

# Moving Out of Hardship

A partnership project between  
Hackney Migrant Centre,  
Haringey Migrant Support Centre and  
Coram Children's Legal Centre

## Final Evaluation Report

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Moving Out of Hardship Project

Moving Out of Hardship started in 2016 and was a five-year partnership project between Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC), Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) and Coram Children’s Legal Centre (CCLC). It focused on families and young migrants aged 30 and under, and came about in response to the growing destitution and hardship HMC and HMSC in particular were witnessing amongst migrants presenting at their centres. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund (now called the National Lottery Community Fund), it provided:

- Crisis response work to resolve immediate hardship issues. This work was undertaken by staff and volunteers at both centres, and involved supporting migrant families and young people to help resolve immediate survival issues (hunger, destitution, homelessness, lack of access to services).
- Resolving underpinning issues through specialist advice. Both immigration and specialist welfare / housing advice were provided at regular sessions in HMC and HMSC by CCLC lawyers and by specialist caseworkers at each centre employed through this project.
- Policy and influencing work. All three partners used the learning gained through this project to train teams of visitors, volunteers and other stakeholders and input into key policy developments which can affect this particularly marginalised group of migrants.

## 1.2. Evaluation overview and methods

The evaluation was commissioned in May 2016 at the beginning of the project. The evaluation team comprised two independent evaluators with extensive experience in the migrant sector.

Initial work in 2016 included the reframing of the outcomes included in the original application to the Big Lottery Fund to create an evaluation framework which both helped identify and organise the underpinning rationale of the project and enabled more logical reporting of the different levels of the project’s support.

Following this, the evaluation team worked formatively with the project, involving partners at planned ‘touch points’ to enable learning and development as Moving Out of Hardship progressed. The first of these was during summer 2017, when an initial evaluation was conducted and a report finalised in September 2017, and a second during autumn 2019, when a lighter-touch evaluation was conducted, and a report finalised in December 2019. The first interim evaluation was relatively in depth, involving 15 interviews and day-long observations at both centres accompanied by a range of visitor interviews ‘on site’ and case file reviews. The second interim evaluation involved, again, on site observations and visitor interviews and interviews with key staff. In both cases the evaluations allowed for discussions both during fieldwork and following the production of an initial draft of the report to go through findings to check for accuracy and relevance and then identify how the findings of the interim reports could usefully shape the remainder of the project.

For this final evaluation we have taken all of this preceding work into account and then added to it through a final round of fieldwork. This final round included 19 interviews with a range of stakeholders and the

review of five written submissions from external partners to the project. In addition, a range of project documentation was reviewed including project data, project reports and the case files pertaining to each visitor we interviewed.

- 7 interviews with staff working on the project
- 6 interviews with visitors (3 from HMC, 3 from HMSC).
- 4 interviews with volunteers (3 from HMC, 1 from HMSC)
- 7 responses from external referral partners, two via telephone interview and five through written submission

Unfortunately, we were unable for this final report to attend drop ins for observation and interview as these had been suspended in the final year in the light of Covid-19 measures. However as this happened both for the first and second interim reports the evaluators were able to get a good feel for the culture and approach of the project both at HMC and at HMSC.

### 1.3. Overview of final report

The main purpose of this report is to highlight the key achievements and the key learning of Big Lottery's investment in the Moving Out of Hardship Project over five years. After this section, it covers the following:

- An overview of the project, including a reminder of the contextual challenges and changes the project faced and the internal adaptations which happened, sometimes in response to these changes. (Section 2)
- Key outcomes and achievements of the project, looking at the short and longer term benefits for the beneficiaries themselves, as well as the benefits for other agencies, for the sector more broadly and for the policy context. (Section 3)
- Key learning from the project, examining in particular the over-arching lessons on the model which Moving Out of Hardship was piloting. (Section 4)
- Topline conclusions from the project (Section 5)

**Note on terminology:** The Moving Out of Hardship project refers to all vulnerable migrants it is supporting as 'visitors' (rather than clients, or service users) and this term is used throughout this report.

## 2. Project and context overview

### 2.1 Rationale and overview of project model

The Moving Out of Hardship project was a response by Hackney Migrant Centre and Haringey Migrant Support Centre to seeing more and more migrants at crisis point. This situation had been building since LASPO<sup>1</sup> came into force in April 2013, introducing sweeping cuts to legal aid and rendering much immigration advice and casework 'out of scope' and thus unavailable to a wide range of vulnerable migrants with immigration advice needs. Frontline agencies across the country were faced with a similar problem: people who had previously been able to access free, quality advice were no longer able to do so and were increasingly therefore turning to frontline agencies who up to that point had been able to rely on a network of provision, now gone.

The project was therefore a response to this growing crisis. It was also a response to the negative impact that a raft of measures introduced under the government's hostile environment policy were having on migrants, resulting in them being more and more cut out of services. These measures increased the number of hurdles or barriers to accessing work, housing, benefits and much else besides. Vulnerable migrants were thus caught in a 'double whammy' of disadvantage – on the one hand the hostile environment was withdrawing the wherewithal to live safely and adequately whilst on the other the advice and support services which they needed to navigate this increasingly hostile and confusing system was dwindling.

The project model was predicated on the fact that many migrants living at or below the poverty line needed a range of support to help them out of immediate crisis which the centres could provide, but also that they could be helped at the same time to access advice which could put them on a pathway to accessing benefits and regularising their status, thus lifting them out of a circle of crisis and poverty. The model relied on giving up front support and often quite sustained and complex follow up work to sort cases out and put the visitor on a path to regularisation but did not in the main have the capacity to take on the conduct of individual cases. For this, the project relied on onward referral to solicitors as and when necessary. The project can thus be seen as an intermediary intervention: catching people at crisis and providing immediate relief and advice to sort out crisis issues (to do with access to finance, housing, and immigration) and then prepare their cases to ensure that they could find, with further legal support, a pathway out of destitution. In some complex cases, or where no legal support could be found, the project did in fact ensure that cases were progressed, but this was exceptional as the model did not provide sufficient capacity to do this for all.

The model brought together three organisations, two with a long history of providing holistic support to vulnerable migrants in hardship 'on the frontline' and one with a longstanding national expertise in legal matters pertaining to children and young people. The funding enabled both frontline centres to employ part time caseworkers to support vulnerable families and young people under 30 to access social welfare and housing advice. Complementing this provision, Coram Children's Legal Centre employed and managed legal advisors to support and attend both centres on a regular basis to deal with visitors' immigration issues emerging during initial triage and advice giving. Hackney Migrant Centre acted as the lead partner.

### 2.2 Contextual issues which impacted on the project

A range of contextual factors impacted on the project as it progressed, the most significant of which were:

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<sup>1</sup> Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012

### *Impact of hostile/compliant environment policy*

The intentionality of the government's Hostile Environment policy (rebadged the Compliant Environment) against undocumented migrants was highlighted through the Windrush scandal. It also became clearer as the project progressed how policies were being changed to ensure more and more people were locked out of the system and fell into irregularity, often through the co-option of services and individuals to help implement the hostile/compliant environment policy (in the form of local authority workers, health service workers, social workers, landlords, employers and so on). The effect of this for both Haringey and Hackney centres (as well as other frontline services around the country) was that they started to see more and more people who previously may have survived 'under the radar' but who were being forced into ever-tightening pockets of destitution, unable to access services. As a result, people started presenting at points of very urgent need, when literally all other avenues of support were closed to them.

### *Increasingly vigorous gate-keeping by local authorities*

Much of the work of caseworkers involved contacting local authorities to get them to take responsibility for various vulnerable visitors. As the Moving Out of Hardship project progressed, staff reported that they were finding it increasingly difficult to get responses from local authorities which were effectively gatekeeping services so that they did not have to act. This persisted and indeed worsened during the Covid lockdown.

For instance, one worker reported during final interview (2021) that they had had increasing difficulty contacting emergency accommodation departments of various local authorities where there was no email and only one number, and where holding to try and speak to somebody involved an hour queuing, at the end of which the 'service' disconnected and they had to start again. They had counted that in one client's case they had held for a total of 3 working days before getting through.

Various projects have responded to this hostile gate-keeping by training teams to write Pre-Action Protocol letters.<sup>2</sup> HMC joined the group of organisations taking this step by joining Deighton Pierce Glynn's 'PAP project' enabling volunteers to write pre-action protocol letters to spur the local authority into action.

### *Local authority accommodation increasingly out of borough*

Local authorities desperate for temporary accommodation in the wake of London's housing crisis started to increasingly place families out of borough. This produced stresses and strains for the families the project was supporting who had to travel big distances between home and schools.

"Parents often report children feeling different to their classmates, being in temporary accommodation halfway across London and having to travel long distances to school. I hear increasingly that local authorities are placing people very far from their schools and children are having to travel for an hour a day on the tube to get to school. The children will be tired and distressed by that and you see that when they come to the centre." [HMC volunteer]

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<sup>2</sup> A project started by Deighton Pierce Glynn which trained staff in both the Red Cross and Praxis to write these letters threatening action in order to push the local authority into a response.



### *Changing prospects for ECF applications*

When LASPO came into force, it included provision for 'exceptional case funding' (ECF) which could be applied for if vulnerable individuals needed the service of a lawyer. However, initial approval rates for such applications were very low indeed, locking many vulnerable people out of any potential legal aid provision at all. As a result of a challenge by the Public Law Project in 2015, a judgement in the High Court<sup>3</sup> found that the ECF scheme was not operating lawfully and needed changing in various ways.

When the Moving Out of Hardship project began in 2016, ECF applications were still only occasionally being granted as the effects of this judgement were slow to take effect. As time went on, however, more and more applications were successful resulting in more and more clients being prepared for legal aid. The change this brought about for the project was that whereas before they had had to work out what to do with clients where ECF funding applications failed, now the problem transmuted into one of finding legal advisors to take on the cases.

*"At the beginning of the project would seek legal representation - that was when we weren't getting ECF, really. So initially wasn't possible, then there was the PLP judgment and getting ECF became easier. So That was great as we were able to go from helping people understand their options, to taking the step for them to take forward those options through representation." [Project legal team]*

ECF applications are, however, time-consuming and during the course of the project some of the support the project had relied on closed down, meaning that lawyers in the project had to take over doing these applications themselves. Towards the end of the project these became the bulk of the work being done by lawyers.

### *Increasing shortage of legal aid advisors to take cases*

Following LASPO, the number of civil legal aid providers providing asylum and immigration advice reduced drastically as much of the work they had done previously became no longer funded (out of scope). The number of such providers reduced from 4,253 in 2011/12 to 2,824 in 2017/18<sup>4</sup> and this downward trajectory has continued.

The impact of this on the project was to reduce the number of lawyers and firms taking cases which were prepared (by establishing the case, gaining evidence and getting ECF funding) by the project. This meant that some clients were helped to get their case prepared but then there could be a delay of months before any trusted immigration lawyer had capacity to take the case on. During COVID, advisors reported that this became even more difficult.

### *Fees and 10-year route to settlement increasingly costly and time-consuming*

The policy of granting only **limited leave to remain** (just 30 months) means a further application plus a fee is always just around the corner, even after a successful application. Costs of applications are excessive<sup>5</sup>, leading to a cycle of poverty and debt for clients. Families on a 10-year route to settlement must make

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.baillii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2015/1965.html>

<sup>4</sup> Research for Paul Hamlyn Foundation by Saira Grant

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.freemovement.org.uk/immigration-nationality-application-fees-2021-22/>

multiple applications, and each one is extremely expensive. Health surcharges in immigration applications are high and have been increasing annually, currently standing (as at July 2021) at £624 per year for every applicant and dependent. This means that the health surcharge alone on a leave to remain application for a mother and 2 children is now £1,872 for every year of leave applied for, in addition to main application fees and cost of advice etc. The same high fees must be paid for every new application every 30 months (3 times) until Indefinite Leave to Remain is applied for.

Effectively this policy means that some undocumented migrants have become 'repeat clients' (visitors) for support agencies, thus adding to the pressure on them and other services. The need to apply for fee waivers is also linked to this – again, a further element of work which the project has needed to input for visitors.

### *NHS charges for in-country treatment*

These have been a big issue for new mothers in particular and are again part of the raft of measures brought in under the hostile environment. Maternity Action ran a national data collection project to which Hackney Migrant Centre contributed which showed the effect of NHS treatment charges on access to pre- and post-natal care. One client interviewed during this research noted that:

“After I had a caesarean section last year, the hospital gave me a bill of £12,000! I couldn't believe it. HMC helped refer me to a solicitor, and they got the Home Office to drop the fee.”

