



HACKNEY MIGRANT CENTRE  
*ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18*

## CURRENT STAFF MEMBERS

Centre  
Manager



Daf Viney

Interim Operations  
Manager



Sue Marris

Destitution  
Coordinator



Benjamin Morgan  
– maternity cover  
for Anna Rudd

Destitution  
Coordinator



Anna Rudd

Caseworker for Migrant Families  
and Young People – job share



Giulia Gosi



Amira Rady

## ABOUT US AND WHAT WE DO

Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) is a charity which offers a weekly drop-in advice and support service for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants. Our drop-in runs every Wednesday from 10:30am to 4pm. We provide advice on a range of issues including immigration, housing, welfare, access to health services and many other issues. Each week we serve our visitors a hot and nutritious meal cooked by our dedicated kitchen team.

HMC was established in 2008 by local organisations concerned about the lack of advice available to migrants. Over time it has developed into a specialist service providing a holistic package of high quality advice and support aiming to reduce poverty, mental distress and social isolation among vulnerable migrants.

We have three in-house welfare and housing advisers and we work with a range of partner agencies who provide immigration advice, health advocacy and other services at the drop-in each week. We also have a large team of volunteers who support the work of our advisers and assist with a significant proportion of advocacy work.

The service is open to any migrant, whatever their nationality, immigration status or present place of residence, though almost all visitors live in London. In 2017–18 we offered 48 drop-in sessions and counted 2,089 visits to our centre. Need for our service has increased significantly in recent years following major cuts to legal aid, and the complexity of the cases has grown due to changes in social policy.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND TRUSTEES

Hackney Migrant Centre celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. We are proud of the successes we have had over the years in helping migrants to regularise their immigration status and to escape destitution. We are all, however, aware that the problems faced by the individuals and families we see at our drop-in are mirrored a hundred times over and that in the ten years of our existence, the climate for migrants has become ever more unwelcoming.

The government's 'hostile environment' for 'illegal migrants' has increasingly demanded from non-citizens – and indeed from ethnic minorities who are citizens – that they 'prove' their eligibility for normal everyday activities including the right to rent, to have a driving licence and, most worryingly, to access NHS care.

Our recognition that we can only make a difference to a small proportion of the individuals and families who need our services has spurred us to extend our work beyond advice and support to campaigning for essential rights for migrants generally. We have a long way to go, but we have already started, in collaboration with our partner and sister organisations, NELMA, Project 17, and the Unity Project, to campaign vigorously for the right of all children who need them to free school meals. We are delighted that the Mayor of Hackney has agreed that children in families supported by Hackney Social Services will have their school lunches paid for by the council. We will continue to demand this right for all children, whatever their parents' immigration status. We are also supporting campaigns to abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds condition that blights the lives of many families, and against eye-watering charges for NHS hospital care, including maternity care.

We have experienced some significant changes in our staff this year. We were extremely sad to lose our long-time Centre Manager, Helen Hibberd, who has moved out of London. Much of the success of our work is due to her excellent organisational skills and welcoming and supportive attitude to visitors, volunteers and staff. Congratulations to our Destitution Coordinator Anna Rudd, who had a little girl early this year. Benjamin Morgan has done a fantastic job as Anna's maternity cover. We have also welcomed Sue Marris

as Interim Operations Manager who is tiding us over as we revise and expand staffing at the head of our organisation, and Sarah Emm as bookkeeper. Amira Rady joined us in March to work as a Caseworker for Families and Young People at Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) in a jobshare with Giulia Gosi who continues in the same role at HMC. This is part of the Big Lottery funded 'Moving Out of Hardship' partnership between HMC, HMSC and the Coram Children's Legal Centre. Daf Viney, who became our Centre Manager when Helen was on maternity leave, has continued in that role and has done a wonderful job of maintaining the effectiveness and welcoming atmosphere of the sessions, coordinating the work of volunteers and advisers.

We were sorry to lose Dot Lewis from the board, who has been secretary of the Trustees since we started, and made an enormous contribution to HMC. Her role has been filled by Rosemary Sales who returned to the board after serving as Speaker of Hackney Council. Another long-standing trustee, Wendy Pettifer, who has also contributed as a housing lawyer at the drop-in, is also resigning now. Two new trustees, Jilna Shah and Hannah McConnachie, have just joined us and bring a wealth of experience with them.

