



HMC

Hackney Migrant Centre
Annual Report 2017



About us

Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC) is a charity which provides a weekly drop-in advice and support service for refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants. Our drop-in runs every Wednesday from 11am 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 by 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 two in-house welfare 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. A large team of volunteers supports 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. Over 800 individuals access our service each year and we provide in-depth follow-up case-work for over 400 cases each year. Need for our service has grown significantly over the last five years following major cuts to legal aid.

Current staff members:



Daf Viney



Helen Hibberd



Anna Rudd



Benjamin Morgan



Giulia Gosi

Joint Centre Managers – Daf Viney and Helen Hibberd

Destitution Coordinator – Benjamin Morgan (maternity cover for Anna Rudd)

Caseworker for Migrant Families and Young People – Giulia Gosi

Centre managers' report

This is the first Annual Report from our joint Centre Managers. Helen Hibberd returned to work part-time after having baby Amber last year and Daf Viney, who covered for Helen while she was on maternity leave, has stayed on to form a job-share with Helen.

We have continued to see a rise in the number of destitute and homeless people at HMC. Most disturbingly, the number of families who are living in appalling conditions or, in extreme cases, sleeping on night buses and in police stations or A&E departments, has increased again. Our staff and volunteer team do whatever is needed to support our most vulnerable visitors, working with a growing range of wonderful partner and referral agencies.

Anna Rudd, our Destitution Coordinator, has developed a Destitution Support Team with volunteers to expand the work we are able to do. She went on maternity leave in Nov 2017 and her replacement, Benjamin Morgan, comes to us with a wealth of experience. Giulia Gosi, HMC's caseworker for migrant families and young people, started with us in July 2016 and continues to carry out exceptional work to find accommodation and financial support for some of the most vulnerable people we see.

Islington Law Centre, Lambeth Law Centre and Coram Children's Legal Centre continue to provide excellent initial immigration advice at each drop-in session. Funding from Trust for London enables the immigration team from Islington Law Centre to take on some urgent cases for people who cannot pay a private solicitor. These are, particularly, cases which do not qualify for legal aid but which have some prospect of success. This project has had a 100% success rate for the cases it has taken on. Last year it enabled 78 people to get Leave To Remain in the UK, and prevented 53 people from becoming destitute. We developed an extension of this project at the beginning of this year, through a partnership with lawyers from Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld solicitors. They work pro bono with students from BBP University Law School working on similar cases, supervised by a senior solicitor from Islington Law Centre.

Alongside our own staff, several agencies offer regular pro bono sessional advice. A trainee solicitor from Duncan Lewis gives housing advice every fortnight. Project 17, which works with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support, sees families once a month who are living in poverty. Wendy Pettifer, a HMC Trustee and housing solicitor, also advises monthly on housing and community care – mainly where a landlord or a local authority are not fulfilling their legal duties.

We have started working with Migrant Family Action, a charity established by social workers frustrated by the lack of support offered to vulnerable migrant children. They visit HMC once a month to meet families who require additional social work inputs which they cannot get elsewhere.

The hostile environment engendered by government policy towards undocumented migrants continues to have an adverse effect on the lives of our visitors and their children. A noticeable change over the last year is the increased barriers to accessing healthcare, with people even being charged for healthcare they received in the past, often many years ago, including some instances when they were eligible for free healthcare at the time. One of our regular visitors was recently charged over £80,000 for a course of life-saving cancer treatment. He remains unwell and living in a care home while we wait for the result of an immigration application submitted a few months ago.

We are fortunate to have developed relationships with several healthcare providers who can help get our visitors the treatment they need. Nese Erkan, Refugee Link Worker at Homerton University Hospital, comes each week to help visitors to access primary healthcare. Doctors of the World attend monthly with a GP and also offer advocacy for visitors who have problems accessing care as a result of their immigration status or who have been wrongly charged or are unable to pay hospital bills. A mental health advocate from City and Hackney Mind also attends fortnightly.

Destitute asylum seekers are entitled to apply for accommodation and financial support while their claims are being considered. Applications are managed by the charity Migrant Help. We are grateful that Migrant Help attends HMC each week to help eligible visitors make applications for asylum support and assists them in navigating their way through the system. They also support visitors who have been trafficked or who have experienced extreme labour exploitation to access the services available to them.