### *Covid pandemic*

From March 2020, the Covid pandemic created a range of new hardships and challenges for migrants which services had to adapt to. Many migrants who were previously 'just about coping' slipped below the waterline as they were made redundant from jobs in hospitality and various service industries which came to a halt as lockdown fell.

“We were finding that people who were just about coping before, were suddenly not coping. They had lost work or just slipped below the level that they could cope with.”  
[HMC volunteer]

“During Covid we really got stuck, because of our status. We didn't have any source of income. Before that I used to look after my friends' kids and my husband used to do gardening for people. So things weren't 100% but we were surviving somehow. But when Covid hit, everyone was home so no-one needed us to work for them.” [HMSC visitor]

This created a whole new cohort of clients presenting to the project with pressing housing or destitution issues including:

- Individuals or families who had previously been living with friends found themselves unable to sofa-surf due to fears of overcrowding which led to them being asked to move on and ending up on the streets.
- Accommodation identified by local authorities under the Everyone In scheme was often inadequate and far from support networks

- Housing provided was often lacking in basic facilities like furniture, leaving the project having to try and make up the gap
- Food provided under Everyone In schemes could be inappropriate or poor quality

“With the pandemic, things really changed - then we saw a lot of concerns about overcrowding and families living close to so many other families and being scared of that.” [HMC volunteer]

‘A lot of our visitors are sofa-surfers who find friends, acquaintances in their community, and they can stay with a host for years. But during the pandemic, people became reluctant to house other people. We found a lot of visitors who perhaps were somehow managing to get a roof over their head before, suddenly on the streets’. [HMSC volunteer]

“Initially, we were staying with my husband’s cousin for a while. During the lockdown last year, he lost his job and he couldn’t take care of our needs in the house, the rent and so on. It became a bit difficult. He moved outside London to look for another job. When he moved, there was no other way than to let go of the house, and that was when we seek help.” [HMSC visitor]

Covid also brought a range of other challenges for migrants at risk of destitution. Fears around infection led to difficulties in accessing GPs, for example. Ongoing fears about irregularity and potential deportation seemed to be making some reluctant to come forward for the vaccination programme. Anxiety, loneliness and isolation also took their toll on many who presented with a range of mental health needs, unable to access the charitable or statutory support they had previously.

“The mental health of visitors has been noticeably worse since lockdown. People approaching us are really struggling.” [Staff advisor]

Drop ins closed their doors and local authorities were unavailable except by phone, which were often impossible to get through to. Advisors in the project and from referral partners noted that they had had to adapt to try and get local authorities to respond to the needs of their visitors, but that even then the gatekeeping had intensified.

“At the beginning of the pandemic, many local authorities were using closure of social services building and lack of signed consent forms etc as additional gatekeeping techniques. We’ve overcome most of those now”. [HMC staff internal report 2021]

“We see so many people graze across 8 or 9 boroughs looking for help, and getting turned away or moved on. This was particularly bad in the time of the Coronavirus when cases were being closed by local authorities because young people weren’t picking up their phones, because they had no funds to put credit on their phones.” [Referral partner]

## 2.3 How the project changed and adapted over the five years

The structure and activities of the project adapted to this changing external context over the five years of the Moving Out of Hardship project. There was also ongoing learning about – and adjustments to – the project structures in order to strengthen the work.

The most significant changes to the original project plan highlighted during the evaluation were:

### *Measures to manage high levels of demand for project services*

Managing demand for the project's services at the point of access was an ongoing challenge for both HMC and HMSC through the project. Follow-up casework for the young people and families seen by this project was increasingly complex and time-consuming, meaning that the original drop-in model had to be carefully evolved in order to ensure sustainability of the service.

In Year 2, both projects worked with external consultants to carry out strategic reviews of their drop-in services. Following this, HMC introduced a limit on visitor numbers at its weekly drop-in, and restricted the number of new cases that could be taken on each week from 30 to 20. HMSC temporarily moved to a fortnightly drop-in in 2019, and in 2020 created two new staff posts (Casework Coordinator and Development Coordinator) to support the drop-in. Both centres improved their triage and casework management systems during the life of the project. These changes reportedly helped HMC and HMSC to deliver this project, although a careful balancing act was still needed to ensure demand did not outstrip capacity.

### *Staff wellbeing and staffing structure*

Some key aspects of the staffing structure evolved during the project, both in response to the needs of frontline staff and in order to manage the logistics of sharing staff resources across the project partnership.

In particular, the project caseworker position (advising visitors on welfare and housing issues), was significantly reformulated during project delivery. The original application had envisaged that the project caseworker would be employed by Hackney Migrant Centre and would work across both organisations. In 2018, the position was changed to become a job share (two workers who were each based at HMC and HMSC respectively, but both of whom were employed by HMC). The position underwent a further restructure in 2019, when it changed to become two workers, employed by HMC and HMSC respectively. This change enabled both centres to retain better oversight over the casework, and to manage the supervision and support of the project staff and volunteers.

More widely, HMC and HMSC reviewed their general staffing systems during the life of the project. As a result, greater support was given to staff at both centres in order to cope with the demands of the work, including more structured supervision and line management.

### *Adaptations to the Covid-19 pandemic*

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic substantially changed the project in its final year of delivery. Both HMC and HMSC had to close their drop-in services in March 2020 - the main gateway usually for visitors to access immediate and longer-term services. HMC established a Remote Advice Service, through which CCLC

and other advisors continued to provide advice to new and existing clients over the telephone and by email. A new Collective Care Team of volunteers delivered food and essential support to HMC visitors, many of whom had been housed in emergency accommodation across London. HMSC ran a more limited service, closing its telephone lines and taking on a small number of new cases, in order to focus on providing continued support to existing cases. A small number of HMSC volunteers continued to provide essential support to visitors in the community. Neither HMC nor HMSC has been able to reopen, and both continue to face continued uncertainty about their operating models into the future.

### *Introduced new, online databases for recording cases*

During the course of the project, both centres took steps to introduce new, online databases in order to enable them to better record client numbers and outcomes, and more easily share/update case notes and files internally and with external agencies. The HMC Lamplight database became operational in 2019 and, following a process of adjusting to that, is now embedded. HMSC's customised, Lamplight database became operational in March 2021. Thus far, there have been clear benefits to this for the work of this project, although the process of setting up new databases is necessarily time-consuming. We heard that, for HMC, the online database was a central factor in its being able to maintain casework for project visitors during the Covid-19 pandemic. Introduction of the databases has also assisted the final evaluation process as has already enabled HMC and HMSC to share visitor case files via email, as well as generating data on project outcomes more easily.

### *Found new ways to share the project learning with external agencies*

Originally, the project had planned to provide a series of in-depth trainings to other charities and providers, to multiply the impact of the work. In practice, the demands of the frontline work have meant that the project team have had the capacity to deliver a very limited number of issue-based trainings.

Instead, however, the project has instead established and maintained a dynamic series of formal partnerships and referral pathways with external providers, alongside participating in various informal networks and sector-based fora. We have heard that this has enabled HMC, HMSC and CCLC to share learning from the project with a range of external partners and participate in various joint research and advocacy initiatives.

## 3. Key outcomes and achievements

This section summarises the key achievements (benefits and outcomes) we could discern from data collected by the project and evaluation interviews. It looks first at the ways in which the primary beneficiaries of the project – migrants in hardship - benefitted from the project in the short term (section 3.1.) and the longer term (section 3.2). It then goes on to look at how the project benefited its referral partners (section 3.3.), the sector more widely (section 3.4.) and then finally considers the impacts of the project on the wider policy environment (section 3.5.).

### 3.1 Short term outcomes for migrants in hardship

Section 3.1. summarises the key short term benefits which migrants facing hardship gained from the project over five years.

The Moving out of Hardship project model aimed to help migrants by providing both short and longer term support. In the first instance it aimed to resolve immediate issues threatening clients' security and wellbeing, such as hunger, urgent mental and physical health issues, homelessness and destitution. Once these had been resolved it was then more possible to help people think about longer term threats to their wellbeing such as unresolved or irregular immigration status.

#### 3.1.a. Relief from immediate hunger

Meals were universally offered to visitors at both drop-in services as a way of drawing them into the centres and providing some immediate support and welcome. Many emphasised this element of the model as being crucial to the service. It ensured that all visitors, many of whom lacked the funds to feed themselves or their families properly, could at the very least benefit from a nutritious meal. The communal lunch brought visitors, volunteers and advisors together, building trust and establishing a friendly and supportive atmosphere. It also meant that visitors were more likely to absorb any advice given at the drop-in, and had the energy to stay at the centre for the whole day which was often necessary.

**“Having the lunchtime together at the drop-in is a really important part of the day, everyone being together. It’s a very sociable service.” [HMC volunteer]**

Until March 2020, meals were provided at the weekly drop-in services operated by both Hackney Migrant Centre and Haringey Migrant Support Centre. Following the COVID lockdown in March 2020, however, the drop-in services closed and both centres used outreach methods to supply clients with immediate necessities. HMC continued to provide food and other essential items to around 60 families per week through a new Collective Care Team of volunteers. HMSC provided vouchers for supermarkets or cash hardship payments instead of food parcels, estimating a total of £17,000 in vouchers, payments and grants were disbursed during this period, most of which was given to project beneficiaries<sup>6</sup>.

The project's original target was to provide immediate assistance to 2,700 visitors by the end of the project, by providing meals at drop-in sessions. In fact, it exceeded this target: over the course of the five year project it is estimated that 3,955 cooked meals were provided to young migrants and families. This

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<sup>6</sup> Exact beneficiary numbers during this period were not available.

provision relates only to Years 1 - 4 and therefore does not include the further assistance given to migrants in Year 5.

In addition to providing a meal at drop ins, the project also provided many visitors with access to foodbanks, either at the drop-in or through vouchers for an external service, to help them to feed themselves and their families over the coming days. The project records that 1,419 foodbank vouchers were issued to visitors over the course of the project.

This brought obvious and immediate relief to visitors.

“When I first went there I had nothing, I was so worried about being homeless. All these things were making me depressed and I had so much anxiety. But once I went there, they gave me hope. It didn’t happen straightaway, things took time to get sorted, but it gave me hope that things would happen. Even that first food voucher she gave me and the £20 cash, that made such a difference, it gave me a bit of hope, to have this kindness and help.” [HMSC visitor]

### 3.1.b. Addressing homelessness

The majority of people seeking assistance from the project were living in precarious accommodation alone or with their families - usually in the home of a friend or other community member. The project often saw people at the point when this arrangement was about to come to an end (often unexpectedly), and the visitor was facing homelessness. We heard that a minority of visitors were already sleeping rough, on night buses or on park benches for example, when they first made contact with the drop-ins.

The project could usually find immediate accommodation for people when needed, taking them off the streets. Overall, the Moving out of Hardship project was able to find emergency accommodation for 311 visitors, often in night shelters or similar.

“For us as volunteers, I remember doing a lot of calling around different shelters to find something for that night. I always managed to find something, even if it was only at 4 p.m. that day.” [HMC volunteer]

Following the first visit, volunteers were also able to make referrals for some visitors to dedicated housing projects such as Martha House, or secure placements for them with host families. This could potentially accommodate people for weeks or months, while further options were explored.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the project successfully helped 7 visitors to find emergency accommodation through their local authority, under the ‘Everyone In scheme’.<sup>7</sup> The project also managed to secure furniture for a number of migrants housed in unfurnished emergency accommodation by local authorities.

“A young single mother with a 5 year old was moved into emergency accommodation by Haringey local authority - a 1 bed flat - after a child in need assessment. There was a fully fitted kitchen in this flat, but not a stick of furniture. No bed, chair or table

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<sup>7</sup> Everyone In was the name given to the scheme announced by the government in June 2020 which provided funds for rough sleepers to be taken off the streets during the Covid pandemic.

in the place!... I did a lot of looking for furniture in the pandemic for various visitors because it was a real, real problem. The council was reduced to getting unfurnished accommodation from private landlords - it was quite extraordinary.” [HMSC volunteer]

### 3.1.c. Addressing immediate financial hardship

Most visitors were experiencing severe financial hardship when they first made contact with HMC or HMSC. Some had been completely financially dependent on support provided by friends, family or their local community, which for some reason or other had stopped, leaving them with no means of buying food, topping up their phone credit or buying clothes for themselves or their children.

The Moving out of Hardship project helped to immediately address this by issuing small hardship grants of between £5 and £25 to drop-in visitors. Overall, it is estimated that 1,327 small hardship payments were issued over the course of the project.

