alongside volunteering.

Leonardo Ferrando - *I chose to volunteer with WLEC as I had previously volunteered and I had had a very rich and pleasant experience. I have experienced what it will be like at an actual work office, which is something which cannot be taught in any classroom. The experience here is invaluable and, through the support of my colleagues, I have been experiencing accelerated learning from day 1.*

All the cases I have worked on have brought to me more knowledge, whether it is housing or employment, I have learnt and applied the key legislation to proceed with a case. Every day here is a day where I learn something new. Whether it is interpersonal skills or the law itself, I have learnt and developed in more ways than one.

I am currently seeking out experience to project me into a legal role. I am fully intentioned to start studying to be a solicitor when the time comes.



Thanks to the solicitors I met and their supports I worked through some difficult cases, which seemed at first impossible.

This experience strengthened me, at first, I was only answering phone calls, but once I adjusted from numerous mistakes I had real conversations, dealt with multiple issues that boosted my communication, writing and analysis skills. However, despite the difficulties, what made me happy to be in the center was when people who came for help left with a smile. Just the fact that we were able to help lift their spirits by working together made me feel grateful inside that I had the chance to volunteer here.

I am now in my third year of study, more motivated than ever, and ready to continue to overcome the obstacles that will come my way. Thanks again Ricky for encouraging me to reveal my potential. I will use everything you have taught me to make my life successful.

Jaida Osei - *I chose to volunteer with the West London Equality Centre because I liked the areas that you focused on and wanted to expand my knowledge in these areas especially as I am studying law.*

I believe that volunteering here compliments my law degree and gives me the opportunity to have real experiences that I can grow from. I have learned how to talk to clients over the phone and in person, and how meetings are conducted. Every case is different and a couple of cases that I have worked on have been complicated. I have learned to always be thorough when asking questions, so that the matter is clear, and we can figure out what claims need to be made and by when.

The West London Equality Centre has helped me develop as it has helped with my research and communication skills. It has also boosted my confidence, from talking to and meeting with clients on a regular basis. I am currently a student, in my second year of law.



Iquo Okon- WLEC has put into place a best practice policy. At least that is how I view it. In order to assist the volunteers, we have a booklet which is the guideline to use, in how to meet and greet clients and also how to take telephone enquiries from clients and the general public at large. This is the information gathering exercise.

We also have very helpful qualified experienced advisers, who help to navigate us through and around the workings of a legal environment and a charitable organisation such as ours.

We sit in on active cases, we are encouraged to read case files, have feedback question and answer sessions and the advisers take an interest in our general wellbeing. As such, they instill in you the desire to learn, to be curious about matters and how to go about resolving unexpected legal issues that may arise.

Grace P.P.Emmanuel- I decided to volunteer with the West London Equality Centre (WLEC) towards the end of my first year of studying Law at the University of West London. I had been told by my peers and my lecturers what an amazing and truly hands on experience volunteering here would be and boy, were they right! Volunteering these past few months really illuminated to me the struggles people face and the realities of the lives others live. Answering phone calls and attending client interviews where people would discuss the injustices they had faced or just simply ask for help reminded me, once again, of the reason why I am studying law to fight for those who can't fight for themselves.

In addition to these client calls and interviews, the weekly Zoom calls hosted by the centre to provide training as well as discuss current human rights issues allowed me develop numerous transferable

skills and also be aware of the ongoing problems people around the world face. Above all, volunteering at WLEC has allowed me to build my confidence and belief in myself and abilities, and for that, I will always be grateful.

Bernard Andonian - I chose to volunteer for WLEC because of the close connection of its legal branch, the Community Advice Programme (CAP), with UWL. As a student of the university between 1972-1975, it was important for me to return to the community of West London, which had served me so well, with any voluntary legal advice and assistance that I could give.

During the past 11 years as a volunteer and some what shorter as a Trustee of WLEC, I have learnt much about human nature and endurance, in terms of the sufferings of others and yet their ability to smile and to appreciate and return kindness. I would like to think that during this period of service I have been of help to other volunteers and clients of CAP, many of whom are vulnerable and hang on to every word of our advice, and in many cases, we are their only source of contact and support. Finally, we are all on a perpetual learning curve. I learn daily new skills and tactics at work in the city as a consultant solicitor, and try to import those ideas as volunteer and trustee at WLEC.

Luca Petrone - Being a part of the WLEC for the past three years has been an incredibly rewarding and educating experience. From the moment I joined as a volunteer in late 2018 as an undergraduate student I was presented with the opportunity to learn from an incredible group of people who immediately made me feel comfortable and a valuable member of the organisation.

Not only does the WLEC carry out incredible work for those who need it most in the local community but I believe everyone who has been either a volunteer or staff here will agree with me when I say that the WLEC represents a special place for all of us. When it comes to my personal and professional development, the WLEC has nurtured me in every sense possible and allowed me to gain valuable experience which is hard to come by for young and undergraduate students nowadays. But what is most important is that it enabled me to participate and contribute to what this organisation does best, looking after its community and helping the most vulnerable.



I have now recently graduated in Politics and International Relations with First Class (Hons.) and also found employment and I thank everyone who is part of this organisation as it undoubtedly has played an essential role in all my recent achievements and developments.

Elizabeth Salmon - *I am so excited and happy to be back at WLEC, and to be able to contribute to the ongoing legacy of community service that I was first introduced to in 2013 as an LPC graduate and volunteer. I relish the opportunity to campaign and use the law as a tool to assist the victims of hate crime and promote community cohesion.*

It is a source of great pride that I am able to build on the legacy of work started by our late Director Ricky Singh. These past 20 days in the role of Anti-hate crime co-ordinator have been a fascinating change of pace and allowed me to scratch the surface of a deep and wide ranging area of law. I cannot wait to see what the year ahead will bring.