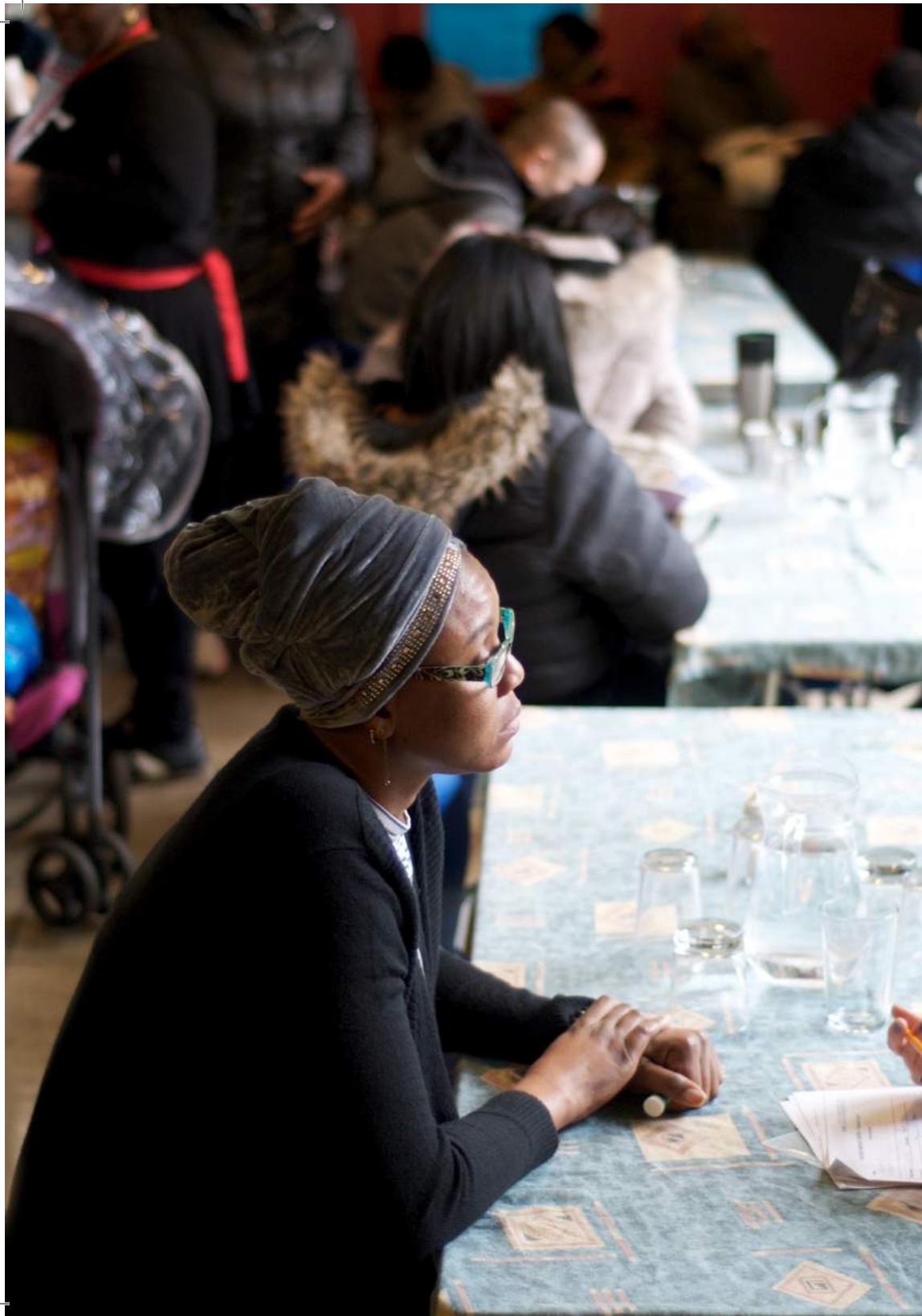
Last year we were joined by Jenny Holliday, a local massage therapist who carries out very popular short chair massages for our visitors every few weeks.

One of the biggest issues we continue to face – noted in every Annual Report we've produced for the last few years – is finding legal advisers to take on cases where legal aid is not available. We are extremely grateful to the following two new projects which have taken on cases that were not getting representation before.