We would like to thank all our staff, new and old, for their tireless commitment to their work in trying to alleviate the problems of the people who use our service. We also thank all our drop-in volunteers, whether in the kitchen, advocating for our visitors, or helping with follow up in our office. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the contribution of our partner agencies, our funders, and members of the local community who support us in myriad ways.

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Trustees: Rayah Feldman (chair), Roy Hiscock, Dot Lewis (resigned July 2018), Jose Charles Makassa, Hannah McConnachie (appointed October 2018), Mark Palframan, Wendy Pettifer, Rosemary Sales, Jilna Shah (appointed October 2018) and Hannah Ward



9:00am – Visitors to Hackney Migrant Centre drop-in waiting ahead of the drop-in session



9:30am – Refreshments provided for visitors before drop-in opens

## MESSAGE FROM THE CENTRE MANAGER DAF VINEY

Hackney Migrant Centre celebrated our tenth anniversary earlier this year. After a brief celebration, we then closed our drop-in for a month to evaluate the service we provide. It was the first time in ten years we'd been closed for longer than a fortnight. This was necessary as for some time we'd been attempting to manage far more demand for our service than we were able to provide and needed to figure out a way to become sustainable. Many thanks to Elizabeth Balgobin and Ruth Grove-White for the support and guidance they provided during this period.

Following this period we tweaked the way our drop-in operates. We reduced the numbers we see each week to twenty to ensure we were able to spend enough time on each case. We reduced the number of immigration advice slots to give our advisers more time to spend with each visitor. We now start our working day half an hour earlier to give our volunteers more time to carry out a holistic needs assessment with each person – and our volunteers now work with a maximum of two people a day and keep in contact with them throughout the day.

One side effect of this is that the morning queues at Hackney Migrant Centre are busier than ever – many mornings this autumn the queue to get in was full at 7am, despite us not opening our doors until 10am. We're looking at ways of managing this as winter approaches to so that the most vulnerable of the people we see are not excluded by the prospect of queueing in adverse weather conditions.

Thanks as always to wonderful staff, office interns, drop-in volunteers and Trustees for all the incredibly hard work put in over the past year. I'm continually impressed by the endless positive energy on display, especially considering the seriousness of some of the issues we tackle and the hostile environment we face in carrying out our work.

This year we said goodbye to Helen Hibberd, who was Coordinator of Hackney Migrant Centre from its earliest days and worked for us until August this year before moving on to new challenges in Birmingham. Helen is responsible for building the centre into what it is today and everything we currently do well is down to her hard work over the course of the last decade.



10:00am – Morning briefing with volunteers



10:00am – Kitchen volunteers preparing donated ingredients for lunch



10:00am – Donated toys being put out in the children's play area



## OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS APRIL 2017 – MARCH 2018



### Our visitors

- Last year we saw 899 visitors from 88 different countries
- 681 new visitors accessed our service for the first time, of whom 338 had families
- Over two thirds of our visitors have No Recourse to Public Funds or no right to work or benefits
- More than 40% are visa overstayers with no current leave to remain in the UK, though many of them are eligible to apply for leave, because of the length of their stay in the UK, because their children are British or because they have compelling reasons not to return to their country of origin
- 12% are refused asylum seekers who are unable to return home, mostly because they consider themselves still at risk. We try to assess their claims to see if they can submit further applications to enable them to stay in the UK
- 11% have leave to remain, as refugees or for long term settlement, but are finding it hard to navigate the complex housing and welfare benefit systems or want advice on how to become a British citizen
- Another 11% have Limited Leave to Remain and are on the current 10-year route to settlement which means they have to extend their leave three times before gaining permanent settlement but often have No Recourse to Public Funds so cannot access housing and welfare benefits
- 5% of our visitors are asylum seekers, who may be eligible for asylum support but who feel socially isolated and are often living in inadequate accommodation with very little income
- A further 5% are EU citizens, fearful about their immigration status after the UK leaves the EU in March 2019