Project Updates

Private Tenants Advice Service

The Private Tenants Advice Service is the West London Equality Centre's newest project. It is funded by Trust For London for a period of 2 years.

The Project began in January of this year and is aimed at assisting residents of Ealing with problems concerning their tenancy agreements, support with disrepair issues, helping to recover deposits, providing advice where a Section 21 Notice has been issued, and assisting with filling in court forms.



However, the Project got off to a slow start, as we faced many difficulties starting in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were forced to provide our services over the phone and online using Zoom, as a result of the lockdowns and inability to see clients in person.

Despite our setbacks, we have still managed to help and make a difference in the lives of the local community.

Please see below for a summary of some of the cases we have had this year.

Mr A

Mr A was illegally evicted during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and he was denied access to his belongings by his landlord. He subsequently became homeless during a time where assistance was incredibly limited. Mr A's mental health deteriorated while he was street homeless and he was sectioned under section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983. He spent several months in hospital recovering and commenced an eviction claim against his previous landlord when he was released. Mr A was provided with very detailed and valuable advice from two of our very experienced advisers. We also provided support to Mr A when he unfortunately became homeless again after being illegally evicted a second time.

Ms K

Ms K lives in a private rented flat with her husband and two very young children. Ms K contacted us, as there was mould in the property, which was severely affecting the health of her youngest child. Ms K's son was allergic to the mould, so that he needed to be rushed to hospital every time he had contact with it. We provided advice and guidance to Ms K, so that she was able to discuss the mould problem with her landlord.

Ms K subsequently found out that the mould in the property was caused by a manufacturing fault with the windows. Concerned about the health of Ms K's child, we contacted Ealing Council and submitted a homelessness application.



Ms K was referred to Property Regulation by Ealing Council and her landlord was served with an Improvement Notice to replace all windows in the property, so that the conditions in the property could improve for the family.

Mr S

Mr S lives in a private rented house with his wife and four young children. Mr S sought our help as he was in dispute with his landlord over disrepair in the property. The property had a leak in the ceiling which affected electrics in the property, a broken cooker and oven, broken living room furniture and no working heating. We conducted a home visit to inspect the disrepair and contacted the client's landlord to remind them of their legal obligations and duties. However, the client's landlord either denied the disrepair or blamed Mr S and his family for causing them. We then reported Mr S's landlord to Property Regulation,

as they would be able to serve an Improvement Notice for mandatory repairs in the property.

Mrs W

Mrs W sought our advice after she ran into difficulties with Ealing Council following a homelessness application. Mrs W contacted Ealing Council after she, her husband and two children were evicted from their home. During the application process, Mrs W informed Ealing Council that she needed to remain in the borough for her children's school. However, Mrs W and her family were placed out of borough and into a private rented flat. From the moment they moved in, Mrs W and her family encountered problems with the property, namely the property developed a massive gas leak and almost had an electrical fire. The property also had damaged floorboards, which caused noise disturbance and strained relationships with neighbours. The numerous problems in the property coupled with being away from their support network was too much for Mrs W's family, caused Mrs W and her daughter to develop mental health conditions.

Mrs W had sought help from Ealing Council in the form of a suitability review in the hope of being moved back to Ealing. However, Ealing Council refused to conduct the suitability review, but WLEC intervened on behalf of Mrs W and reminded them of their legal obligations. Ealing Council denied having any responsibility for providing Mrs W and her family with a suitable home. We were, therefore, forced to commence an application to challenge Ealing Council's decisions under section 204 Housing Act 1996. - Ezra

Help Through Crisis

Help Through Crisis (HTC) is into the first year of the three-year renewed project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The HTC project is now delivered by ECVS, Ealing Law Centre and WLEC. The role of the Crisis Navigators continues to comprise of supporting users of the Trussell Trust food banks across Ealing by providing an outreach face to face service at the food banks to residents facing hardships in their day to day lives.



A change that has been made to the project is the introduction of the HTC advice and support hub. The aim of the advice and support hub is to provide a one-stop source for a client where a host of services will be offered to them by various organisations. It is held on a Wednesday at West Ealing Library where ECVS is based. There are currently 2 – 3 organisations involved. The Advice and Support hub is still in the piloting stages with the goal being to branch out and introduce more organisations. We are able to refer HTC clients to the hub as well as set up our own base there and see clients.

Ealing food bank also identified a need for a form filling role as there was an overwhelming number of clients who were struggling to complete an assortment of form applications themselves. They have managed to secure separate funding for this role which has been offered to the WLEC crisis navigators to help with clients engaged onto the HTC programme.

There are currently three Crisis Navigators from WLEC who work on the HTC project. Mojdeh Aghili, Abdi Ali and Ranjini Yoganathan.

Each of the WLEC Crisis Navigators covers one food bank a week. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, from December 2020 until March 2021, Crisis Navigators were providing a phone service rather than attending the food banks. The service was proving to be even more crucial during these periods. For example, there had been a rise in clients significantly affected by the pandemic/lockdowns. Many of these clients had never previously used the food bank and were doing so as a result of either job loss or low-paying furlough. This meant some were entirely new to the benefits system and required assistance in making benefit applications. Already low-income households were placed at a particular disadvantage, such as families with young children who cannot afford electronic devices. We therefore saw a surge in clients needing help procuring a device when schooling was being done virtually, as their child's education was at risk.