“The hardship grants were never something that people were expecting when they came. It was a really useful, small amount of money that relieved a lot of stress from them on the day... That was something you could do that could make a difference, tangibly, on the day.” [HMC volunteer]

As well as these immediate hardship payments on their first visit to the drop-ins, project volunteers often began to make applications in order to secure larger hardship grants for visitors, providing further financial assistance. These usually required an application to a charitable trust and, if granted, were paid into a friend’s bank account for the visitor to access. Applications for 1,231 larger hardship payments were made during the course of the project to migrants.

Although visitors were not seen at drop-ins during the Covid-19 pandemic, the projects still managed to make hardship payments to some migrants. HMSC increased the number of hardship payments made during the pandemic and reported this to be a good way of providing support at a time when face to face contact was so limited. We heard that some volunteers delivered cash in person to migrants who could not access friends’ bank accounts during the lockdown.

“People usually don’t have bank accounts for us to pay hardship grants into. If they were staying with a friend then I could have done it that way in the past, but not once they were in hotels [during the pandemic]. I had to drive there and give them the money in person.” [HMSC volunteer]

In addition, the project also provided support to some visitors on benefits issues, during their first visit to the drop-ins. This involved investigating why benefits had been stopped, establishing new benefits claims and referrals to external agencies.

### 3.1.d. Meeting physical and/or mental health needs

Some visitors attending the HMC or HMSC drop-ins were experiencing physical and/or mental health issues, and the project was able to provide ‘on the day’ health support to a number of visitors. This included helping 301 visitors to complete HC1 forms in order to get free prescriptions, sight and dental tests, as well as on-the-day health advice (in Years 1 and 2) by healthcare charities MIND and Doctors of the World.



Over the course of the project, 361 visitors were advised on how to register with a GP, or referred elsewhere for mental or physical health support.

“HMC are good with mental health issues, making a lot of referrals to mental health charities. Given the resources they have, it’s amazing what a service they can provide. They get a lot done.” [HMC volunteer]

The project also successfully intervened to help a small number of visitors to challenge NHS charges for overseas visitors to access healthcare, including maternity care. HMC began to monitor this in Years 4 and 5 of the project, and estimates that a total of £48,000 worth of NHS debt was written off during this period for 22 visitors, as a result of project interventions.

“People are having their baby and then getting sent a bill for a few thousand pounds. If you put in an immigration application and you have an outstanding debt to the NHS they can refuse it on that basis, so we have to ensure they get a minimal payment plan even if it is £2 a week. We are also seeing people refused cancer treatment, and even women who have lost babies are getting chased for the intensive care support provided for the baby before he or she died.” (Staff member, Interim evaluation, 2017)

### 3.1.e. Supporting parents and children

Many of the beneficiaries of Moving Out of Hardship had families, and often brought young children with them to the drop-ins. All visitors attending with children were able to use the children’s play areas, run by volunteers, during their visit. This enabled visitors to better cope with the situation, concentrate on the advice given and therefore get the most value out of the support provided.

“I think that having the creche is a really good idea - it gives mums and dads the headspace to focus on the advice and chat to us, knowing their baby was being looked after. That is really helpful for them.” [HMC volunteer]

Some visitors attending the drop-ins with children lacked basic necessities, like baby clothes, nappies or baby baths, as well as items such as children’s toys. Part of the support provided by volunteers was to provide them with donations of clothes, food and toys made available through the centres. Where the necessary items were not available, applications were then made to specialist charities such as Little Village for further supplies.

“As a volunteer, there’s always extra things that you don’t need to do but would be a nice bonus for them e.g. I try to reach out to a local group to get them to donate really nice toys - it’s not a necessity but it’s nice and fun and kids should be able to have them, as well as basics.” [HMC volunteer]

### 3.1.f. Strengthening visitors’ ability to understand their situation and the options available

Beyond addressing immediate welfare needs, all visitors to the HMC and HMSC drop-in services were able to access an initial appointment with one or more specialist advisors employed by the project - including an immigration lawyer and/or welfare advisor. This allowed visitors to better understand the options

available to them and make an informed decision on the next steps regarding further casework, advice or support.

An estimated 2,184 visitors received initial welfare and / or immigration advice 'on the day', by project advisors.

The initial advice sessions often led to follow-up applications, casework and/or support, either at HMC or HMSC , or a referral to another agency to take the case forward. However, we heard that even where no further advice or support could be given, the advice had often helped visitors to better understand their situation and the options available to them.

"I think the services give the clients very immediate responses, which straightaway give them a comfort blanket. Even if it's a negative response, they get some useful information which helps them to think about another way forward. Everybody always leaves with some hope..." [External referral partner]

## 3.2 Longer term outcomes for migrants in hardship

Beyond the on-the day support, the project aimed to provide follow-up interventions and casework to help visitors resolve their wider crisis situation. This involved taking steps to address one or more longer-term issues, including welfare provision, accommodation, access to education and immigration status.

During the 5 years of the project, approximately 1,462 visitors received follow-up support and advice from specialist advisors employed by HMC, HMSC and CCLC under this project. This significantly exceeded the original target of providing specialist advocacy and casework to 1,075 visitors by the end of the project.

"Overall the project has done a lot of great things. It has advised over 1000 families across the five years of the project - those are families in which there are many members. A lot of them have secured leave and we've had a crucial role in the step from them not knowing what to do to taking the right steps and getting legal representation." [Project worker]

As a result of its follow-up support, the project has achieved multiple longer-term outcomes for visitors of which the following are the most significant.

### 3.2.a. Successfully challenging local authorities to provide support for families

Many visitors to HMC and HMSC with children were eligible for support from their local authority which they were not receiving. We heard particularly about visitors being denied support due to a failure of local authorities to assess their children under the Children's Act, and the lack of family eligibility for No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). This was successfully challenged for visitors by Moving out of Hardship welfare advisors, including by referrals to external agencies to have NRPF restrictions lifted.

The project also made 189 successful referrals to external solicitors to secure Section 17 support, resulting in material improvements for visitors.

“Certainly the most obvious examples are the ones where we have a young single mother with child or children who is living very precariously, courtesy of a church friend, but that situation is becoming untenable. Where HMSC has made a difference is in pushing the local authority and social services into doing the Section 17 assessment. And then, happily, finding them a roof over their heads. That is a big move forward - suddenly they have some level of security which makes a big difference to them...” (External referral partner)

“It was only because of HMSC that we got housed by Haringey Council, they are helping us under the Children’s Act, and are giving us money for food. So at least I don’t have to worry about not having money to buy food for my children.” [HMSC visitor]

“The point where they get a roof over their head is a real moment - it’s hard for anyone to imagine what it’s like to finally get a door to shut behind you unless you’ve been in that situation yourself.” [HMSC volunteer]

Attending appointments with social services was known to be stressful for families, as they were frequently treated poorly or even with hostility by the local authority. The Moving out of Hardship project ensured that 49 families were accompanied by support charity NELMA<sup>8</sup> to attend social services assessments, helping them to present their situation clearly and absorb all information given to them by social services.

### 3.2.b. Successfully challenging unsuitable accommodation provided by local authorities

Even after visitors and their families were housed by local authorities, some families were placed in unsuitable housing which was too small, unsuitable for children, too far away from schools or work, or even unfurnished. During the course of the project, advisors made 57 successful visitor referrals to external solicitors with the aim of resolving their housing issues. Once referred, however, we heard that ultimate resolution of housing problems often required multiple legal interventions, and further support from the project.

“The second thing that HMC did for me is that the room that the council gave us was tiny - just a single bed and one chair. The kitchen was out of the hotel in another building. No space for my daughter to play or anything. I was trying to manage but I couldn’t cope, my daughter hated being in that tiny room and she would cry and refuse to go back there after we went out. I had to call [MOH worker] and tell her. [MOH worker] sent an email to the council and my social worker, they didn’t do anything for me. The lawyer called me and I explained everything, they sent a letter to the local council. We gave them some time and then they did give us another room which was a bit bigger than the one we had before.” [HMC visitor]

### 3.2.c. Ensuring schools adequately met the needs of visitors’ children

Visitors to the project often reported issues relating to schooling and childcare. Some parents and school-age children attending the centres were not eligible for free school meals due to NRP restrictions and, as

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<sup>8</sup> North East London Migrant Action <https://nelmacampaigns.wordpress.com/>

a result, their children were not having lunch. Over the five years it ran, Moving Out of Hardship managed to secure free school meals for 137 children by advocating with schools and/or local authorities.

Where children were attending school, the project also helped to secure crucial school supplies that the family was unable to provide. We heard about multiple provisions by the project in order to help school age children.

“A lot of families that we would see - if their kids were already at school there were issues around free school meals, uniform, needing help with stationary and so on, so that they could take part in school, childcare as well - so we were juggling all that to help them.” [HMC volunteer]

“They would bring food to my house throughout the Covid lockdown. They knew that we were suffering a lot. [They also] helped us with a tablet for the children to keep studying on.” [HMSC visitor]

Moving Out of Hardship also managed to successfully lobby local authorities to secure childcare for visitors where children with special needs were involved.

“In January 2020, I realised I really needed some help with my daughter. [MOH worker] helped me to find a nursery and do the application. I needed to go to the council to get a letter of support. There were two ladies there and they told me that because of my status my daughter couldn't go to school. But [name of daughter] is British! And she is autistic, she needs some help. [MOH worker] helped by sending an email to them. Three or four days later they rang back and gave her a space in the school. I was very happy!” [HMC visitor]

### 3.2.d. Securing removal of NRPF conditions

Many visitors to the HMC and HMSC drop-ins were destitute as they were either not entitled to access benefits as had no immigration status, or had been given leave but with a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition attached

The Moving out of Hardship project successfully made at least 13 applications to have NRPF conditions lifted, of which 5 were successful. In addition, it assisted many more visitors by referring them onto specialist agencies such as the Unity Project<sup>9</sup> which could help them apply to have the NRPF conditions removed.

“When I came I wanted help to lift the NRPF ban, but I didn't know if I would qualify. I came for help with accommodation, I was in a single room rented with my son. It was very expensive.....HMSC were really helpful, they gave me a lawyer, they said that because of my situation I could get help. I offered to do the application on my own, just needed bit of support. They printed the form, went through it with me, and told me the documents to attach so I did it myself. The application is free of charge.” (Visitor interview, Interim evaluation, 2017)

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### 3.2.e. Securing legal aid / fee waivers for visitors to progress their immigration cases

The majority of the visitors coming to HMC and HMSC under this project had underlying immigration or nationality issues, and many had grounds for applications to the Home Office. However, the pathway to immigration status often required a series of expensive applications, and many visitors could not afford to progress without financial assistance.

Led by the project immigration advisor at Coram Children’s Legal Centre, the MoH project applied for and secured Exceptional Case Funding for 199 visitors to take their cases forward. However, there was a very high demand for solicitors who could then take the ECF-funded cases on as a result of which securing a solicitor was often extremely challenging at this point, with visitors sometimes having to wait months before a solicitor could be found.

The MoH project additionally successfully applied for some visitors’ immigration application fees to be waived, again, to enable them to progress their application.

“HMSC ... saw that apart from the housing and money issues we needed help with immigration, and they helped us to apply. I wasn’t working and there was no way we could pay for it, so they helped us to apply for a fee waiver. We were then able to get a solicitor through them, to process our application to the Home Office... Three weeks ago, we were given residents permits - 30 months of leave to remain, with recourse to public funds.” [HMSC visitor]

### 3.2.f. Enabling access to specialist advice / support

The project was also able to connect visitors with external agencies which then provided specialist advice and support relevant to their particular situation.

“We receive referrals from HMSC for people to make Change of Conditions applications to remove the NRPF condition. Often, HMSC are the first people to tell people about the possibility of making a CoC application. .. We can offer follow up and support in this specific area (CoC applications), but we can only do that if people find out about us in the first place, which they might not do without places like HMSC. HMSC have directly referred over 60 people to us, mostly families, and that number doesn't include people who they've advised to contact us directly instead. Without these referrals, these families might not have found out about possibility of removing NRPF condition/support.” [Referral partner]

“HMC are really good at being a drop-in and being an on-the-spot pathway to give someone a plan and the first step on a journey - and then they bring in professionals and specialists to do the specialist stuff.” [Referral partner]

### 3.2.g. Helping children and young people register as British citizens

The largest demographic seen by the legal team working in the project were destitute families where there was a child who might be British. Migrant children who are born in the UK have the right to register as British citizens, if it can be demonstrated that at least one of their parents has indefinite leave to remain in the UK or British citizenship, or if they have lived in the UK for the first 10 years of their life.