11:00am – Advocacy volunteers welcoming and talking to visitors during the morning session

## HOW WE HELPED OUR VISITORS

### We provided

- 705 specialist immigration advice consultations
- 553 welfare and housing advice consultations
- 154 health advocacy consultations
- Over 300 hardship grants of £20 given to visitors in crisis

### Our volunteers

- Obtained external grants for 280 individuals totalling nearly £42,000 to enable them to buy basic necessities – an average of almost £150 per person
- Gave out 175 food bank vouchers; twice as many as last year following our determined efforts to contact more food banks in London
- Requested free school meals for 23 destitute families (*read more about our Free School Meals campaign later in the report*)
- Assisted 110 people to complete HC1 forms for free prescriptions (together with our health advocate)
- Requested over 50 visitor files from the Home Office
- Carried out 532 pieces of advocacy work on behalf of visitors; for example, letter writing, phone calls, contacting external agencies

### Referrals were made for

- 51 families for Social Services support
- 87 people to emergency shelters, hostels or private rented accommodation
- 31 people to community care solicitors
- 26 families to North East London Migrant Action (NELMA)'s scheme accompanying people to Social Services
- Over 75 people to external representatives to make asylum applications on their behalf

### We helped

- Over 200 people access safe accommodation and support
- Nearly 60 individuals secure their legal immigration status



11:00am – Advocacy volunteers helping visitors during the morning session



12:30pm – Kitchen volunteers serving lunch

## WHAT OUR VISITORS SAY

*"The organisation is a very good one – one of my friends brought me there – you're doing a great job – ever since I came there, my life has basically changed for good – I was almost depressed when I arrived. It's amazing."*

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*"I am feeling good because I followed advice and contacted some solicitors. I found a solicitor and they helped me to submit an application. I am now waiting for a decision."*

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*"The future feels very promising. It is much more positive now that solicitors are helping. I have big plans for myself and want to go back to uni. I want something better for me and my daughter and hope the application helps to do this."*

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*"Doing a fantastic job. I am impressed, never seen such a thing for people to volunteer to look after others."*

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*"They listen to you, they give you advice, and introduce you to people who are going to help you with your issue. After that they kept referring me to different groups and that was so helpful."*

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*"What I notice is that it feels like a family at the moment at the drop-in. People come from different areas, we shout, we play, I've made friends there."*

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS ADVOCACY AT HMC NADIA CHALABI



1:30pm – Visitors and volunteers  
in the children's play area

Hackney Migrant Centre is supporting North East London Migrant Action (NELMA)'s campaign for free school meals for all who need them, regardless of immigration status. I have been HMC's free school meals advocate since July 2018, volunteering one and a half days a week. My work aims to improve access to food for children living in poverty and to reduce the stress and financial burden that paying for school meals places on families with No Recourse to Public Funds.

Currently, if a parent is not receiving mainstream benefits, or is not in receipt of Section 95 asylum support, their children are not automatically entitled

to free school meals. The result is that some children in destitute migrant families go hungry at school or parents receive huge bills they cannot afford to pay.

Denying children access to free school meals is one of many ways in which the government's No Recourse to Public Funds policies discriminate against some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Along with NELMA, we are asking for national policy change that acknowledges the equal right to food for all children. This would mean extending free school meals to children whose parents have a No Recourse to Public Funds condition attached to their visas – and to the children in undocumented families.

In my role I support parents and carers to write advocacy letters to their children's school. These letters ask schools to use their discretion to cover the cost of the children's lunches from the school's budget. Where schools are unable to do this, the letters ask that they liaise with the relevant local authority to meet this need.

I have written 35 letters to date. So far 26 of them have been responded to with 13 children receiving free school meals. In some cases where schools have been unable to grant free school meals they have cleared families' debt to the school, have provided other support such as free access to after school clubs or help towards the cost of uniforms and trips.