The New Unity Project in Islington, which opened earlier this year, provides legal support to migrants whose Limited Leave to Remain in the UK carries a condition of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). They take on cases we refer to them of people who are applying to get this condition lifted because it is causing destitution or other extreme hardship.

KIND (Kids In Need of Defence) UK is a new organisation which is taking on the cases of young people who have been in the UK for more than seven years where it would not be reasonable to expect them to leave the country. The cost of an application for Leave to Remain and legal representation is beyond the means of most people who come to HMC so KIND steps in to provide this service pro bono.

We would like to thank our staff, volunteers and visiting agencies for carrying out all of this work and making a huge difference to the lives of those who come to Hackney Migrant Centre.



Our year: April 2016 - March 2017

Our visitors

Came from over 90 different countries.

682 new visitors accessed our service for the first time, of whom 215 were families. We also saw 265 returning visitors.

80% of our visitors have No Recourse to Public Funds or no right to work or benefits.

Over one third are visa overstayers - with no current leave to remain in the UK - but many of them could apply for leave to remain, 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.

13 % have leave to remain, as refugees or for long term settlement, but many still find it hard to navigate the complex benefit housing and benefit systems or want advice on how to become a British citizen.

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.

12% are asylum seekers, most of whom are in receipt of asylum support but who feel socially isolated and are often living in inadequate accommodation and with very little income.

A further 10% have Limited Leave to Remain and are on the current 10 year route to settlement which means they have to extend their leave 3 times before gaining permanent settlement but often have No Recourse to Public Funds so cannot access housing and benefits.

Finally, 5% are EU citizens, an increase from previous years, in response to fears about their immigration status following Brexit.

How we helped our visitors

We provided:

717 specialist immigration consultations

457 welfare and housing consultations

81 health advocacy consultations

235 hardship grants of £20 to visitors in crisis

Our volunteers:

Obtained grants for individuals totalling over £37,500 to enable them to buy basic necessities – an average of almost £150 per person

Gave out 85 food bank vouchers

Requested free school meals for 10 destitute families

Assisted 92 people complete HC1 forms for free prescriptions (together with our health advocate)

Requested over 50 visitor files from the Home Office

Carried out advocacy work (e.g. letter writing, phone calls, contacting external agencies) in relation to:

170 housing cases
100 immigration cases

Signposted 185 homeless people to external agencies

Referrals were made for:

50 families for Social Services support

22 housing cases to external advisers or relevant projects

93 people to emergency shelters/hostels/NRPF schemes/private rented accommodation or hosting schemes

Over 25 people to community care solicitors

11 families to North East London Migrant Action (NELMA)'s scheme accompanying people to Social Services.

Over 175 immigration cases to solicitors or advisers, pro bono projects or organisations to assist with exceptional case funding applications

We helped:

Over 200 people access safe accommodation and support

Over 100 people make applications to the Home Office for Leave to Remain and secured legal immigration status for over 30 individuals

Moving Out of Hardship

This is a partnership project between Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC), Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) and Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC).

HMC has been leading on the Moving Out of Hardship project since June 2016. It has received five years' funding from the Help Through Crisis strand of the Big Lottery Fund.

The project focuses on families and young migrants aged 30 and under. It was a response to the increasing destitution and hardship we have been seeing amongst this visitor group both at HMC and HMSC. The project funding enabled us to employ two new workers: an Immigration Solicitor from CCLC and a Caseworker for Migrant Families and Young People, employed by HMC.

The aim of the project is to offer a holistic package of support to families and young people. Both advisers give weekly advice at HMC and HMSC's weekly drop-in services. Through the combination of immigration and welfare advice, the advisers aim to tackle the root causes of our visitors' destitution which are often very complex and arise because of their insecure immigration status.

"When I came to HMC I saw Giulia. I was homeless so her first priority was to find a suitable place for me and my child. She referred me to NELMA and they helped me to approach the social services. Haringey Social Services refused but Hackney put me in a hotel for a few days then found me emergency accommodation under S17 in January." - Visitor

Our immigration adviser assists our visitors to try to get Leave to Remain in the UK either by representing them directly, by applying for Exceptional Case Funding to enable them to get legal aid, or through referrals to legal aid lawyers, pro bono solicitors or immigration projects. Alongside this work, our Caseworker helps visitors to find accommodation and to access financial, social, and emotional support. Much of this work is assisted by volunteers across the three organisations.