“80% of cases are destitute families who can regularise their status somehow in relation to rights which stem from the child. There are lots of nuances to the work on such cases depending on what evidence families might have in terms of rights of the child. And a lot of case-building exercises for activities which go alongside making an ECF application which we needed to do just for somebody to be taken on by the solicitor - for instance, we might need to help a mum prove the nationality of a child, or work out the nationality of the father.” [Project legal team]

For some project visitors, this also required them to obtain proof of paternity from a partner who may have left the family and cut off contact.

We heard about multiple visitors to the MoH project whose children had been successfully registered as British citizens, largely as a result of legal casework by Coram Children’s Legal Centre under this project. This then opened up access to a range of local authority assistance, including access to welfare benefits and accommodation. It also provided a pathway for their parent/s to then make an application for their own immigration status (usually 30 months limited leave to remain in the UK), in order to care for them.

### 3.2.h. Successfully resolving immigration status issues

The project’s immigration advice and casework has brought about concrete improvements in immigration status for multiple visitors over the past 5 years - usually by securing a period of 30 months of Limited Leave to Remain. Many of these cases involved the unravelling of years of inadequate or non-existent advice in order to regularise status and help the individual move on in their lives.

“I worked with one young person who was around 25 years old and arrived homeless and completely destitute. She had been living for years with no fixed address at lots of people’s houses, having been kicked out of her family home at 17. She’d arrived in the UK around 6 or 7 years old.

Going through all her documents we realised she had had Leave to Remain from the age of 12 or 13 but was dyslexic, not really literate and nobody had taken the time to go through her papers with her and tell her. So we got her Home Office file and she could remember some of the schools she had been through by identifying the uniform or by identifying the bus stop she got off at and things like that. So we managed to contact all these different places she had been at school including a school for SEN and proved that she had been here. I was able to do that application for her and within two months I had a way of proving she’d been here and she had ILR. HMC helped with accommodation during that time. She is now living in north London.” [Project legal team]

Though it was difficult to track casework outcomes for visitors once referred on to solicitors (as they often had lost contact with project staff by the time the Home Office decision was made), anecdotal evidence gathered by this evaluation points to multiple cases in which visitors' immigration status issues were successfully resolved.

“After that, [MOH worker] called me to say I should go to HMC to sort out my Home Office to apply to regularise my own status. I went to the centre in March 2020 before the lockdown. They then found me a lawyer, we started the process... Because I was still waiting for [daughter's] diagnosis, the lawyer said she still needed more proof from the doctor to support my application. The lawyer told me I needed a [country of origin] passport as I didn't have one. I called the lawyer to tell her and they said that I needed £250 to buy the postal order to get the passport. The lawyer told me to find that and HMC paid for that for me. This January 2021 I put in my application in, with my passport. They called me in mid-March to say that it had been successful and I had leave to remain to take care of my daughter. They supported me so much.” [HMC visitor]

“But imagine, if [HMSC] didn't help us, what would have happened. My daughter could have already applied for her status under the 7-year rule but we didn't have the money. HMSC helped us to do that and it has happened in the end. Our life really changed through Haringey Migrant Support.” [HMSC visitor]

Many of the visitors to HMC / HMSC had received poor advice elsewhere, or had cases which had been ongoing for months or even years. The Moving out of Hardship project intervened to help untangle such messy or compromised casework situations, or to advance or stabilise immigration applications in order to give visitors the best chance of success. This included requesting adjournments for appeals, making referrals to the National Referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking, and/or referring clients into the asylum system.

### 3.2.i. Bringing about improvements in visitors' well-being

When visitors first sought advice from HMC and HMSC they were often in a state of extreme stress and anxiety. It is difficult to measure changes in well-being and mental health, but the project took various steps to track the impacts of project interventions on clients in this regard, including:

- Feedback forms for visitors at both centres, completed periodically.
- Follow-up telephone interviews with visitors by volunteers, again conducted periodically
- Telephone interviews with visitors as part of external evaluations.

These feedback mechanisms give us some indications of the impacts on visitors' well-being as a result of making a connection with the project. Key benefits include:

- Improvements in mood, and mental and physical well-being.
- Increased understanding of their situation - and ability to cope with the challenges they face
- Increased connection with friends or family and reduced isolation.
- Taking better care of themselves and their children.

- More confidence and a sense of 'having rights'
- Having a sense of future - expressing hope and making plans for the next stages of their life.

The following quotes from visitor interviews highlight the improvements they felt in their mental wellbeing as a result of the support received from Moving Out of Hardship.

"I was so stressed - thinking, thinking all the time. I couldn't sleep. I had a headache all the time. All the time there was tears, tears. But now, through them, we have a place to stay, the children are happy they are OK at school. Now my 'thinking thinking' has gone. I'm a happy woman in my spirit now." [HMSC visitor]

"Before we came to Haringey, and got the help we needed, I was scared. We had nowhere to go and I was always thinking about how to find the right help for my family. And the kids are involved, and during the lockdown with the virus and everything I was scared. I didn't know what to do. After Haringey helped us out and directed us to the right people to get the help we needed, even though right now we are still not in the right place, we are much much better than we were. We are not on the streets, finally we have our residence permits and I am happy." [HMSC visitor]

"Sometimes, you just need a hand from someone to help you with your problems - to hold you up while you're experiencing a bad time. And then you can move on and you don't need them anymore. I hope that, when our situation is sorted, we can get on with our lives and some other family can take our place at Haringey." [HMSC visitor]

Some of the impact for visitors came from having a constant source of support through the ups and downs of 'moving out of hardship', which was rarely a linear route. This wrap-around support accompanied some visitors through sometimes very difficult moments in their lives, as these two quotes from volunteers illustrate.

"There's one client I've worked with for the last year, and when I first was speaking to her she was about to have a baby, had none of the baby things she needed, and was really scared about how she'd get to the hospital and also about what would happen after the baby was born, getting him his British passport and everything. With her it's been a full service we've been able to provide - I helped her to get a full baby set-up (clothes, formula). I was calling her during labour to offer words of encouragement, and have visited her in her new place. I helped her to get set up with new, much better, safer, housing. She was so happy with the housing we'd managed to sort out for her. She's also really interested in education and becoming a nurse. We've helped her with a solicitor and she has an immigration case pending which will hopefully work out. From the beginning when I first met her she was in a real state, so worried and frightened. There's definitely still a journey ahead but there has been a huge change in that. She is so much calmer and clearer now. Having that long-term care (she and I have spoken regularly over the last year) has made such a difference. Often clients have to speak to many people and that can be unsettling so this has been really helpful for her." [HMC volunteer]



“A few years ago, a youngish person came to me, with two children. She came in really distressed because she’d run away from Nigeria with her children from an abusive relationship and come here. She’s been here a while, had some accommodation somewhere and came in very distressed because her husband had found out where she was and was threatening her. He said that the daughter was coming up to 13 and he wanted to come and get her and bring her back to Nigeria for FGM. The housing advisor at the time immediately found her new accommodation within 24 hours of her first coming here. Then we started a whole support package for her and her children, including getting her status in the UK. She has now done lots of courses, she’s bettering herself, she has her own flat. She is happy, she is a volunteer at HMC because she wanted to give something back. It’s taken a few years but she’s now in a much better place and she and her kids are safe. We get lots of stories like that.” [HMC volunteer]

### 3.2.j. Longer term outcomes not always positive given immigration system

For some clients, the picture was not so positive as their case was ongoing at the end of the project or their situation remained precarious. Whilst in these cases the project had represented an important source of support or help in an otherwise hostile environment, it is still important to note that many visitors continued to face significant challenges in their lives. Gaining immigration status was a classic example of this:

“It’s a huge and life changing experience for people to gain immigration status especially if they’ve been an undocumented migrant. For a lot of people that might create a barrier for them falling into destitution again. But I don’t think that’s the end of crises for many of them - a lot of people can be in poverty after that. For me, the issue is structural - the 10 year route for settlement seems to be designed to perpetuate precarity. The things we can do to help people not to fall into some of the traps in the 10 year route, e.g. avoiding bad legal representation, making in-time applications, fee waivers, NRP conditions, - all that can be helped by HMC. Often at that point, people have moved out of crisis point but there are risks in things spiralling again.” [HMC volunteer]

## 3.3 Outcomes for referral partners and other support agencies

HMC and HMSC both worked with a range of external agencies as referral partners and other sources of support during this project. They were both referree and referrer: frontline and community groups not able to provide the degree of advice and support migrants needed would refer to them, and Moving Out of Hardship would refer on visitors to other specialists when they needed more detailed or specialist support.

### 3.3.a. Providing wrap-around support to enable specialists to focus on complex casework

For some specialist agencies in referral partnerships with HMC and HMSC, the value added by the project was in its holistic approach towards visitors. The wrap-around support which the Moving Out of Hardship provided made it easier for external agencies to focus on the complex casework, with confidence that the visitor’s immediate material and also emotional needs were being met.

“One thing I’d really highlight is HMC’s hardship funding throughout Covid. They have heavily supported families materially, in terms of grant-finding and material support - to meet their material needs at the time. That has taken hours and hours of time off my caseload. They were so responsive to the immediate needs of families. That meant that we didn’t need to worry about that and could focus on the technical part of cases.” [Referral partner]

### 3.3.b. Supporting frontline agencies working with migrants in hardship

The combined contribution of HMC, HMSC and CCLC as Moving Out Of Hardship was described as a much-valued resource for many of the agencies interviewed during this evaluation process which were able to refer their clients into the project, particularly for immigration advice or support. This significantly added value to the work being done by other agencies which felt that they were better able to help their clients and find them pathways through destitution and irregularity.

The following quotes are all from different organisations, all of which referred into Moving Out of Hardship.

“[By referring our clients to the project], we link them in with the more trained immigration advocacy stuff that both Hackney and Haringey can do. What takes us 20 minutes to explain, they can do in 2 minutes. They may not be able to do the housing or whatever, it might be outside their catchment. So we collaborate to find the funds to help them. We do the advocating for them, and they do the legal advice..... Both HMC and HMSC also have a contact list of lawyers so they can then pathway them by finding lawyers who can take on cases. I don’t have that list and it would take us days to find a lawyer if we tried.” [Referral partner]

“The Moving out of Hardship project increased the sources of support available for our client group and people in similar situations. We have signposted to HMC/HMSC a lot when Project 17 hasn’t had capacity for new cases, and when people have needed immigration advice (which we can’t provide).” [Referral partner]

“We run a drop-in open to anyone who needs free meals and/or other types of support. The range of issues our service users are faced with is very diverse. We don’t have any specialist advisors in-house. In the past, the type of support we could offer to vulnerable migrants was very limited. Being able to refer people to HMC / Moving Out of Hardship Project has made a real difference.” [Referral partner]

Both HMC and HMSC also played through this project an important mutual aid role within the community of organisations working with vulnerable migrants in London. The wider support provided by HMSC to one external agency was described as follows:

“[Names of workers] in particular have always been super supportive and generous with their time, lending expertise and insights, and sometimes practical support that we literally wouldn’t have been able to keep going without. For instance, they let us use their OISC registration for a while when Lambeth Law Centre closed out of the blue and left us high and dry, but also emotional support.” [Referral partner]

### 3.3.c. Building skills within the partnership

The partnership also enabled the three partner organisations to learn more about each other and how to work together. There was also evidence that skills were being built as a result: for instance, Coram Children’s Legal Centre helped to start an ECF project at Hackney Migrant’s Centre.

“Hackney Migrant Centre wanted to start their own ECF project for these cases and other cases they had in. I did training with lots of volunteers on two occasions explaining the ECF project and how to do the applications, and we set out templates for them and shared our model. For the first few months I also supervised the ECF applications they were doing, and still answer if there are any complicated queries about evidence and means. But now it has a momentum of its own and it is a functioning little project within HMC which has helped boost what they can do for all their visitors.” [Project legal team]

### 3.4. Sharing project learning more widely across the sector

HMC, HMSC and CCLC regularly drew upon the work of the project to contribute to initiatives of key civil society and institutional stakeholders. Outcomes of this activity included:

- **Strengthening other organisations’ research, inquiry submissions and advocacy work** by contributing case studies and insights from the project. This had direct benefits for others, including the Public Interest Law Project, Maternity Action, Project 17, the Law Commission, Freedom from Torture, Migrants Rights Network, NACCOM, and JCWI.
- **Improving understanding of migration and destitution among wider civil society sectors** (including organisations working within homelessness, public health, poverty relief and children’s rights), by presenting the project at meetings and public events and contributing evidence and information for research and legal submissions.
- **Producing concrete resources for frontline practitioners:** for example, the HMC guide, produced in 2019, for NGOs and migrants on how to access Section 17 Support. This was produced in partnership with 5 other organisations (Project 17, Akwaaba, Migrants Rights Network, NELMA and Together with Migrant Children) and was widely distributed across the sector.
- **Building constructive dialogue between the sector and statutory providers.** Project staff met periodically with a range of local and national statutory players, including from public services (GPs, public health providers), local government (e.g. Mayor of London, Newham Council, Hackney Council) and members of parliament (e.g. Kate Osamor MP) to present evidence from the project and discuss solutions.