In April 2021, the CN's returned to the food banks and were receiving a mixture of enquiries. Amongst these enquiries, the following have been most common:

- 1) Applications for a Discretionary Housing Payment as a result of rent arrears.
- 2) Property disrepair cases where landlords have failed to action the disrepair and have used the lockdowns as a defence.
- 3) Pre-settled status and the effect on entitlement to benefits.
- 4) PIP applications due to a deterioration in mental health.

Case study

Mrs VM first approached us for help at the Hanwell food bank. The client is a single mother with two very young children who lives in a one-bedroom flat. She is living in privately-rented accommodation which was sourced through Ealing Council. Mrs VM's monthly income was made up of UC and earnings from her part-time employment. Her primary language is Hindi and she struggled to communicate in English. The client heavily relies on her 12-year-old son to translate for her. The client's son would also regularly go to the food bank on his own to collect the food parcels for the family.

During the initial consultation with the client, we identified the following areas she required help with:

- 1) Debts in relation to utility and mobile phone bills.
- 2) Her son falling behind in school due to remote studying whilst lacking appropriate electronic devices
- 3) Signing up for free school meals for her 7-year-old daughter.



Support and outcomes

Initially the client filled out a budget sheet which revealed she was in energy arrears and her mobile costs were relatively high. When further querying this with the client, we established that during the period where Mrs VM's son was remote learning, Mrs VM had no wifi service which was why her mobile charges had increased. Through Mrs VM energy provider we managed to apply to Citizens Advice Plymouth for a financial award which would go towards clearing the energy arrears. The client offered to pay £140 towards the debt. We also assisted her in making an application for Ealing Councils Welfare Assistance Grant. Due to the client's language barrier, we wrote to her son's school on her behalf to make them aware of the family's circumstances and the difficulty the son was facing with remote learning. We also mentioned that the client's daughter was not receiving free school meals. Shortly after this, the client informed us that the school provided her son with a laptop and registered her daughter for free school meals. We also successfully managed to attain free student wifi for the client's son by applying on her behalf via the government website - Mojdeh and Ranjini

Hate Crime Project

It is gratifying that we have been able to continue our hate crime work having received further funding from the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). The NLCF were impressed by the methods used by the WLEC to inform and persuade the Metropolitan Police and Ealing Council (the Council) that hate crimes were significant in the Borough, and that the structures in place to assist victims were not fit for purpose. The second phase of the project will concentrate on replicating our achievements in Ealing throughout the West Area Basic Command Unit (BCU) which comprises Ealing, Hillingdon, and Hounslow. We will also continue to assist victims of hate crime by liaising with the Council and the police in order to sustain the improvements that have been made in identifying hate crimes and progressing them through the criminal justice system.

The second phase of the project, fortuitously, coincided with National Hate Crime Awareness Week during which we engaged with the public directly, with the intention of raising awareness, and our profile as the only organisation in the BCU that is able to offer legal assistance and support to victims of hate crime. During the first phase of the project our main concern was addressing the problem of low detection and prosecution in Ealing. Being part of the crime reduction structures in Ealing, via our membership of the Ealing Safer Partnership Board, we consistently brought hate crime to the attention of partners, highlighting the need to develop more appropriate responses to hate crime in the Borough.

It was clear that awareness of hate crime was low which resulted in fewer reports compared with some other boroughs, and the perception of the police, and the Council, was that hate crime was not an issue for the borough. Our aim was to change these perceptions, which we did by assisting victims of hate crime to liaise with the police and the Council, where appropriate, while also ensuring that they participated in progressing their cases. We also used test cases to highlight the failure of the police, and the Council, to recognise hate crimes and to address the careless application of hate crime laws by the CPS and/or the police, resulting in perpetrators not being prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The police are now approaching hate crime similarly to the way they deal with incidents of domestic violence making it easier for first response officers to establish whether a complainant has been a victim of hate crime. This is a welcomed improvement because officers will be obliged to record and investigate hate crimes regardless of whether or not they recognised the offence in the first instance.

With the co-operation of the police and the Council, we formed the Hate Crime Operational Group (HCOG) to raise the profile of hate crimes and improve reporting and prosecution.



We will now encourage, and assist, neighbouring boroughs within the West Area BCU to develop similar structures and establish common policies regarding the reporting and prosecution of hate crimes.

Hate crimes have increased after the Brexit vote and, again, following the Black Lives Matter campaign, and continues to rise. The West Area BCU is one of the larger Metropolitan policing areas in London and comprises a diverse population. In Hounslow, White British are in the majority but it also has the largest Sikh population in the BCU, and in London. In Ealing and Hillingdon, the majority of the population are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. It is important therefore that societal cohesion is encouraged to grow in the BCU and we intend to continue to make an important contribution to this process through the Hate Crime Project and in our work generally.

Hate crimes not only damage cohesion but they may also cause significant and long-lasting psychological damage to victims which can have a major impact on communities, making them withdrawn and isolated from the rest of society.

Hate reduces interaction between communities and creates divisions that results in retaliatory violence as well as an escalation in crime and disorder. Ensuring that residents are not made to feel afraid because of who they are is essential for the prevention of crime and the promotion of equality in the West Area BCU. It will never be a perfect world but hate crimes are so damaging to individuals and communities, as well as society generally, that they cannot be ignored or allowed to go unpunished.