The project also offers training, both internally to staff and volunteers, and externally, to other organisations, to help them understand the issues facing this group of migrants. We held a public meeting in June 2017 to try to inform European migrants and their family members how Brexit could affect them and how they can best respond. All project partners, especially CCLC, also raise awareness of the issues we witness at various forums and in policy submissions.



The first year of the project was very successful

464 families and young people were given initial advice

364 people were provided with in-depth follow-up immigration and welfare advice and support

25 people were assisted with applications for Exceptional Case Funding - 23 applications were successful and 20 were referred to legal aid solicitors

91 individuals or families have been referred to immigration solicitors or other immigration projects

51 families were referred to Social Services for support

29 families were referred to a community care solicitor when Social Services refused to offer support

43 families were rehoused and provided with financial support by Social Services

What our visitors say

"The story isn't over yet, but if I look at where I was coming from, it's better where I am now. These days I feel more light in my life than I did. I feel I have hope because when you have somebody who stops you from getting down then it gives you strength."

"There has been a lot of people's involvement with my family's situation and although things aren't sorted yet, I'm feeling a lot more confident. I'm not really worried about it now, but I was really worried before I came here. I have more than ten people I can call on now, professional people!"



"For the children, it was hard before. We explained to them – the 12 year old asks a lot of questions about things that he wanted. I had to explain the plan. When we explain to him the situation and he understands it. I show him everything we do. I felt really bad that we couldn't provide everything for the children. Now we have benefits I told them that we can afford some things we couldn't afford before. They can see the improvement in our situation. I appreciate these people so much; they have made such a difference for us. I thank God I came here."

Grace

Grace is a Nigerian national who came to the UK in 2005 on a work visa. She and her husband have three children, one of whom has glaucoma. After their visa expired, their applications for Leave to Remain were rejected. Although all their children were born in the UK, because the parents were not settled at the time they were born, it is very difficult for the whole family to regularise their status in the UK. They have a fresh application for leave pending.

The family were supported financially by Grace's brother, friends and their church but this support gradually dissolved, leaving the family destitute and homeless.

Hackney Migrant Centre helped the family to access emergency accommodation from Social Services after they had been turned away and had to spend the night in A&E in a hospital. The family was later charged the exorbitant sum of £3,000 for sleeping at A&E and HMC referred them to an agency for debt advice.

A solicitor challenged the Social Services decision to not accommodate them and they were ordered to offer immediate accommodation. Social Services provided one hotel room for the whole family and very limited subsistence, so it was still hard for Grace to feed her children.

Two months later Social Services gave the family notice of eviction. It took two different court judgements and four more months to reinstate the support. In the meantime, the family had been made homeless again.

They are now accommodated and Grace has begun volunteering as an advocate at Hackney Migrant Centre.

Dawit

Dawit is a 35 year old man from Eritrea. He came to HMC in 2017, after he had been granted refugee status in the UK. He had previously been dispersed to Cardiff but left his accommodation there in order to move to London to be close to his community and people who speak his language.

He was not yet in receipt of benefits or accommodation and was sofa-surfing with friends, though he had made contact with the Job Centre. HMC's Destitution Coordinator helped to follow-up his application for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and referred him to the Refugee Council's Private Rented Scheme, for help with longer-term accommodation and hosting schemes. He was also signposted to ESOL classes and other projects for social support. HMC referred him to the Refugee Council's Employment Advice Service.

We were able to secure three hosting placements with the charity Refugees at Home. He was in receipt of JSA whilst job hunting and attending ESOL classes.

Following employment advice, he is now working and earning over £1000 per month and so is in a position to move into the private rented sector.

HMC's volunteers

Hackney Migrant Centre would not function without the amazing work done by our dedicated volunteer team. We estimate that over 14,000 hours were spent by volunteers working for HMC in the past year, the equivalent of around eight full-time workers.

Every visitor to the drop-in meets a trained advocacy and casework volunteer who will welcome them and carry out a preliminary assessment of their needs and refer them to appropriate professional advisers. Volunteers also help visitors in other ways, such as applying for grants, writing letters and finding emergency shelters.

During the past year our Destitution Coordinator developed a new volunteer Destitution Support Team. Its members provide ongoing casework outside our drop-in sessions for homeless families who are seeking help from local authorities, and for single homeless people trying to find emergency accommodation. These tasks often involve in-depth work and a lot of form filling in order to get positive results.