### 3.5. Benefits for the wider policy landscape

Many of the challenges faced by visitors to the project had arisen from hostile policies and legislation and their implementation at local level through the actions of public services and local authorities. Although it is difficult to measure direct impacts of campaigning or policy activities, we heard that HMC, HMSC and

CCLC had all helped to raise the profile of these issues through advocacy work drawing on the learning from this project. In particular, the following outcomes of this work can be highlighted:

### 3.5.a. Influencing local authorities to change their policies or practices

During the course of the project, HMC and HMSC, supported by sympathetic solicitors firms and other local charities, led a number of successful legal and advocacy challenges to poor or discriminatory practice by local authorities. These challenges resulted in number of concrete outcomes, illustrated by the examples below:

- **Securing justice for visitors by challenging local authority in the courts.** A case taken forward by Hackney Migrant Centre in 2016 and supported by a solicitor's firm successfully challenged the decision of a local authority to withdraw housing and support from a visitor, husband and three children, rendering them homeless. The family won the case on appeal and not only were the family re-housed by the local authority, but they were awarded £30,000 in damages due the 'irrationality' of the original decision and distress it had caused.
- **Achieving concrete policy changes on local Section 17 subsistence levels.** In 2018/9, Haringey Migrant Support Centre partnered with Project 17 and the Public Interest Law Centre to challenge Haringey Council's low level of subsistence support offered to families receiving section 17 support. Using examples of visitors to this project who were being required to support their families on as little as £37 per week, they lobbied the Council for a change. Shortly afterwards, the Council issued new guidance including an increase in the subsistence support granted under Section 17.
- **Bringing about a shift within local authority approach towards destitute migrant families.** In 2019, Hackney Migrant Centre, in partnership with four other charities, made a formal complaint to Newham Children's Services in 2019 regarding treatment of families and children with No Recourse to Public Funds. This complaint went to the highest levels of the Council, resulting in meetings with the Mayor of Newham, and in the replacement of problematic staff members within Social Services. Frontline staff in the NRPF team at the Council were subsequently given targeted trainings in order to improve their treatment of vulnerable families.

### 3.5.b. Informing national policy work

The project reported multiple national policy interventions and joint campaigning actions by all three partners to raise awareness about issues relating to migration and destitution, drawing upon learning and/or case studies from this project. These include submissions to national Parliamentary and Committee inquiries, contributions towards joint letters sent to politicians and the media raising the profile of destitution and migration as an issue, and other lobbying activities.

Coram Children's Legal Centre in particular has engaged in widespread national policy and advocacy work to improve the rights of migrant children and young people. It has regularly drawn upon the casework and learning from this project in order to inform that work, as well as its other casework.

"1,000 families has provided an enormous evidence base for us. We have different areas of expertise but most of the work we do is around families on the 10 year route. The

evidence we draw on for that work is from this project. So it's massively shaped our thinking and the outputs we produce.

For example, British Futures ran a cross-party enquiry into citizenship policy and the evidence we put into that about children's citizenship and how difficult it can be for single parents to evidence it was informed by the work on this project. Equally with Zambrano - there was a letter which ILPA sent and we all signed up to this letter from the project. And we did a witness statement also on Zambrano which Hackney Law Centre ran and the witness statement is based on our practice in this project." [Project staff]

The following examples show some of the other concrete policy and advocacy impacts the project has had through national-level lobbying and campaigning work:

- **Raising awareness among politicians about the issues faced by vulnerable children.** In 2020 Coram Children's Legal Centre drew on evidence from the project to publish a major report on children and the EU settlement scheme: 'Children left out? Securing Children's Rights to stay in the UK beyond Brexit', which received widespread citations by Mayor of London and Parliamentarians, as well as online.
- **Influencing policy recommendations to the government.** In 2020, the final report of a national cross-party inquiry into citizenship policy drew extensively upon Coram Children's Legal Centre's submission which cited the hundreds of cases it assisted through this project. The final inquiry report echoed CCLC in its recommendations to the government.
- **Raising awareness about the need for free school meals for migrant children.** In 2020, Hackney Migrant Centre published a report 'Children with No Recourse to Public Funds: the need for free school meals'. This drew on case studies of visitors to this project, some of whom were subsequently interviewed for an article covering this issue in the national media.
- **Raising the profile of destitute migrants through national media coverage.** In 2020, Haringey Migrant Support Centre, together with the Public Interest Law Centre, drew on learning from the project to draw attention to the impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and the private sector. A joint submission by HMSC and other charities in the homeless sector was made to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry. The issue was subsequently covered across national and sector-based media, with HMSC quoted.
- **Shining a light on the issues faced by destitute migrants in the pandemic.** Since March 2020, HMC, HMSC and CCLC have participated in a series of lobbying activities to highlight the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on destitute migrants, including joint letters with other NGOs to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

## 4. Key learning from the project

This section summarises what was learnt about the model of delivery and its operations over the five years. Section 4.1. looks first at the critical success factors which enabled it create strong working relationships and systems, and section 4.2 looks at those elements which worked less well or undermined its effectiveness.

### 4.1 Success factors

#### 4.1.a. Wrap-around holistic support enables specialists to give meaningful advice

It was clear that a key strength of the Moving Out of Hardship model had been the wrap-around support which enabled lawyers to give meaningful advice. The support was partly practical (assessing and triaging, chasing documents and assembling relevant pieces of information for submission to the lawyers) but it was also human and emotional – providing a listening ear, being reassuring and explaining the situation as needed.

Without it being a holistic model with support from HMC, a lot of the advice I gave might not actually have been meaningful advice. Often I tell them to do something they cannot action without the support of HMC and the volunteers on that side of the project. They help so much in terms of practically implementing the advice and making something actually happen.

It can be really basic stuff. For instance, I will sit with somebody and give them advice for an hour and I might think they have understood. But then someone from HMC will call them again to make sure they understand what has been said. And sometimes more things are raised and it emerges they didn't understand those bits - so I call them back and we can have another conversation about it, or somebody from HMC will go through the notes I've provided.

They are also key for follow up. I can write a few lines saying for instance, 'this person needs to find out the nationality of the father - we need X, Y and Z documents'. That's easy for me to write down, but then HMC will help with the practical sides of getting that information. They help implement the advice in a way which wouldn't happen if they weren't there." [Project legal team]

Many of the visitors who attended HMC and HMSC have had multiple contacts with advice agencies or public services. Even if they had been given good advice previously, they had clearly often not been listened to or had things explained to them in a way that they could understand. This model helps to make sure that the specialist advice on offer is understood, and enacted. This model is hugely helped by being backed up by the strong volunteer teams who do not have the same pressure of time as paid members of staff.

"The volunteer's role is to put yourself in their shoes and think about what we could give them. We are in no rush - we don't need to move on until they are finished. Sometimes we only see 1 person, if they need more time then they do. If we need to

stay until 6pm then we do that - that's definitely the atmosphere there. It's a very family-friendly environment. [HMC volunteer]

Giving good and detailed advice gives a lot of agency to people - I see that as a really important part of it. Often people haven't had good advice before, and that can be very disempowering. Giving people the time of day and making sure you explain things and help them get some control over the situation is very important. [HMC volunteer]

#### 4.1.b. Co-working model enables issues to be dealt with in a time-efficient manner

Migrants seeking help can find themselves having to explain their story, often in spite of language challenges, to multiple advisors or services. One of the strengths of the project was that it enabled the multiplicity of issues a visitor may be facing to be untangled and worked on simultaneously by specialist advisors who could help with a wide range of support, including housing, welfare and immigration advice. This proved not only better for the visitor but also for the service which could ensure that everybody was working on the same basis and towards the same goal for the visitor and was able to update the other if there were any significant developments. This is more efficient and saves time for all.

“One of the things our clients mention a lot is being asked the same set of questions a lot of times (e.g. by housing advisors, immigration advisors, domestic violence workers, social workers) and so having both immigration and housing advice that is linked up and able to share info (with consent) makes things a lot faster.” [Referral partner]

#### 4.1.c. Importance of committed and supported volunteer network to underpin delivery

The model greatly benefitted from the strong support and skills provided by HMC and HMSC volunteers and the systems which have been developed to tap into and manage their skill, energy and commitment. HMC in particular has particularly strong networks of often long term volunteers who are trained to deliver on certain elements of the work, as well as well developed systems for volunteer recruitment, support and supervision.

“They have an ARMY of volunteers! I'm always struck by how much they deliver with so few paid staff, they really invest in their volunteers. It really shows in the work that they do. [Referral partner]

A key benefit of this was the fact that volunteer involvement allowed each visitor to receive flexible amounts of time and attention during which volunteers could both listen and explain according to individual visitor need, rather than be constrained by the parameters of having to fit a certain amount of people into a (paid) schedule.

The volunteers delivered core elements of the model. For instance, the triage and assessment process at HMC was enabled by having this network both before and then during Covid, when a detailed assessment of each visitor was done by a volunteer over the phone every Wednesday to prepare the case for referral to the legal advisor. Volunteers also picked up on work which needed doing following the advice.

In addition, other cohorts of volunteers trained during this project added value to the project's work: those trained on doing ECF applications at HMC, for example, those part of HMSC's Legal Support Team or those recruited and supported to be part of the Collective Care Team set up by HMC during COVID to offer financial and emotional support during the pandemic. Volunteers added much and also relished the engagement.

"I find the whole service, if you're there for a whole day which I am, such an amazing service to provide. From getting people a hot drink in the morning, to providing all the support we've talked about, and the lunch. There's not one specific thing, it's the whole thing, and the thanks and recognition that we always get at the end of the day that makes it worthwhile. I desperately miss the drop-in now - the people you meet and the volunteers, both sets of people are amazing to spend a day with." [HMC volunteer]

#### 4.1.d. Importance of strong systems and back office functions to enable flexibility

The development of strong systems and back office functions – for example around data collection, online case management and volunteer organisation – were important throughout the project but in particular enabled rapid and successful adaptation during Covid. HMC managed in a very short timeframe to develop a new system for triage, assessment and case conduct assisted by having cloud-based working in place and strong volunteer management systems. Referral partners were particularly appreciative of this:

"The way the referral pathways has changed has mainly been because of Lamplight - every week they send me lists of names and I can now pop in to their computer system. It's been quite seamless for us to be honest. It's been a lot smoother than I thought it would be.....HMC is the only one [of our partners] that devised a model for a telephone drop-in to carry on helping people during the lockdown. So many other drop-ins..... literally just closed their doors and stopped providing a service. We saw a lot of that. But HMC levelled up to try and meet the challenge." [Referral partner]

#### 4.1.e. Establishing roles and boundaries

Creating a partnership between a frontline organisation (which is constantly dealing with demand often presenting in physical form) and a specialist organisation which exists further back from the frontline can have tensions, as the project learnt over the years. Where partners felt that this relationship worked best was when there was a mutual understanding about the very real constraints on specialist advisor time.

"I think an understanding of each other's workload and pressures is really helpful in order for these kind of partnerships to work well. We have posh offices and a legal aid contract so I know expectations on us can be quite high. But the person resourced for the project is a normal person trying to get too much done, often working in the evenings and really quite stressed. I understand for frontline groups that they have sometimes an open door and that's extremely stressful, but I need them to understand that we can only do the work we are funded to do on this project and that there are multiple pressures which they can't see which individual solicitors are juggling." [Project legal team]



Where this had happened, lawyers really appreciated it. This boiled down to simple things: not asking lawyers to take more clients than agreed and being communicative and responsive when asked for support on a particular element of the case.

#### 4.1.f. Setting realistic targets of visitor numbers to enable quality and prevent burnout

The project also learnt as it went on about the need to manage demand internally in the centres. Initially the project tried to see many more people than it ended up seeing, learning as it went along that there was a real risk of burnout for caseworkers if they got too overwhelmed.