Hate crimes are difficult to prosecute and victims are likely to be disappointed because perpetrators may not be punished to the extent of law, or at all. In England and Wales hate crimes have risen from 39,130 in March 2013 to 190,000 in March 2020 and continues to increase. Between the 1st January 2021 and the 31st March 2021, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) received 10,969 hate crime referrals resulting in 3,392 successful prosecutions which is a relatively small number compared to the reports logged.

The Office for National Statistics recorded 2 million incidents of anti-social behaviour in the year ending March 2021, an increase of 48% compared with the previous year. Of this number 8% believed that their experience was because of race or ethnicity. So, potentially, there could have been a further 160,000 hate crimes that may not have been captured by police because anti-social behaviour incidents are rarely linked to hate crimes. We have already alerted the Council and the police to incidents of anti-social behaviour involving hate crimes and we recently received a referral from the Council.

The support of the Community Fund has allowed the WLEC to tackle and challenge hate crime in the West Area BCU as never before, and we are grateful for their continued support.

EMPLOYMENT

During lockdown we saw very few hate crime clients but we continued to receive employment enquiries regarding discrimination in the workplace. Discrimination is more correctly identified as hate incidents because individuals are treated less favourably as a result of who they are, and nearly all the hate incidents we identified fell within the hate crime monitored strands (the protected characteristics that are monitored by the Home Office). Of course, these incidents also adversely affect victims in the same way as hate crimes, and we have seen many cases of long-term anxiety and depression following discrimination at work.

Most of our clients are on low salaries and are not able to obtain assistance via the no win no fee process because legal practitioners are unlikely to recover the costs of the litigation even if the claimant recovers compensation. Legal aid is available in discrimination cases but we have not found any solicitors who assist employees through this method, largely because it is very difficult to obtain.



Our task, as we see it, is to ensure we are able to present the claimant's case in a way that ensures we establish a reasonable cause of action that the respondent's legal advisers recognise as having substance. The added advantage of this approach are improved prospects of settlements, prior to the final hearing, and better chances of recovery for claimants who have suffered psychological harm because of discrimination.

We assist claimants to refer their complaints to ACAS and to draft their ET1 for submission to the Employment Tribunal. In all discrimination cases, a Preliminary Hearing (PH) will be scheduled to identify the issues to be decided at the final hearing. We have attended most PHs during lockdown as they have all been telephone hearings.

We advise all employment clients that we do not have the resources to attend final hearings which usually last, on average, four or six days. Unfortunately, it is difficult to refer these cases to organisations such as the Free Representation Unit because their policy is to only assist claimants when the final hearing is no longer than 3 days. It is therefore important for us to ensure that the claimants' cases are strong enough to encourage settlement.

During 2021 we have recovered over £113,000 in compensation for our clients and just over £100,000 for the period 2018-2020. The highest amount recovered for one client was £45,000.

Case 1

Our client X was employed by an energy company for 4 years and resigned and claimed constructive dismissal. He was promoted to the position of a meter installer, after training, and had been doing this for over a year prior to resigning.



We interviewed the client who said he was a victim of race discrimination and that this was the basis of his claim against the respondent. He had a difficult relationship with his manager but, having interviewed the client and taken various documents, it was clear that there was little evidence of race discrimination and, what there was, occurred more than 3 months prior, which meant he would be out of time to bring a claim based on race discrimination.

X told us that he was suffering from depression and anxiety as a result of work issues but this would not give rise to a discrimination claim because it seems he had not drawn this to the attention of the respondent when he resigned. It was difficult to see how he could build a case. We received a copy of an occupational health report compiled, prior to our client's resignation, and it was clear that his depression and anxiety was not just work-related stress, and it had lasted for longer than a year and was relevant to his resignation.

The source of our client's anxiety was related to his fear of making errors because of the gaps in his training which could potentially result in catastrophic events if he were to make a mistake. His anxiety rocketed because of this and the respondent had not done enough to address the gap in his training. His relationship with his manager was a contributory factor which was also recognised in the occupational health report. But the most important fact was that X had resigned because his manager had taken the decision to return X to his control, even though the occupation health report had recommended the removal of X from interacting with his manager while X was recovering. This amounted to indirect disability discrimination which was the basis of X's claim.

With our assistance the claim was settled recently and the claimant received significant compensation.

Case 2

This case was also settled this year and involved a transgender woman Y, who had been working for a charity as a support worker.

During her first 6 months of employment, she performed very well and was promoted following her probation because of the standard of her work. Unfortunately, soon after starting her new role she was outed by a member, or members, of staff and colleagues misgendered her on occasions as a result. It was clear that most of the staff discovered that she was transgender which was most disturbing for her because no one had ever questioned her gender in the past and she was treated, and accepted as female.

Y experienced a recurrence of mental health conditions and found it very difficult to face her colleagues without becoming stressed and anxious, and always fearing that someone would misgender her again. As a result, she failed to attend some training sessions and was reprimanded for this and, eventually, dismissed for not attending required sessions which were an important part of her role.



We identified disability discrimination as the focus of her claim, but there were also breaches of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the claimant's right to private life in terms of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Y was able to achieve a settlement with the Respondent because at the time of her dismissal they were aware of her disability and dismissed her anyway. The current case law demonstrates that dismissal in such circumstance will be deemed discriminatory and that the dismissal would be considered a detriment which meant that the Respondent would not succeed in defending the claim against them.

Y was delighted with the outcome and made a donation to the WLEC as a result.