Our volunteer Legal Support Team provides follow-up work to find external legal representatives for our visitors. Finding quality legal representation for those who are unable to pay fees becomes more difficult year on year and this team has become adept at finding new resources.

Every Wednesday lunchtime at Hackney Migrant Centre, all of our visitors, volunteers and staff sit down together for a delicious home cooked meal, made mainly with donated ingredients from local shops and restaurants. A team of volunteers collects food and a number of regular kitchen volunteers create tasty, healthy food from scratch each week – but watch out for Arnold's lethal chilli sauce!

Volunteers arrive before we open each Wednesday to start taking the names of the visitors who queue early. At our drop-in we have designated volunteers who stay at our front door to signpost latecomers to other services when we're full, who make hot drinks for everyone, and who manage the crazily busy front desk to ensure our visitors see the right advisers. We have a team of people who make the sessions fun for our younger visitors and allow their parents to concentrate on getting the advice they've come for. Away from the drop-in we have other volunteers who administer the individual grants we get from other charities, write our weekly newsletter and organise the resources required for the drop-in.



"I have been volunteering at Hackney Migrant Centre for a year. When I started, I had just moved to the UK and wanted to keep working in the immigration sector.

Volunteering at HMC gave me the chance to learn how the immigration system works and what type of support is available for destitute migrants. I received training and the coordinators are always available to answer my questions during and after the session. I also met wonderful people who with time became close friends. I feel the work I do makes a difference for the visitors I support and it makes me grow both personally and professionally."

Message from the trustees

Britain's vote to leave the European Union last year has cast a dark shadow over an already troubled immigration landscape. Reports of increased harassment and hate crimes against EU migrants proliferated after the referendum and have remained a feature as the UK moves further towards parting company with the rest of Europe. An uncertain future for EU migrants living in the UK has compounded the problems faced by our already vulnerable visitors, with homeless EU migrants facing deportation as new Home Office policy counts sleeping rough as a breach of EU citizens' treaty rights.

Alongside this, the government has persisted with its 'hostile environment' programme of policies designed to make life as challenging as possible for migrants. Sky-high fees for applications for Leave to Remain, which now have to be resubmitted every 2.5 years for 10 years, with a health surcharge of £200 with each application, are putting lower-paid migrants in impossible positions: find the money to pay the fees or be forced to leave. No Recourse to Public Funds is a common condition of grants of Leave to Remain, with migrants who lose their jobs thus facing destitution and homelessness. Local authorities, already themselves facing swingeing budget cuts under a continuing programme of austerity, are resistant to providing accommodation for families in this situation. Private landlords are expected to carry out immigration checks on prospective tenants and to share that information with the Home Office – or face significant fines if they do not.

Perhaps most pernicious of all, upfront charging for community and secondary healthcare has now been introduced, leaving many vulnerable migrants – including those who are undocumented or whose asylum claims have been refused – without access to a range of healthcare services including community mental healthcare or hospital treatment unless they are able to pay for it first. These regulations, brought in by the parliamentary back door in July, will lead to further discrimination, poorer health outcomes for migrant communities and will not reduce costs for the NHS. Data sharing agreements drawn up between the Home Office and the NHS are further compounding barriers to healthcare by making vulnerable and ill migrants too frightened to access essential care.

Two years ago, extensive media coverage of the desperate plight of refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict appeared to cause a shift in public opinion with greater sympathy towards their plight. Sadly, this has led to very little concrete change, with very limited numbers of refugees gaining entry to the UK. Yet within this generally depressing picture, our small charity has thrived on the continuing support from our generous funders, donors and fundraisers and thanks to our army of volunteers. They, along with our small but dedicated staff team, keep our sessions running and able to offer services to visitors week after week. We are enormously grateful to you all.

Future plans and developments

Our aim for the future is to support our visitors as much as we can despite the increasingly hostile environment. We continually have to balance the demands placed on our service with our staff's ability to manage heavy and challenging caseloads. As this report highlights, migrants face many difficulties in just trying to survive in the UK and we fear that this will only get worse for the foreseeable future. We will remain responsive to these challenges by reviewing the way that we work, ensuring that we put our resources into the most pressing issues and urgent cases. We always try to develop new partnerships or referral routes with agencies, rather than trying to tackle every new issue ourselves.