The campaign has been widely supported. In September 2018 NELMA and HMC were invited to speak at a public meeting on the hostile environment organised by Hackney Labour. At this meeting the Mayor of Hackney Philip Glanville and Diane Abbott MP pledged to support the campaign: The Mayor of Hackney's intervention has resulted in a planned increase in subsistence payments to families with No Recourse to Public Funds supported by Hackney social services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Although this is a significant gain, it will not help the many families living in extreme poverty who do not receive Section 17 support. This is highlighted by the fact that of the 41 children that I have written advocacy letters for, only nine were living in Section 17 accommodation. The campaign continues...

## CASE STUDIES FROM OUR WELFARE ADVISORS

*These case studies are from our Caseworkers for Migrant Families and Young People, who work at HMC and Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) as part of the 'Moving Out of Hardship' project; and our Destitution Coordinator. The names have been changed.*

### Susan (HMC)

Susan is a Nigerian national with Limited Leave to Remain with No Recourse to Public Funds. She is the destitute mother of three very young children. She came to HMC in October 2018. She had been in contact with Lewisham, Southwark and Greenwich social services before who all refused to assess her case and provide the necessary support.

On the day Susan came to HMC, she was evicted together with her three children, from the place they were hosted at before. We referred her to Lewisham children's services for an assessment, but she was reluctant to go there again due to her prior experience. Susan approached Lewisham for the first time in 2016 (when she was first evicted) and remembers being shouted at. During the recent assessment, the social worker shouted at Susan again. She accused her of lying in regards to the addresses provided in 2016. She told Susan 'You are dishonest' and 'I'm going to be waiting for you in the future.'

Nonetheless, as a matter of urgency, HMC made a referral to Lewisham social services to get them to assess her case for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. HMC also urged the social services to provide interim support to prevent street homelessness.

For the time being, Susan has been given a hardship grant on the day she arrived at HMC and she has also been given a food voucher. Additionally, HMC applied for a grant on behalf of Susan to help Susan support herself and kids during the difficult time she was going through.

Eventually, with the support of HMC, emergency accommodation and financial support have been arranged for Susan and her family by Lewisham social services. Our support to the family continues, by advocating for more financial support to be provided.

### Paulina (HMC)

Paulina came to the UK from Nigeria in 2010. She is a 36 year old single mother with two daughters. In Nigeria she and her children were the victims of violence as a result of her husband's involvement in politics.

Paulina was a refused asylum seeker when she came to Hackney Migrant Centre in November 2017. The family had no income and were surviving on handouts from family and friends – sometimes as little as £20 per month. Paulina could not afford to feed her children, whose school was fortunately providing breakfast and lunch as well as take-away boxes for the family to eat in the evenings. During weekends Paulina and her children ate only once a day.

Paulina and her children lived in squalid conditions. For five years they had shared a single room with no access to a kitchen, bathroom or heating facilities. They bathed in a plastic container. The windows in the room were broken and covered with plywood. The children slept on a wooden bedframe cushioned only by a thin piece of foam material. Paulina slept on a small chair. The room was infested with rats and rat faeces, and one of Paulina's daughters had been bitten by a rat.

During her first visit, Hackney Migrant Centre provided Paulina with food bank vouchers and a small hardship payment of £20 and applied for a charity grant to help her buy food and pay for travel. HMC's destitution worker referred Paulina and the children to social services. HMC referred Paulina to NELMA so that a volunteer accompanier could follow her through the difficult process of accessing support from social services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. With the help of HMC and NELMA, Paulina and her daughters were able to access emergency temporary housing from Paulina's local authority.

This accommodation, though still inadequate, at least had heating and access to a shared bathroom and kitchen. After the local authority concerned initially failed to provide the family with any subsistence support, HMC intervened, successfully advocating for social services to cover the cost of the families' essential living needs. When Paulina returned to HMC at the start of January 2018 she reported that the family were eating three times a day every day and that they had been able to celebrate Christmas.

Hackney Migrant Centre has since found Paulina a solicitor from Southwark Law Centre to assist her with

an application for leave to remain. After much more advocacy and a referral to a housing solicitor (Miles and Partners, one of HMC's partner organisations), Paulina and her children were finally moved to self-contained accommodation.



1:30pm – Volunteers following up with visitors during the afternoon



### Sarah (HMSC)

Sarah came to the UK from Nigeria in 2013. She was a destitute mother with two children, aged one and four years old. Her eldest daughter, Sofia, is a British citizen although has had difficulty providing evidence of this.