We would like to welcome Elizabeth Salmon who has recently joined our team. Elizabeth knows the WLEC very well and she will be an asset to the project

- Paula Howell

Have Your Say

Introduction

The Have Your Say ("HYS") project is an international initiative funded by the European Union ("EU"). The project started in 2019 and the following countries are partners in the HYS project:

- 1) Italy*
- 2) Germany*
- 3) Sweden*
- 4) Hungary*
- 5) Spain*
- 6) France and*
- 7) The United Kingdom*

The HYS project is the second project that the West London Equality Centre has participated and been an active partner in.



What is the HYS project all about?

The Project focuses on both researching and creating new tools and activities that seek to reduce and remove misinformation and disinformation. The main subject is the EU, therefore in practical terms, the HYS initiative seeks to provide readers, educators and learners with effective and comprehensive resources on the EU.

The methodologies used and innovated during the first stages of the project can be reused and implemented in respect to other topics other than the EU. Therefore, this creates a method and approach that educators can use to highlight the importance of objective and factual learning rather than relying on opinion-based, subjective and misleading information.

The WLEC has created an Escape Room with a Virtual twist, allowing educators and learners alike to use and further develop their knowledge on the European Union and the United Kingdom alike.



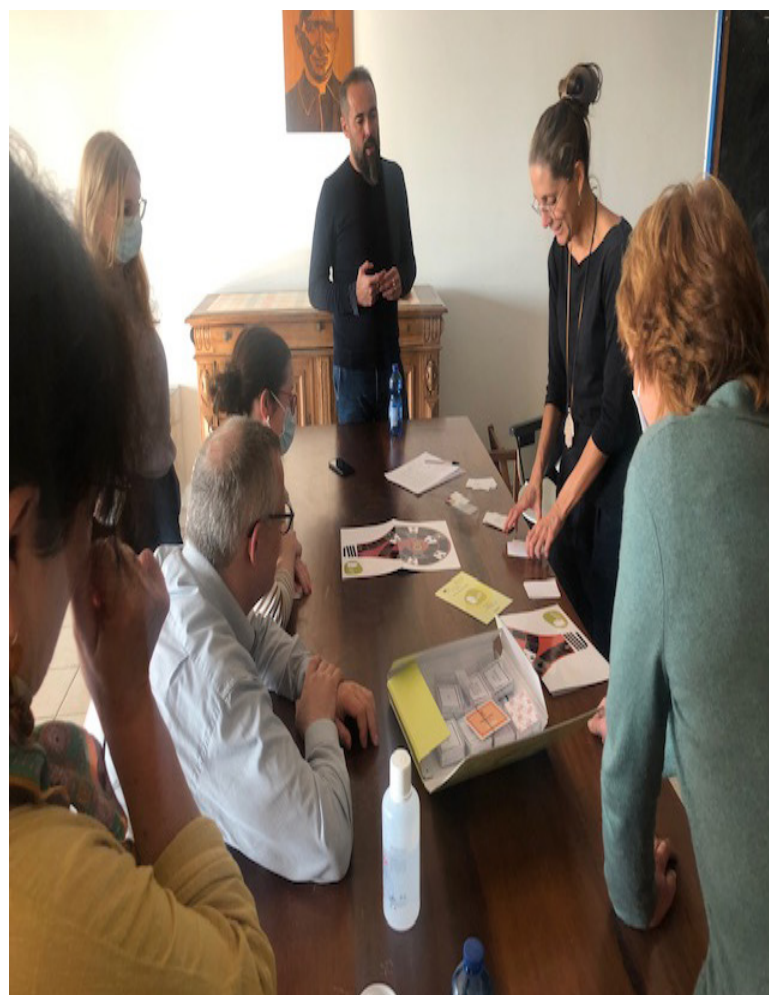
The project manager Joseph Karauli has worked closely with the above mentioned HYS partners in developing not only the Virtual Escape Room but the HYS initiative generally and has taken a proactive and leading role in ensuring the successful implementation of the project's goals.

Joseph Karauli is a Trainee Solicitor who has a background and knowledge in law, project management and education all of which he has utilised during HYS, providing the project and its partners with a unique, multi-dimensional and distinctive perspective.

Leading on, the HYS project thus far during the difficult time that is the global Covid-19 pandemic, many of our partner organisations, colleagues and their respective countries have suffered a great deal.

Despite the problems faced, we are pleased to announce that both the HYS partners and WLEC have worked throughout the pandemic and we endeavour to continue working hard to fulfil the HYS goals and objectives.

- Joseph Karauli



EUSS Project

West London Equality Centre has been running the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) project funded by the Home Office since June 2019 to help vulnerable EU citizens as well as their family members to settle in the UK after Brexit. The Scheme introduced by the Home Office enabled EU citizens and their families to continue living in the UK and thereby preserve their existing rights such as access to education, employment, benefits and NHS services. The Scheme has been open for those residing in the UK before the end of transition period on 31st of December 2020.

WLEC is committed to helping those most disadvantaged in our community to go through the process of the application. The vulnerable and at-risk EU citizens and their family members include victims of domestic violence and modern slavery; children living in care; homeless and rough sleepers; elderly and care home residents; gypsy, Roma & travelers' community people with disability, including serious mental health concerns; prisoners, BAME communities; and victims of trafficking.

After September 2020, the Home Office also recognized other vulnerabilities including, language difficulties of people who have recently arrived or do not speak English fluently. In addition, we also recognize other vulnerable groups such as family members living under the sponsorship of their EU citizen families who have abused and oppressed them, preventing them from making applications under the Scheme.

In the second year of the project commencing in March 2020, we have faced challenges caused by the Coronavirus pandemic and rearrange the way we were providing the service.