“It’s really important to recognise the limits given the staff members you have and the pressure of this working environment because as you have seen it is real burnout territory for lots of people if you don’t respect those boundaries because of how intense and pressurised the casework is. The capping model which HMC took in terms of reducing the numbers to 20 people a week has been a huge benefit and one of the things which meant that boundaries between colleague can stay in place. And it is a workable model where people get a high level of support. That’s really important if your aim is to provide a good service: if your aim is that you want holistic, good, quality, wrap around support for individuals then your targets have to be much lower.” [Staff member]

#### 4.1.g. Establishing evaluation framework useful for planning and data collection

The original proposal to the Big Lottery outlined a range of objectives and when it began it was not entirely clear how these would be disaggregated into outcomes and evidenced. The evaluation enabled initial work with project staff to break elements of the project down into shorter and longer term visitor outcomes, as a result of which it was possible to structure more efficient data collection. Staff reported that they felt far clearer about what they were seeking to achieve as a result.

#### 4.1.h. Embedded in strong referral network of partner organisations

All three partner agencies already had strong working links with a range of organisations and more developed through the Moving Out of Hardship project. This was important both for finding appropriate visitors to support and to refer visitors on to further support as necessary.

“HMC is a really important partner and ally for Akwaaba... We don't have the capacity/skills to provide the professional advice and advocacy that HMC does, so it is a vital referral partner for us.” [Referral partner]

“On the referrals that come in to us from HMC the partnership makes a huge difference. By the time people reach us the immigration advice has been done - so that leaves us to focus on the family work.” [Referral partner]

#### 4.1.i. Warm, empathetic and client-centred approach

Migrants are not called ‘clients’ but ‘visitors’ (in both centres). This shows how they are viewed: with warmth, and from a position of solidarity and empathy rather than charitable sympathy. This is important

to help visitors feel at their ease, respected and able to disclose the facts of their circumstances. This disclosure is important: if migrants do not trust people or services they are unlikely to open up to them, and without the full picture advisors cannot give the advice they need. As one volunteer noted: *“Being nice, empathetic and supportive is so important with this group – you can see how stressed they are. You need to be so patient and do that extra bit of service for them, anything that you can do to help.”*

This client-centred approach is created partly through the culture at the drop in sessions where people are welcomed with a meal and where volunteers have the time to help people and sit with them, rather than treat them like a number. This will already feel different to many services they have experienced, as some visitors noted.

“I didn’t expect to go over there and meet people like that. They don’t judge you at all. Haringey council are so rude and judge you so harshly without knowing your situation. When we went to HMSC everyone was so kind, they listen to you. When you look in their eyes, you know they are not judging you. That’s the first time I told my whole story to anyone outside my family, because I just knew that they would be kind to me. I just cried and cried. They really understood.” [HMSC visitor]

“I guess due to Hackney and my interaction with [HMC staff member] I’ve been able to open up a bit more - I’ve felt not so alone. I’ve at least felt like there’s someone looking out for me. I’ve been feeling a bit more confident - not so scared of my surroundings.” [HMC visitor]

Referral partners notice this warmth, dedication and commitment and highlight it as a strength.

“HMC is the closest I’ve seen to the holistic model of addressing problems that we have in social work, it’s really special and remarkable. In comparison to so many other outreaches, HMC makes people feel really loved and cared for, and that makes all the difference.” [Referral partner]

“I wish people like the HMSC staff got more acknowledgement. They work tirelessly, and care so deeply - literally dedicating their lives to this - it’s quite incredible.” [Referral partner]

## 4.2 Challenges and limitations

### 4.2.a. Communication and accessibility for new/potential visitors

There has been high demand for HMC and HMSC services throughout the project which has meant that it is difficult for new visitors to access the service. When the project started visitors could access by coming to the drop in, but this inevitably was easier for some than for others, particularly given that queues could start in the early hours of the morning.

“I know there’s been a very high demand for support, and before the pandemic I know there were often queues outside both HMC and HMSC several hours before they opened.

This made it difficult for some people to access support e.g. people with caring responsibilities who couldn't queue early in the morning.” [Referral partner]

Communication with the service was even more of a challenge in the context of the lockdown. HMSC effectively closed its open lines once lockdown started though continued to work on all open cases and took on any new cases who they heard on the grapevine had emergencies if they had capacity. For HMC, they set up a phone line but it was a single number and often people could not get through for weeks on end (one man when he did get through said he had been trying for six weeks, every Monday). Staff and volunteers were aware of this but it was difficult to find another system. Visitors and external agencies also observed that this had been a challenge:

“I called HMC. Due to the lockdown situation then, it was very hard to reach them - the lines were usually busy, so I continuously tried to reach them but I couldn't get through. So on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> week I was able to get through.” [HMC visitor]

“My impression has been that quality and responsiveness to need has been very good for those who get an appointment/have previously been supported by HMC, but accessibility for new clients has been a major issue. Before COVID this involved long queues overnight and after COVID the phone line was extremely hard for people to get an answer on.” [Referral partner]

“Communication remains difficult. Clients know who their workers are [in the MOH project] but don't necessarily have direct contact with them - they just have the general number available, and that can build anxiety for clients. If they can email, they would get a quick response, but email can be difficult - our clients often only have access to email via a phone, they also don't understand English or what you're asking for. They all WhatsApp so that's an option. Once HMC and HSMC DO respond, it's amazing. But that is a gap in the communication which could be streamlined a bit more. Especially when in the lockdown, they just don't have the cash or the equipment to use email - they can't access libraries, community centres, youth centres, or even coffee shops or MacDonald's, there was suddenly no way of communicating. [Referral partner]

#### 4.2.b. Growing complexity of casework means more work needed to achieve same outcomes

Over the 5 years, the project experienced a rise in the complexity of the cases coming through the door, increasing demands on all caseworkers at the centres. Simply put, caseworkers needed to do more to achieve the same outcomes as before.

“In the context of the hostile environment, big changes to the immigration system, restrictions to Legal Aid and national/local funding cuts over the last decade - all these things have impacted the impartial advice and support that's available, and increased the amount of intervention needed for positive outcomes.” [Referral partner]

In response to this growing volume and complexity, both centres undertook strategic reviews to help them understand and manage the 'new needs' better. Since 2016, HMC has reduced overall visitor numbers accessing the service via the drop-in twice, from 40 to 30 per week in 2017, and then down to 20 per week

in 2018. The rationale for this change is that the often complex and lengthy follow-up casework can only be managed if visitor numbers are kept at a low level. When the HMC drop-in reopens later this year, it plans to reduce the visitor numbers further, to 10 per week. Although described as necessary, this had obviously generated some concern about the project's ability to continue to meet the need in the community.

HMSC has not capped visitor numbers, but it reduced the drop-in service to a fortnightly service (September 2019 until March 2020) in order to meet the ongoing challenge of rising visitor need against a backdrop of hostile policies and contracting resources. This meant that they were assessing 40+ cases which were prioritised and distributed amongst other advisors, matching the skills and expertise to the client. HMSC is planning to reopen the drop-in when regulations allow, but it is unclear whether this will be on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

“With my own understanding of the field, the complexity of people's cases has gone up precipitously over the past decade with the hostile environment and potentially other changes to the immigration system on the horizon. The complexity of any one case has gone up, which means the support they need has gone up. To do that work well and in a timely way, [reducing visitor numbers] does make sense. The model of the drop-in pre-dates the current government and the landscape of immigration advice was so different at that point.” [HMC volunteer]

Whilst this has been a rational response to circumstances, all partners are aware that the need for the service has not gone away and that there are many more who they cannot help. This causes concern to staff and volunteers committed to trying to help as many migrants in hardship as possible.

“It does worry me that we don't see more people - we can't see that many people and now it's even less. There is so much need out there, and it's probably going up. That worries me.” [HMC volunteer]

“The ones we see are the lucky ones because they WILL be able to access this service - others get fatigued, swallowed up by the underground and give up. We are only picking up a small percentage of these cases, unfortunately.” [Referral partner]

#### 4.2.c. Lack of systems made it hard to adapt to Covid situation

The drop in and the associated support and networking it offered were important elements of the provision at both centres. However, whilst HMC managed to adapt to deliver an ongoing service for new clients, until November 2020, HMSC could not do this so well, partly because of its lack of cloud-based casework files to enable sharing of these between workers and partly because there was not a full complement of staff until February 2021 as recruitment had ground to a halt during lockdown. HMC, which already had this in place, adapted better to remote support for visitors.

Both centres however recognised that the removal of the drop in element introduced particular challenges in ensuring that the needs of visitors were met holistically. Staff and volunteers noted that without the focus of a drop in, lots of the natural connections which happened because referral partners were coming in (for instance, Doctors of the World) simply did not happen during lockdown once the service had gone

remote. Similarly the natural support and empathy possible from face to face working was difficult to replicate remotely.

“On a Monday visitors come for the drop-in, with a hot meal, clothes bank and food bank. And this enabled visitors to meet each other and support each other. That was a really crucial element of what we did, above the advice and signposting. That, of course, hasn’t happened now for 16 or 17 months.” [HMSC volunteer]

#### 4.2.d. Virtual support during Covid more time-consuming than face to face

Though intuitively one might feel that virtual working might save time, in fact in this model of provision - which relies so heavily on volunteer input and on holistic support to visitors - took longer once lockdown had started. That was because co-ordinating teams of volunteers took longer, and in particular conducting casework with visitors remotely took far more time. It is more difficult to explain issues when it is not physically possible to check understanding, for instance.

“In terms of me doing work remotely - everything takes longer. I think phone advice is basically less effective and it is very difficult still having done it for a year to communicate these really complex ideas and situations over the phone to people, especially when they are in distress. And often I think that results in having to reiterate the information more than once and that’s time consuming. People would bounce back more often and I think that’s a result of not grasping the advice in the same way but also not having the sense of reassurance of the person sitting next to you. That results in people coming back and asking more questions again and again. So that’s been more time-consuming.” [Staff member]

In addition, the work undertaken to contact statutory agencies took longer. It had never been easy to contact local authorities, but at least before there had been the option of turning up in person, or advising families to turn up, or getting an appointment for a visitor at a housing office. With all of that stopped, it resulted in considerably more time being spent to try and get through on the single phone numbers or reach housing officers through one email address which often went unanswered. This consumed literally days of workers’ time.

#### 4.2.e. Intermediary intervention provided by the project only works if onward referral possible

The difficulty of referring cases for which ECF had been obtained has already been mentioned several times. The challenge here is for the model itself: if a project is designed around providing an intermediary intervention on the basis that ‘prepared cases’ are then taken on elsewhere, it will not work if the ecosystem of provision no longer allows this. Increasingly this was the case with the project, though it was already the case in 2017 when the first interim report was written.

“The difficulty with this model is that with the changes to legal aid, even if you diagnose what the individual’s case is it doesn’t change the fact that it is extremely difficult to get people to take on advice. So for me the model is good as far as it goes, but there is still a critical need within the voluntary sector to have more casework provision.

We need people to take on cases and so do the visitors. There's a sector-wide dearth of such people." [Referral partner]

#### 4.2.f. Difficulty of closing cases

The project provided an intermediary intervention in order to sort out crises issues and move the visitor towards legal advice. However, establishing the 'end point' of this could be tricky, particularly in the last year because of the rapidly changing circumstances around emergency accommodation under the Everyone In scheme for some of the project's visitors.

It is not just the particular circumstances of Covid which makes establishing an end point for cases difficult. The difficulty of finding legal aid lawyers to take on cases for whom ECF has been gained has already been noted, and this effectively meant that lawyers were continuing to support and advocate for clients for several months after, in theory, their case could have been passed on. In addition the project showed more and more clearly how 'moving through the system' did not always end up getting the visitor into an easier situation. An example of this was in relation to No Recourse, a condition placed on leave which the project sought to get lifted whenever it could, thus entitling the individual to access to public funds in the form of benefits and housing support. This could mean that they moved out of the emergency accommodation provided under Section 17 and had to instead find their way in the complex and under-funded world of the 'official' benefits system.

"A thought I've had over the last six months is that a lot of problems really start when you get recourse to public funds. In a weird way the system of support around S17 is at least relatively clear. But once somebody gets recourse to funds they can go from a self-contained accommodation with their family to having to navigate the welfare system, or getting dumped in a hostel and into shitty accommodation. They don't have a social worker and they don't have as good facilities, and they don't understand why nobody at the housing team speaks to them any more." [Project staff]

What this means for project workers is that whilst they have technically allowed the visitor to move on in the system, the system itself is not working to such a degree that the visitor finds themselves in fact in a worse situation. Closing a case in such circumstances is very difficult and caseworkers often found themselves supporting people long after the 'official' outcome had been achieved.