When Sarah first visited HMSC the family were faced with street homelessness following a negative outcome of an assessment conducted by Southwark Social Services following a self-referral for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. We challenged the negative outcome on the basis of significant errors in the assessment. Prior to coming to HMSC, Sarah had exhausted her support network and on occasion had to sleep in McDonald's with her children.

On the day of coming to HMSC we referred the family to Martha House for emergency shelter. Martha House is a charity that offers accommodation to destitute migrants who have No Recourse to Public Funds and we provided the family with a £20 hardship grant.

After two days the family were provided with accommodation and subsistence support of by Southwark Social Services. Since agreeing to support the family Southwark Social Services have on two occasions threatened to terminate support because Sarah had not submitted an application to the Home Office. We instructed a community care solicitor on behalf of Sarah and prevented support from being terminated.

We referred Sarah to a food bank where she received fresh fruit and vegetables, non-perishable goods, hygiene products, nappies and baby milk as well as clothing and toys for her children. They also provided the family with breakfast and travel reimbursements on every visit.

Sarah was receiving no financial support from the children's fathers. We referred her to the Child Maintenance Service to obtain financial support from Sofia's father and she now receives £82 per month in child maintenance payments.

We also referred Sarah to an immigration advisor at Southwark Citizens' Advice Bureau who helped her to submit an application for leave to remain. Sarah and her younger daughter were granted 30 months leave with recourse to public funds. We continue to support the family to move from Section 17 support to mainstream housing and to apply for the benefits they are entitled to.

## WHAT OUR VOLUNTEERS SAY



*“My experience volunteering with Hackney Migrant Centre has been at once shocking, galvanising and deeply moving. In my first week I met a woman and her family who had experienced some of the worst injustices imaginable, and although the trauma of this could not be easily addressed we were able to offer her immediate practical support – arranging a place to stay for the night, a small amount of money for basic necessities, a meal – and advice in taking the next step to rebuilding her life. The biggest impact for me is bumping into a visitor a few weeks or months down the line and seeing their life improving because of the help we’ve given, whether it’s that they have gained access to housing, free school meals for their children, mental health services, or have a breakthrough with their status.”*

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*“Volunteering as an Advocate at Hackney Migrant Centre has been a hugely rewarding experience. It’s a hectic and sometimes emotionally challenging environment but I feel I’ve got much more out of it than I’ve had to put in. Every drop-in session is different and you get to meet incredible people from all kinds of different backgrounds. The role is extremely varied so you learn a huge amount in a short space of time and get plenty of support from the staff. It’s also a great way to make friends in the local community.”*

## FUTURE PLANS & DEVELOPMENTS

In the coming year we will remain responsive to the many complex challenges facing migrants, particularly in view of the hostile environment which is still ever present.

In the immediate future we will move temporarily to alternative drop-in premises while St Mary’s Church Rooms are being refurbished, and we hope to update our website which has been largely unchanged since we started the organisation.

Looking to the medium term our recent strategic review identified areas for potential development of HMC including the development of a broad fundraising strategy. It also highlighted the importance of developing our policy capability using our large body of casework to inform campaigns and so have a greater impact on public policy.

One of our founding aims is “To publicise issues relating to migrants’ social and economic circumstances.” However, as an organisation we’re often so focussed on the day to day casework that needs to be urgently carried out that we lose sight of the bigger picture.

We’ve written elsewhere in this report about the Free School Meals campaign. We’ve also provided feedback to other campaigns about healthcare charging, issues that homeless migrant families face in accessing social services support, legal aid cuts and the fees for making applications for leave to remain and British citizenship.

As we’re on the frontline of providing services to some of the most vulnerable people in the UK, we’re in a position to encounter individual problems and detect trends before they become more widely known. The Windrush scandal showed that the hostile environment is causing massive harm to migrants and we encounter many other aspects of this policy which are having similar results, some the deliberate result of policies and some unintentional. We’re determined to use the experiences of the people that we meet to publicise the issues that migrants face and to effect change in policy.