During the lockdown, it was challenging for us to progress with the project, as we had to cope with limited services provided by The Home Office, which also impacted the services we provide to our clients.

The first issue was that family members (FM) were unable to book appointments to give biometric details once they submitted their applications because all centres were closed due to the pandemic. The service only started to work again in late September 2020. The only applications we were able to proceed with were for Europeans who held current passports or biometric national ID cards, as well as FM with Biometric Residence Cards or Biometric Residence Permits (BRP). However, shortly after, the online application system was also suspended, the Home Office stopped receiving physical documents by post to confirm people's identity. Thus, we were only able to proceed with applications for European citizens with biometric documents, either passports or National ID cards, and FM with BRP cards. The only possible option to apply otherwise was under the Government App.

Social media became our most important tool to communicate, inform, and find people in need to be helped. Being part of numerous community groups on Facebook, we gained access to many clients. We were able to tap into Latin American community groups linked to European descendants, thereby helping a significant number of people. We also ran monthly webinars for Spanish speakers over the pandemic to bring information and support to those communities too.



We were unable to provide Face-to-face interviews so we had to offer telephone services and Whatsapp conference calls to reach as many people as possible. When restrictions were relaxed, we started meeting clients in open spaces like parks and coffee shops as it was impossible to proceed with the application without meeting them.

The last three months of the year were challenging because of the huge amount of people desperately trying to enter the UK before the 31st December 2020. Because of the flying restrictions, many people hurriedly came to the UK without prior planning to secure jobs to support their families or government support as new arrivals.

Applications made after the middle of December 2020 were taking longer to process due to the increased number of applications being made as a result of the pandemic.

The 1st of January 2021 saw new rules introduced by The Home Office for EU citizens. From then, only “close family members” could apply to join their EU family members in the UK. This means only children under 21, grandchildren, dependent parents, grandparents, and spouses can apply. Those who have arrived in the country after that date we’re no longer eligible to settle in the UK under the Scheme.

In June 2021, the project was extended for a further nine months in order to assist individuals who are considered ‘isolated’ to be able to submit late applications where there are reasonable grounds.

The ‘reasonable grounds’ for late applications include but are not limited to English language skills; limited computer literacy; parent, guardian or local authority failing to apply on behalf of a child; no internet access or simply being unaware of the requirement to apply. Therefore, we are able to continue to assist vulnerable persons needing to make applications. This will continue until the end of March 2022.

In total, we have managed to support 4658 individuals and completed 227 applications on behalf of clients. Our Facebook page has also provided information and support to over 10,000 people.

Case study

Mr FM, Miss. CM and Miss. LM

RE: Vulnerability: English language difficulties / Homelessness / Modern workplace slavery/ Younger child with severe health conditions / Lone parent with financial difficulties.

Mr FM first contacted us on 19/05/21 when he was referred by Brent Children Social Services. Mr FM is a citizen of Romania, and his two daughters Miss. CM and Miss. LM hold Moldavian passports.

Mr FM first arrived in the UK in 2007 and has been working in poor and near-slavery conditions since he arrived in the UK. He has limited English language skills.

In August 2020, Mr FM had to travel to Moldova to rescue his two daughters from an orphanage because the mother had been sentenced to 16 years in prison. In March 2021, Mr FM and his two daughters became homeless due to financial issues. Miss LM suffered from Juvenile Dermatomyositis, Arthritis and Interstitial LD. WLEC helped Mr FM and his two daughters to apply under the EUSS scheme. We discovered that that though Mr FM had previously been assisted in 2020 by another organisation, that application process was not completed.

As mentioned above, Mr FM had financial difficulties, so he was only able to book one biometric appointment and pay for Miss CM but was unable to do the same for Miss LM. WLEC contacted the resolution centre on two occasions to request additional time to allow Mr FM to book a second slot for the other daughter. However, on the 1st of September, we received information that LM’s application had been rejected as invalid.



Mr FM contacted us from Brent Social Services on the 16th of September 2021, as it appeared that the housing and services department were putting pressure on Mr FM to confirm his residency status.

We finally were able to submit Miss. LM's application on the 17th of September 2021, as a late application and gave reason as to why she was applying late. Her Biometric appointment was booked for the 8th of October.

On the 6th of October, Mr FM contacted us stating that Brent housing benefit was to close his housing benefit claim due to failure to prove the residency status of the family. We decided to contact the grant team again, asking for help on his behalf, as the family was at risk of homelessness and further deprivation.

Shortly after, Mr FM was finally granted settled status allowing the family to move on with their lives. This case took a total of 4 months and 6 days to resolve. It highlights the important work of the organisation under the EUSS project supporting vulnerable persons to access rights and overcome adversities

Mr R.B.- Vulnerability: Mental Health Condition.

Mr R contacted WLEC just a month before the deadline, as he was worried that if he don't get the EUSS status before 30 June 2021, he will no longer be able to stay in the UK, and his benefits will cease. Mr R suffers from serious mental health conditions and is under the care of local authorities.

When we started the application process for Mr R, we discovered that he had an application already in progress, however, we were unable to log in to that application, as he could not remember the telephone number or email address details used. Mr R told us that there was someone assisted him previously, but he was no longer in touch with them and did not have their contact details.

This required us to change his details to access that previous application and to complete it as necessary. Therefore, we contacted the resolution centre requesting a change of details, but we were informed that it might take up to 4 weeks to resolve.

This information caused a lot of stress and anxiety for the client due to his pre-existing mental health condition and the prospect of not submitting his application before the deadline. Fortunately, we achieved the required change of his login details within two weeks, and his application was continued.