#### 4.2.g. Challenges in ending the project

Cases taken on by the project could continue for months or even years, as is common with many complex cases involving immigration issues. Taking on cases towards the end of the project was therefore difficult without knowing what the next steps might be. Both HMC and HMSC have wanted this to continue. HMC has found funds from its reserves to allow this to happen *pro tem* by an interim contract with CCLC. HMSC has not to date contracted though they have increased the amount of time worked by the advisor from two to four days. The end of the project has created some challenges in knowing when to stop taking on and working on clients' cases. As one staff member observed: "*endings are always difficult in these projects.*"

#### 4.2.h. Challenges in monitoring and outcome tracking

Both the first and second interim evaluation highlighted the need for improved outcome tracking but this was difficult for many reasons. Such work takes time and dedicated resources and though the projects tried to find this, it was challenging.

“HMSC have been better than us - they’ve done some following up in the last couple of months. In the last year we haven’t done so much. We used to ask people after a drop in session, and generally they were massively complimentary. But we weren’t good at phoning people up again - the idea was that we would phone people back and we kept on trying to keep on top of that, then we had a change of staff and it seemed that there was just no time to do something like that which wasn’t immediately urgent.”  
[Staff member]

Another challenge was that once the case had been referred on the project could often lose touch, and once it became another lawyer’s case getting information was virtually impossible unless they were referred back for some reason. And yet another challenge related to the issue of visitors moving on but not necessarily out of difficulty, which meant that even if they were contacted one or two years on, they may still be stuck in circumstances which were still very difficult. Getting leave to remain, for instance, may be immediately relieving for visitors but they will still need to be applying for settlement and will be braced for that (as well as the fees) and their material circumstances, as well as their mental and physical wellbeing, may be the same or even worse.

“We did try and phone all visitors from February last year and asked a volunteer to do that, but they said it was really really hard to get them to answer any of the questions as many were still in such a difficult place. Their life was still crap, basically, and they didn’t want to talk about it. Even people who get limited leave to remain are trying to save up for the next renewal so they are destitute because of that. Though we’ve moved them on, the system means that they are far from being completely sorted.” [Staff member]

This has been logged by centres as an area they need to improve, but to do this will require some thought and it will also need to be accompanied by an understanding from funders of a service such as this that moving out of hardship is a process which, given the current systems, can take many years.

#### 4.2.i. Non-delivery of ‘extras’

In the original application quite a complex project was envisaged with a number of outputs sitting alongside the core casework and visitor support. In fact, the project under-estimated the time that would be needed to cope with the increasing numbers and complexity of cases seen, and original ideas of producing e.g. information sheets for visitors and trainings for external agencies were not prioritised. Training was done as part of the general work of the organisations but not as an add on, and though policy work was achieved this was done as an organic growth from the casework rather than by initiating local campaigns and events, as originally envisaged. In the view of the evaluation team this has not detracted from the core work of the project at all but possibly provides a lesson not to over-promise or over-complicate asks to funders in the future.

#### 4.2.j. The future is uncertain

In common with organisations around the country, both HMC and HMSC at present are uncertain as to their future operating model and their ability to open up and resume face to face drop in sessions. Both feel somewhat in limbo as a result, and fears around Covid transmission and the safeguarding of visitors still persist.

“The huge challenge for me is how to reopen the drop-in. We just need to progress this as quickly as possible. Even having the discussions about this over Zoom is difficult at the moment! That is something that is preoccupying me at the moment, particularly as a Board member. It will make a huge difference when we reopen.” [HMSC volunteer]

“I do feel frustrated that we are seeing so many fewer people which worries me, but I know that the service we ARE providing is amazing. I just hope that we can expand a bit more once we are allowed to open up again. But we will have to see what is needed - that is one thing that HMC is very good at - adapting and changing like they did in the Covid-19 situation. And we don't know, as the dust settles post-pandemic, what needs to happen next.” [HMC volunteer]



## 5. Conclusions and future suggestions

Overall, the Moving Out of Hardship project has been an extremely successful model of provision which has enabled upwards of 1,000 families to move on in their lives. The model trialled – that of frontline organisations partnering with a specialist legal agency – has proved beneficial to both visitors and to the organisations involved and multiple lessons have been gained concerning delivery and structure of such a service which can serve to help shape future services.

There are clearly both external and internal limitations however to the model which has been delivered. The following conclusions are therefore offered with an eye to developing future services which adapt in the light of lessons learnt.

### 1. *Three-way partnership model does not particularly add value*

Whilst both frontline organisations got considerable value out of their partnership with CCLC, there was no particular added value in both of them being aligned in one partnership. Indeed, this caused some challenges in terms of sharing staff and moving between two similar but in some ways different organisational contexts and cultures. This is not to say that HMC and HMSC did not get on: they shared information before the project began and will continue to do so afterwards. But the motivation for including all three was at least in part it seems to ‘make the partnership bigger’ as there was an assumption that this would be more attractive to funders, and in the event, this probably just made it more complex than it needed to be. HMC and CCLC have agreed to try and move forwards with another similar (if adapted) service which makes more sense and HMSC is still exploring whether or not it is possible to restart a similar scheme once CCLC has capacity again.

### 2. *Setting targets for such a project is not particularly useful*

In the event, the project out-performed all its targets but the fact of setting them did not form a particularly useful yardstick against which to measure either progress or effectiveness. Part of the reason for establishing them is that funding applications tend to ask for them, but in a world where cases are becoming increasingly complex and the time needed to resolve them thus longer and longer, it would make more sense to have a discussion with funders about outcome reporting which is flexible.

### 3. *Future projects should be realistic about their potential to ‘move out of hardship’*

Though visitors were definitely helped, and though within the project’s own terms the project over-performed, it is essential for funders to understand and organisations to try to explain that the gains made are incremental and that there may still be a long road to go before individuals genuinely move out of crisis and hardship. Organisations need to be clear about the positioning of the advice and where this fits into a visitor’s journey: it would potentially be useful to illustrate this both to visitors and funders alike, potentially diagrammatically. What are the challenges the project can deal with now, what others may occur after the project has intervened which are not covered and for which other provision will be needed?

### 4. *Specialist + specialist + holistic, wrap-around support is a gold standard service*

Combining specialist immigration advice and specialist welfare and housing advice together is, for this group of migrants in particular, a gold standard of service provision which other organisations could learn

from and replicate. Generally, there is an awareness in the homelessness and migrant sectors that there is much crossover between immigration and other advice needs, but the projects which address this are few. There have been others which have experimented with providing expert housing and immigration advice at the same time (such as StrEET Aware, in Scotland) but the Moving Out of Hardship model takes it one step further by embedding both of those specialists into a model where visitors are held and supported by the empathetic, client-centred, wrap-around support offered by each centre. This not only ensures that the visitor gets the best service possible, it also ensures that resources are used to best effect for the client, with low drop out, maximum use of specialist advisor time, and a crucial offering to the visitor which enables them to understand, interact with and use the advice given to the very best of their ability.

#### *5. Need to flex model to allow for better use of immigration advisor time*

That said, given the shortage of legal aid providers and the difficulty of getting ECF cases taken on, there is a clear need to consider flexing the model to allow for specialist advisor time to be better used. This may involve reducing the amount of time the specialist immigration advisors spend on ECF applications (potentially training up volunteers, as has already been done at HMC, to do these instead) and allowing the model to be more flexible to allow for the specialist immigration advisor to concentrate more on casework which is impossible to place elsewhere. In addition, it may be possible for the wrap-around support currently provided by the frontline service to be provided to other solicitors' firms as an incentive for taking cases on: the Access to Justice team at HMC or Legal Support Team at HMSC could potentially offer this as a means of expanding potential onward referral routes for visitors. This is already being taken forward to some extent by HMC and HMSC. Solicitors are likely to be more willing to take on cases if they know that such holistic support is available, and though this means volunteers would have to pivot towards private firms this would ultimately expand the pool of provision as well as ensuring that visitors referred to private firms continued to receive wrap-around support and follow up.

#### *6. External pressures likely to increase*

As set out in Section 2, the project has been subjected to a range of external pressures and changes and in the foreseeable future is likely to encounter more. Some of these are practical issues - the digitisation of forms is already well underway, and visitors will need to be helped to navigate that. Others however are deeper – the effect of the aftermath of the EUSS deadline, for instance, is yet to be understood but it is likely that there will be what many are calling 'a second Windrush' once EU migrants who did not meet the deadline for whatever reason are 'flushed out' by hostile environment policies. Other changes in the pipeline under the government's new Plan for Immigration threaten to deprive migrants even further of their rights. The project will need to be aware of and constantly adapting to these and make those supporting future work aware that the environment is complex, evolving and at present sadly trending towards vulnerable migrants needing more and more support of the type offered.

## Appendix A: List of those interviewed over course of evaluation

The following is a list of all those interviewed over the course of our five-year evaluation, indicating whether individuals were interviewed for the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> interim reports (in September 2017 and December 2019 respectively) or for this final report. To inform this final report we conducted 19 interviews and received five further written submissions gained - this includes interviews with six project visitors who had received support from Moving Out of Hardship. We also interviewed as well as observed visitors for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> interim evaluations, as outlined in Section 1 of this report.

Interviewees are listed alphabetically by first name. \*\* indicates that views were submitted in written form rather than via telephone interview

Name	Role / organisation	Interim Report (Sept 2017)	Interim Report (Dec 2019)	Final Report (July 2021)
Abi Brunswick	Project 17	✓		
Afia Ahmed	Outreach solicitor, Coram Children's Legal Centre			✓
Alec Turner	Volunteer & trustee, Haringey Migrant Support Centre			✓
Anita Hurrell	Head of Migrant Children's Project, Coram Children's Legal Centre		✓	✓
Bethan Lant	Praxis Community Projects	✓		
Caroline Spearpoint	Volunteer, Hackney Migrant Centre			✓
Caz Hattam	The Unity Project			✓**
Chloe Evans	Immigration Advisor, Migrant Children's Project, Coram Children's Legal Centre		✓	✓
Daf Viney	Director of Services, Hackney Migrant Centre	✓		
Frances Trevena	Legal and Policy Manager, Coram Children's Legal Centre	✓		
Giulia Gosi	Caseworker - Migrant Families and Young People, Hackney Migrant Centre	✓		
Helen Hibberd	Centre Manager (job share), Hackney Migrant Centre	✓		
Isabelle Gore	Volunteer, Hackney Migrant Centre			✓
Jess Evans	Solicitor, Migrant Children's Project, Coram Children's Legal Centre	✓	✓	
John Quinlan	City Project	✓		
Karolina Maroszek	Centre Manager, Haringey Migrant Support Centre	✓	✓	✓
Lauren Stewart	Caseworker (Migrant Families and Young People), Hackney Migrant Centre		✓	✓
Lex Goodman	Caseworker, Haringey Migrant Support Centre		✓	
Lorna Lewis	Bump Buddies, Shoreditch Trust	✓		
Lucie Garland	North London Action for the Homeless			✓**
Marnie Gill	Duncan Lewis Solicitors	✓		
Mike Boyle	Akwaaba	✓		✓**

Name	Role / organisation	Interim Report (Sept 2017)	Interim Report (Dec 2019)	Final Report (July 2021)
Nick Watts	Together with Migrant Children			✓
Renata Cleaver	Volunteer, Hackney Migrant Centre	✓		
Robin Walden	Caseworker, Haringey Migrant Support Centre			✓
Roopa Tanna	Islington Law Centre	✓		
Rosemary Sales	Trustee, Hackney Migrant Centre	✓		
Savvas Panas	Pilion Trust			✓
Shadin Dowson-Zeidan	Project 17			✓**
Sue Marris	Director of Operations, Hackney Migrant Centre		✓	✓
William Neal	Jesuit Refugee Service (written submission)			✓**
Zaki Shah	Volunteer, Hackney Migrant Centre			✓

## Appendix B: Project monitoring data, Years 1 - 5

### Project outcomes - Initial Advice, Support, and Orientation at the drop-in

Moving out of Hardship project service to migrant families and young people	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Visitors accessing drop-in and offered hot meal	930	999	1367	659	0 <sup>10</sup>	3955
Food bank vouchers issued	107	274	279	462	297	1419
Small (£5 - £25) hardship payments made	212	397	278	322	118 <sup>11</sup>	1327
Applications for larger (£50 - £500) hardship grants made to other providers	234	351	230	270	146	1231
Visitors referred for emergency accommodation on the day	92	92	55	52	20	311
Applications for HC1 form (free healthcare prescriptions) made	55	98	31	83	41	308
Free school meals applied for	21	20	30	42	24	137
Accessed/referred for health/mental health support, including GP registration advice <sup>12</sup>	83	198	15 <sup>14</sup>	44	21	361
Visitors receiving initial welfare and/or immigration advice 'on the day' by project advisors	464	547 <sup>13</sup>	487	497	189 <sup>14</sup>	2184

<sup>10</sup> The drop-in was closed at both centres for the whole of Year 5. HMC and HMSC continued to provide food to migrants in the community during the pandemic but this figure has not been provided.