# FINANCIAL POSITION

## Hackney Migrant Centre Draft Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 31 March 2018

Unrestricted income was exceptionally good during the year 2017–18, and such funding more than offset the reduction on certain restricted funds covering key posts. The growing body of committed community support remains healthy, though the exceptional support received during the year to 31 March 2018 is unlikely to be repeated in the current year.

	Unrestricted Funds (£)	Restricted Funds (£)	Total 2018 (£)	Total 2017 (£)
Income				
Grants, donations and legacies	93,823	–	93,823	21,491
<i>Income from charitable activities:</i>				
Grants and donations	–	272,894	272,894	259,136
<b>Total income</b>	<b>93,823</b>	<b>272,894</b>	<b>366,717</b>	<b>280,627</b>
Expenditure				
Cost of raising funds	–	–	–	–
Expenditure on charitable activities	10,567	294,225	304,792	244,223
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>10,567</b>	<b>294,225</b>	<b>304,792</b>	<b>244,223</b>
Transfer from unrestricted to restricted funds	(11,919)	11,919	–	–
<b>Net income /(expenditure)</b>	<b>71,336</b>	<b>(9,412)</b>	<b>61,925</b>	<b>36,404</b>
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>				
Total funds brought forward	62,626	35,022	97,648	61,244
Total funds carried forward	133,962	25,610	159,573	97,648

### Continuing Operations

None of the charity's activities were acquired or discontinued during the year.

### Total Recognised Losses and Gains

The charity has no recognised gains or losses other than the above movement in funds for the financial year ended 31 March 2018.



2:30pm – Volunteers and visitors together during the afternoon

## THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS



### Advisers

City and Hackney Mind / Coram Children's Legal Centre / Doctors of the World / Hackney Community Law Centre / Homerton NHS Trust / Islington Law Centre / Lambeth Law Centre / Kathy Meade / Migrant Help / Lou Crisfield of Miles and Partners / Wendy Pettifer / Project 17 / Together with Migrant Children

### Community supporters

Dentons / Eat Hackney Cookbook / Ernest UK / Every Cloud Bar / Green Leaning Ltd / Hackney Marsh Parish / Jubilee School Year 6 / Kehillah North London / Lardo / Linklaters LLP / London Legal Support Trust / Pages of Hackney / Speaker of Hackney's Office / Springfield

Methodist Church / St John the Baptist Catholic Church / Stockwell Methodist Church / Stoke Newington Relief in Need / Summer Supper Club / Turning Earth / Wilson Solicitors LLP / Young and Idle / And the many individuals who have made generous donations during the year

### Funders

Big Lottery Fund / Hackney Parochial Charities / Heinz, Anna and Carol Kroch Foundation / Metropolitan Migration Fund / Redburn Limited / Reel Fund – London Community Foundation / Trust for London / Tudor Trust / West Hackney Parochial Charity

### Gifts of food to drop-in

Growing Communities / Jaines & Son Fishmonger / Londis (Mayank for deliveries) / Nandos – Canary Wharf / Spence Bakery / Stoke Newington Greengrocer / Whole Foods Stoke Newington

### Grants to vulnerable individuals

Catholic Women's League / Family Holiday Association / Hackney Parochial Charities / Heinz, Anna and Carol Kroch Foundation / Hornsey Parochial Charities / Mary Strand Trust / Methodist Church Fund for Human Need / Sheila Hind Trust / Society of Friends for Foreigners in Distress / South Hackney Parochial Charity

We'd also like to thank The Unity Project, Kids in Need of Defence, City, No.5 Project, Caz Hattam, Abi Nolan from Supply Yoga for early morning yoga classes at the drop-in, and Jenny Holliday for massage therapy for our visitors.

A big thanks also to St Mary's Church who have continued to support HMC's work (especially Paula who shaved her head to raise money for HMC to replace stolen equipment).

Finally we'd like to thank all of our volunteers, who donate their time so that HMC can continue to help so many people.



For more information about Hackney Migrant Centre, please contact us on:

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Registered charity number: 1122363

Hackney Migrant Centre, St Mary's Church Rooms, Spensley Walk (off Stoke Newington Church Street), London, N16 9ES