During the process, the client was requested to provide residency evidence for the previous two years, but as he had struggles with maintaining paperwork and records, he was unable to evidence this. We were able to get around this problem by contacting his GP and requesting his medical records, as he had been under constant care NHS services for over 20 years due to his serious mental health condition. It took a while to hear back from the GP, but fortunately, we got all of the necessary records before the deadline and were able to submit the application within the date. - Alejandra and Julita

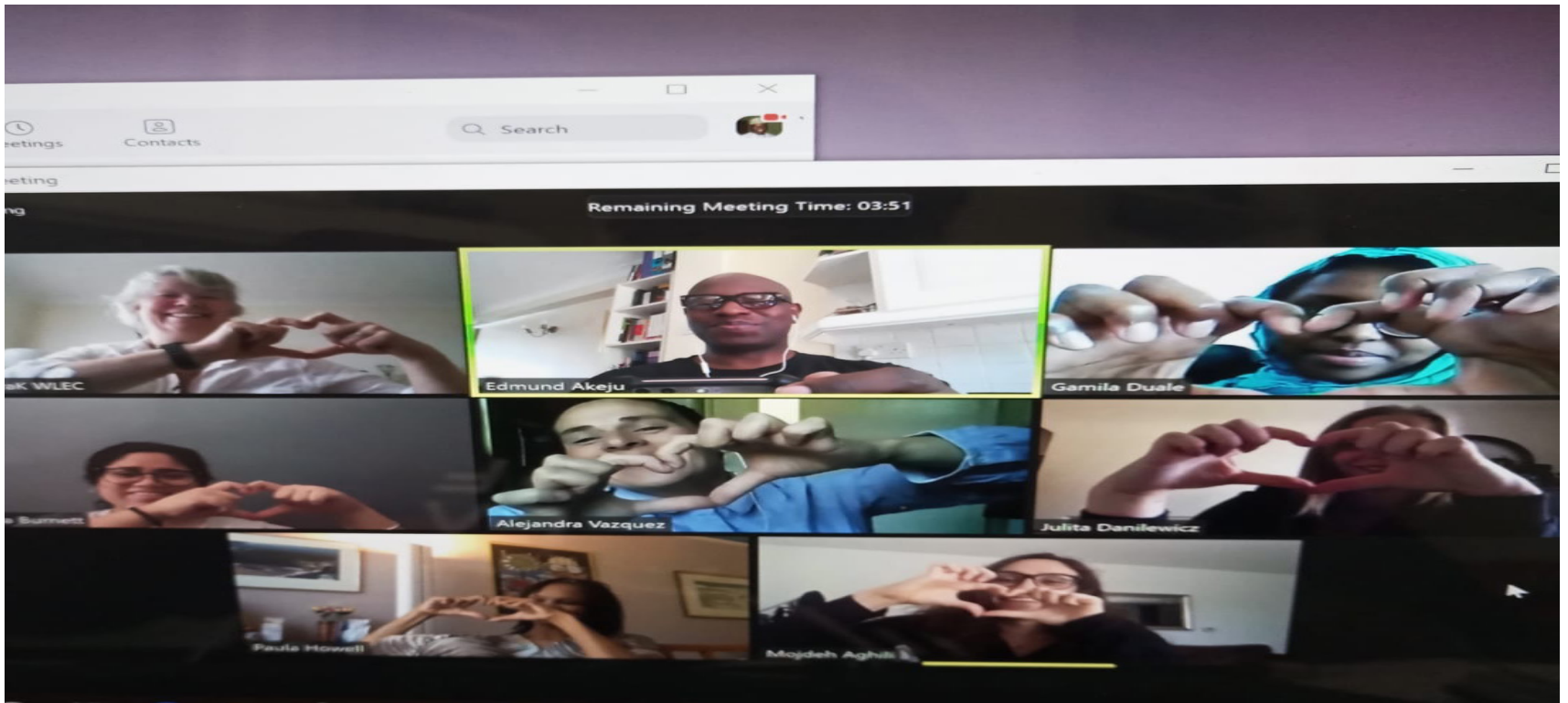


Covid- 19

The pandemic saw disruption to much of WLEC's activity, however like most of the world, the charity had to adapt in order to survive. Throughout lockdown, WLEC's operations had shifted virtually. Staff and volunteers were equipped with mobile phones and client databases to ensure a smooth transition. This guaranteed that the various projects continued to serve the community. Additionally, weekly training sessions on Zoom ensured that a cohesive unit was maintained.

Once restrictions had eased what had been noted was the increase in activity. This highlights the adaptability of the organisation. However, due to the nature of the work, it's vital that clients are advised face-to-face. Those who are referred to WLEC often lack access to a computer or mobile device that supports an effective online consultation. Therefore what has occurred is a gradual return to hosting client meeting at Villiers House.

Since April 2021, staff and Volunteers have also returned to the office. This quite importantly has enabled the team to engage and deal with client enquiries more effectively. This has ensured that WLEC can continue to service our clients and project commitments, while also keeping up with volunteer mentoring and development.