"The story isn't over yet, but if I look at where I was coming from, it's better where I am now. These days I feel more light in my life than I did. I feel I have hope because when you have somebody who stops you from getting down then it gives you strength." Visitor

We have a good history of helping organisations to develop and grow, most recently the Unity Project which helps people get NRPF removed from their immigration conditions.

In the coming year we are planning to introduce a confidential online case-recording system to replace our paper records. This has been made necessary because we now do significant amounts of casework internally compared with only two years ago. As cuts have been made and organisations have closed down, we have had to adapt our original model of short-term advice followed by referrals and signposting, and do more work ourselves to progress our visitors' claims.

We also hope to update our website which has been largely unchanged since we started the organisation.

AND we will be celebrating our 10th anniversary – sad to see that our service is still needed, pleased that we are still here to continue our work.

We want to continue to share our knowledge and experience and help organisations work with us. We also want to improve our ability to capture and record the impact of the work we do in order to ensure that we can keep raising essential funds for our core work.

Financial position

Fortunately we remain in a good financial position, having secured some longer term funds and developed good, ongoing relationships with local funders. We now have some corporate funders and a growing body of community support and initiatives. The trustees believe that the charity's reserves will help to ensure future financial security.

HACKNEY MIGRANT CENTRE DRAFT STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2017

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2017 £	Total 2016 £
Income					
Grants, donations and legacies	2	21,491	-	21,491	24,794
<i>Income from charitable activities:</i>					
Grants and donations	3	-	259,136	259,136	162,542
Total income		21,491	259,136	280,627	187,336
Expenditure					
Cost of raising funds		-	-	-	648
Expenditure on charitable activities		8,583	235,640	244,223	169,199
Total expenditure	4	8,583	235,640	244,223	169,847
Net income/(expenditure)		12,908	23,496	36,404	17,489
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>					
Total funds brought forward		49,718	11,526	61,244	43,755
Total funds carried forward		62,626	35,022	97,648	61,244

CONTINUING OPERATIONS

None of the company's activities were acquired or discontinued during the above financial year.

TOTAL RECOGNISED GAINS AND LOSSES

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

Thank you

HMC continues to be well supported by many individuals and organisations, without whom we would not be able to do our work as effectively. We are hugely grateful to the following:

Local organisations

Growing Communities, Harvest N16, Jaines & Son Fishmonger, Mayak Patel from Londis, Nando's -Canary Wharf, Nawaal Fund, Spence Bakery, Whole Foods Market - Stoke Newington.

Our partner organisations

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Fled, BPP Law School, City and Hackney Mind, Coram Children's Legal Centre, Doctors of the World, Duncan Lewis Solicitors, Camden Law Centre, Haringey Migrant Support Centre, Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust, Islington Law Centre, Jenny Holliday from the Well Garden, Lambeth Law Centre, Migrant Help, Project 17, and all the other agencies to whom we regularly refer our visitors.

Funding organisations

Big Lottery Fund, Hackney Parochial Charities, Hilden Charitable Trust, London Community Foundation - Dispossessed Fund, Metropolitan Migration Foundation, MSN Fund, South Hackney Parochial Charity, Trust for London, Tudor Trust.

Thank you to St Mary's Church which continues to be the generous host of the Centre and our volunteers from Stoke Newington School.

A HUGE thank you to all of our volunteers who cook, advocate, make tea, write letters, wash up, translate and interpret, set up chairs and tables and put them away again, listen, make phone calls and do everything else needed to keep the Centre going.

Community supporters

Biercraft, Christchurch on the Mead, Ernest UK, Funholsale, Hackney Refugee and Migrant Support Group, Lardo Pizzeria, New Unity, Roxy Bistro, Ruth Whitehead (Charity concert), Turning Earth, Unite the Union, the Speaker of Hackney who chose us as one of her two nominated charities and raised an amazing amount, and all our regular and one-off donors.

The following organisations have made grants to our most vulnerable visitors

Catholic Women's League, Family Holiday Association, Gardeners Trust for the Blind, Hackney Parochial Charities, Heinz, Anna and Carol Kroch Foundation, Hornsey Parochial Charity, Mary Strand Trust, Positive Action in Housing, Sheila Hind Trust, Society of Friends for Foreigners in Distress, South Hackney Parochial Charity and West Hackney Parochial Charity.



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