<sup>11</sup> Figure is an underestimate due to change in recording measures at HMSC.

<sup>12</sup> This data category is necessarily broad as health services at the HMC and HMSC drop-ins peaked in Year 2 and reduced in Year 3. It therefore includes visitors who saw a health / mental health specialist on the day, and/or were referred to another agency on the day for health support.

<sup>13</sup> Figure is reportedly incompatible with the Year 1 and 3 figures, as includes all minor advocacy support actions (e.g. letter-writing / phonecalls etc) to support clients.

<sup>14</sup> Figure is an underestimate due to change in recording measures at HMSC.

## Project outcomes - Follow-up Support, Advice and Representation

Moving out of Hardship project service	Year 1 (2016 - 2017)	Year 2 (2017 - 2018)	Year 3 (2018 - 2019)	Year 4 (2019 - 2020)	Year 5 (2020 - 2021)	Total
Total cases receiving follow-up support / advice from project advisors <sup>15</sup>	Solicitor: 200 Caseworker: 164 Total: 364	Solicitor: 196 C'worker: 224 Total: 420	Solicitor: 175 C'worker: 106 Total: 281	Solicitor: 131 C'worker: 102 Total: 233	Solicitor: 57 C'worker: 107 Total: 164	Solicitor: 759 C'worker: 703 Total: 1462
Exceptional Case Funding applications made and gained (successful)	26	35	34	54	50	199
Successful referrals to external organisations / agencies	201	158	71	66	41	537
Successful referrals to external solicitors to secure Section 17 support	33	28	48	39	41	189
Successful referrals to external solicitors for housing issues	x	x	x	32	25	57
Families successfully rehoused and Social Services support secured/increased <sup>16</sup>	47	35	33	Not provided	Not provided	115
Applications to have NRPF restrictions lifted.	2 made 1 successful.	2 made <sup>17</sup>	6 made 2 successful	Not provided	Not provided	13 <sup>18</sup>
Families accompanied by NELMA to Social Services assessments	10	18	17	3	1	49
Visitors for whom NHS debt was written off / reduced	x	x	x	22 <sup>19</sup>		22

<sup>15</sup> Most of these clients will be double-counted i.e. taken on by both the solicitor and the caseworker.

<sup>16</sup> This data category includes families who were rehoused and newly provided with support by Social Services, families whose council accommodation was improved, and families whose Social Services financial support was either reinstated or increased, as a result of project activity.

<sup>17</sup> Outcomes of these applications not provided.

<sup>18</sup> Likely to be an underestimate as Years 4 and 5 data not provided.

<sup>19</sup> HMC only. £48K of debt was cancelled, waived or reduced in total, for 22 visitors, by HMC, during Year 4 and Year 5 only. Under-reported as data not fully available.

## Appendix C: Moving out of Hardship visitor case studies

The evaluators conducted a total of 20 interviews and case file reviews with visitors to the Moving out of Hardship project over the course of the project. Case study summaries of eight visitors interviewed by the external evaluators were included in the Year 1 and Year 3 interim reports.

For the final evaluation in Year 5, six telephone interviews with Moving out of Hardship project visitors in Year 5 of the project (June - July 2021), and also reviewed the case files of these visitors. Four case studies have been selected from these to illustrate the range of visitor circumstances as well as the range of interventions that Moving Out of Hardship has made to support them.

### Case study one: Visitor A (Hackney Migrant Centre)

#### Background

In February 2021, Visitor A came to Hackney Migrant Centre. He was 21 and had lived in the UK without regular immigration status since he came here at 12 years old from Nigeria. He had been supported and cared for by his only relative in the UK, his uncle. But in January 2021, his uncle had moved to Germany and left Visitor A behind. When he first came to Hackney Migrant Centre, he was street homeless, cold and hungry. He needed immediate assistance, mental health support, and assistance to regularise his immigration status.

HMC found Visitor A some emergency accommodation in a local night shelter and supported him to connect with a therapist. They then worked with Room for Refugees to place Visitor A with a host family in Tunbridge Wells for 6 weeks and secured him subsistence support from various grant sources. Meanwhile, HMC successfully made an Exceptional Case Funding application, and found Visitor A a solicitor to take forward an Article 8 application for leave to remain in the UK. Visitor A is currently awaiting the start of work on his case by the lawyer and staying in the Martha House homeless shelter.

#### In his own words

I came here to this country very young and was living with my uncle for most of my life. When he went to Germany in January, I didn't have any of the necessary tools to do things by myself. I had no papers to work, no money to pay for rent, so I went out on the street.

I had to stay at a friend's place for a night, then I'd stay in an empty park, moving around like that. My friend found me Hackney Migrant Centre (HMC). I couldn't see anyone in person because of Covid, but when I managed to get hold of someone on the phone, I told them what was going on. They were able to help me out with some money to get something to eat and some warm clothes. They found me a night shelter and I stayed there for a month.

Hackney managed to find a host family for me in Tunbridge Wells. That was really nice, the fresh air and everything. It was very good for my mental health. After that I was sent to a shelter called Martha House, where I am right now. It's a nice place too.

Hackney made an application for me to get legal aid and that was successful. A lawyer was supposed to contact me by the end of June but I'm yet to receive anything from her yet. I'm a bit worried about that.

I guess, due to Hackney Migrant Centre I've been able to open up a bit more. I've felt not so alone. I've at least felt like there's someone looking out for me. I've been feeling a bit more confident – not so scared of my surroundings.

Eventually, if things work out, I want to start my own business. Due to my situation and everything that happened, I hope to some day get my own place, a place with at least 2 or 3 bedrooms so I can help other people in my situation. From my experience, being homeless is terrifying, I wouldn't wish it on anyone. If I could help other people then I would really like to.

## Case study two: Visitor B (Haringey Migrant Support Centre)

### Background

Visitor B and her husband presented at Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) in June 2020. They had lived irregularly in the UK for over a decade and had two young children. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck and much cash-in-hand work dried up, the family found they were facing eviction and street homelessness.

Coram Children's Legal Centre made a successful application for Exceptional Case Funding, so that Visitor B's daughter could make an Article 8 application for leave to remain. They then secured Turpin Miller solicitors to take on her case, and the family awaits the outcome of the application. With some difficulty, HMSC assisted the family in securing subsistence support and accommodation from Enfield local authority, under Section 17 of the Children's Act.

### In her own words

During Covid we really got stuck, because of our status. We didn't have any source of income. Before that I used to look after my friends' kids and my husband used to do gardening for people. Things weren't 100% but we were surviving somehow. But when Covid hit, no-one needed us to work for them. My husband's friend suggested that we go to Haringey Centre (HMSC) to ask for help. I told my husband – let's go once and see if they can help.

We went to Haringey for the first time in February 2020, just before the lockdown started. When we went there everyone was so kind. They really listen to you. When you look in their eyes, you know they are not judging you. I just cried and cried. They really understood.

When I went for the first time they gave me £20, and vouchers for the foodbank. It was only because of Haringey that we got housed by the Council. They are helping us under the Children's Act and are giving us money for food. So at least I don't have to worry about not having money to buy food for my children.

My daughter is going to be 9 in September, and Haringey have now applied to regularise her status under the 7-year rule. It's expensive and the process is very slow, Covid has made the process worse too.

Hopefully, god willing, we will hear soon (in a few months' time) and we are praying that my daughter will be able to get status. Me and my husband are just hoping that one day we will be able to work hard, have a better future and have a house – you know, what every normal couple wants.

For now, our life really changed through Haringey Migrant Centre. Sometimes, you just need a hand from someone to help you with your problems – to hold you up while you're experiencing a bad time. And then you can move on and you don't need them anymore.



## Case study three: Visitor C (Hackney Migrant Centre)

### Background

Visitor C and her four-year old daughter first came to Hackney Migrant Centre in October 2019. They had been staying with a friend, but now urgently needed somewhere else to stay. Although her four-year old daughter is a British citizen, Visitor C (originally from Nigeria) had no leave to remain in the UK. This meant that the family was not yet receiving the statutory support they needed.

Following their first meeting with Visitor C, HMC provided her with multiple forms of assistance, including subsistence payments, mobile top-ups and food vouchers. Her daughter received an autism diagnosis and HMC helped to find her a place in a special needs nursery. HMC managed to secure accommodation for the family from the local authority – originally emergency housing and later a more suitable home nearer to her daughter’s nursery.

Coram Children’s Legal Centre advised Visitor C on putting in an application for leave to remain as the mother and primary carer of a British child. In April 2021 Visitor C received 30 months leave to remain in the UK with recourse to public funds. Following this, HMC continued to assist her in securing ongoing housing and support from the local authority.

### In her own words

Back then, I was homeless and was staying with a friend. My friend started complaining about my daughter Elizabeth’s behaviour and said I couldn’t stay there anymore. I went to the council to ask for help and they refused to help us because I don’t have status or papers for living in this country.

One of my friends in my church told me about Hackney Migrant Centre. I was there at 4.30am, with my daughter, to make sure I got a place. The first thing Hackney (HMC) did was they sent an email to the council about my situation and then they found me accommodation in a hotel. Then, [HMC staff member] helped me find a nursery for my daughter and do the application. I was very happy!

After that, [HMC staff member] called me to say I should go to Hackney to apply to regularise my own status. They found me a lawyer and we started the process. The lawyer told me I needed a Nigerian passport as I didn’t have one. They said that I needed £250 to get the passport - and Hackney paid for that for me.

This January 2021 I put in my immigration application in. They called me in mid-March to say that it had been successful and I had leave to remain to take care of my daughter. And then, even after getting my residence permit, council said I’d have to leave the hotel. In May, I sent everything to [HMC staff member] I had to send more documents to the lawyers and they spoke to the council for me. The council then found us some different temporary accommodation which we are now in, in Ashford. It’s good, near to my daughter’s nursery, and everything is much better now.

Yes, Hackney supported me so much. They are very friendly, they call you and talk to you and ask if everything is OK. I don’t know where I would be now without them.

## Case study four: Visitor D (Haringey Migrant Support Centre)

### Background

Visitor D, her husband and two young children were facing eviction from their home during the Covid-19 lockdown. Without regular immigration status, they struggled to get support until they contacted Haringey Migrant Support Centre (HMSC) in August 2020.

Working with the family remotely, HMSC provided immediate assistance including foodbank vouchers, and referred them to Enfield Local Authority. They then assisted the family while Social Services conducted a Section 17 assessment. Emergency accommodation and financial support was provided to the family by the Local Authority, in the borough of Redbridge. Coram Children's Legal Centre secured Exceptional Case Funding to apply for immigration status, as well as a fee waiver, and helped the family to find a solicitor.

In June 2021, the family was granted 30 months Leave to Remain, with recourse to public funds. They are now hoping to be moved back to Enfield, to be nearer to the children's school.

### In her own words

Before we came to Haringey (HMSC), and got the help we needed, I was scared. We had nowhere to go and I was always thinking about how to find the right help for my family. And the kids are involved, and during the lockdown with the virus and everything I was scared. I didn't know what to do.

A friend introduced us to Haringey. When we sent the email to Haringey they responded back, and the following day the staff rang us on the phone. That was how it started.

Haringey helped us out and directed us to the right people. They were trying to get help for us from Enfield Local Authority – to get a place for us. As there were kids involved, and in the lockdown, they didn't want us to be on the streets with kids. So Enfield social services called us on the phone, by WhatsApp and Zoom. We talked and they asked some questions and did all their assessments and from there, they were able to assist by providing temporary accommodation. Enfield gave us financial assistance as well.

Haringey saw that apart from the housing and money issues we needed help with immigration too, and they helped us to apply. Three weeks ago, we were given residence permits. We were very happy, because we've been here for over 10 years and though they said my husband and I were not allowed by ourselves to stay, we were able to get permission to stay because of the kids. We were given the 30 months leave to remain.

Haringey were really helpful. If not for them, I don't think we would have got as much help as we did right now. We are not on the streets, finally we have our residence permits and I am happy.