- staff zoom meeting during lockdown



Financial statements

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2021

	Notes	Unrestricted fund £	Restricted fund £	31.3.21 Total funds £	31.3.20 Total funds £
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible assets	10	1	440	441	867
CURRENT ASSETS					
Debtors	11	6,356	9,589	15,945	15,007
Cash at bank and in hand		117,353	79,503	196,856	108,516
		<u>123,709</u>	<u>89,092</u>	<u>212,801</u>	<u>123,523</u>
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	12	7,991	(59,251)	(51,260)	(10,459)
		<u>131,700</u>	<u>29,841</u>	<u>161,541</u>	<u>113,064</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS					
		<u>131,701</u>	<u>30,281</u>	<u>161,982</u>	<u>113,931</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES					
		<u>131,701</u>	<u>30,281</u>	<u>161,982</u>	<u>113,931</u>
NET ASSETS					
		<u>131,701</u>	<u>30,281</u>	<u>161,982</u>	<u>113,931</u>
FUNDS	13				
Unrestricted funds				131,701	64,403
Restricted funds				<u>30,281</u>	<u>49,528</u>
TOTAL FUNDS				<u>161,982</u>	<u>113,931</u>

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to charitable companies subject to the small companies regime.

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees and authorised for issue on and were signed on its behalf by:

.....
Ms C Lumb - Trustee

.....
Mr I M Potts - Trustee



DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	31.3.21 £	31.3.20 £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS		
Donations and legacies		
Donations	53,317	360
Grants	242,372	310,756
	<u>295,689</u>	<u>311,116</u>
Investment income		
Deposit account interest	239	542
	<u>295,928</u>	<u>311,658</u>
Total incoming resources		
EXPENDITURE		
Direct charitable activities		
Staff training	588	461
Project costs	11,846	12,129
Volunteer expenses	1,336	1,934
Travel expenses	4,573	-
Depreciation computer and office equipment	426	426
	<u>18,769</u>	<u>14,950</u>
Support costs		
Overhead costs		
Wages	186,481	185,172
Social security	15,503	15,662
Pensions	8,125	2,779
Operating leases - premises	6,000	6,000
Insurance	1,642	1,485
Telephone	1,519	1,830
Postage and stationery	253	3,934
Computer costs	-	278
Sundry expenses	147	385
Document storage	600	705
Printing costs	43	855
Professional fees	2,634	4,269
Training bursaries	300	-
Bank charges	161	158
	<u>223,408</u>	<u>223,490</u>
Governance costs		
Wages	2,400	2,300
Social security	300	258
Auditors' remuneration	3,000	3,000
	<u>5,700</u>	<u>5,558</u>
Total resources expended	<u>247,877</u>	<u>243,998</u>
Net income	<u>48,051</u>	<u>67,660</u>



Mr I. M.

*Potts, chair
(co-opted)*

*Mr K. Akuffo, vice-chair
(to 2022)*

Mr M Alam (to 2021)

Mr A. Ali (resigned 1.1.21)

Mr B. Andonian (to 2021)

Ms J. De Souza (to 2022)

Mr L. Gomez (co-opted)

Prof. P. John (to 2023)

Ms R Okoria-Sanni (to 2021)

Ms H. Panford (to 2023)

Ms E. Salmon (to 2023)

Ms P Walker (to 2022)

Council Appointees;

Cllr S. Kumar

Cllr A Raza

Cllr S. Woodroffe.



Volunteers

Paul Bradford; Elizabeth Salmon; Josephine De Souza; Patricia Walker; Sue Flemons; Johanna Cargill; Jyoti Kumar; Sandy Derbyshire; Raheema Yousuf Mohamoud; Abdi Ali; Ranjini Yoganathan; Luca Petrone Gomez; Mohammed Mateen Alam; Hawah Catherine Judith Kargbo; Olufemi Ademola Adeeko; Princy Thavarajah; Fatima Nurkic; Afia Konadu Morrison; Radek Kaleta; Gabija Grigaliunaite; Soumaya Eddridi; Aya Mohamed; Barbara Karayi; Balahl Khan; Joseph Karauli; Hilary Pandford; Kuljeet Dobe; Kwame Akuffo; Bernard Andonian; Zeline Campbell; Rebecca Okoria; Ahdiya Yaqubzada; Ana Camila Martinez; Marlena Gorska; Helen Chuter; Ashkan Mahdizadeh; Havisha Yoganathan; Matthew Cresser; Achelous Obi; Romane Perouse; Sharon Thomas; Iquo Okon; Milena Rozhin; Andrew Vince; Kin Chan; Sorreny Shallow; Stourry Masheini; Amal Ay-Bayat; Francesco D'angelo; Margareth Frearson; Alexandra Grigorian; Jakub Sztandera; Janet Willis; Mohamad Hamid; Karen Jacob; Marco Petrone Vazquez; Lamara Anderson; Shihari Perera; Isabel Reynoso Llumigusin; Caroline Lumb; Brith; Liana Keplacz; Milly Mbabazi; Fatima Safi; Sehil Sheikh; Seata Saha; Ladan Hashi; Stassia Mc Pherson; Andy Boakye; Francesca Tayman; Sarah Razak; Edgares Stangirla; Farah Ul-Haque; Arousa Asad; Tabarek Alan; Andrew Share Parera; Fitwi Weldeyohannes; Ian Potts; Edmund Akeju; Paula Howell; Gamila Duale; Alejandra Vazquez; Erza Burnet; Mojdeh Aghili; Donnelly Mazzarello; Emily Symonds; Florin Dragan; Kelly Johnson; Hassan Ahmed, Jaida Osei; Jasmin Tia Nelson; Kulminder Brachu; Maria e. Arriagada Valenzuela; Haider Ali; Nasra Ali; Oana Balaneanu; Grace P. P. Emmanuel; Alessandro Ferrando, Leonardo Ferrando; Sita Vimalaraj; Sakina Elmahdi.

