**West Midlands Migration Network Rights Thematic Meeting**

**28th September (10:00-11:00)**

Minutes

**Chair: Danai Papachristopoulou**

**Actions from previous meeting:**

* None

1. **Presentation from Baobab Women’s Project**

Baobab are currently looking at four key priority areas – housing, money, legal and health. The biggest issue is finding solicitors for clients. They have been working with IRiS at University of Birmingham to collect evidence around gender based violence and how they can get voices heard. This has been presented to the Home Office to support improvements so that women do not have to reexperience trauma whilst in the asylum system.

It is crucial for clients to understand the asylum process from the start so that they are aware of what is required and expected so that needs are met. Research has highlighted that those who experience good interviews are likely to have status recognised and these experiences need to be promoted as best practice.

In relation to health, positive outcomes often rely on GPs being experienced with the needs of migrants. Local practices such as Cape Hill provide a good model, referring to specialist services when needed.

Access to Asylum Support continues to be problematic. There is not an easy process to contact Migrant Help in order to escalate difficulties.

Networks in the sector have developed strongly over the past few years providing greater collaboration around best practice and opportunities for collective lobbying on key issues. The NACCOM network supporting those experiencing destitution and homelessness has allowed Baobab to link with partners and deliver evidence of problems.

DP asked about the challenges of providing Move On support under a reduced timescale and the difficulties in obtaining housing and support. ST talked about some individuals they have been supporting who took several weeks for substantial asylum interviews but could not obtain housing. She agreed it was an issue that needed to be tackled and required a policy change.

BD highlighted that Refugee Action have quicker escalation routes available that may reduce the need to contact Migrant Help.

DP also highlighted a number of clients who were considering claiming asylum but not formally begun the process but then had difficulty obtaining relevant support from local Children’s Services.

ST hopes to release a report on current findings by the end of the year.

1. **Introduction to Strategic Legal Aid Committee (SLAC)**

CT gave an input on the newly formed SLAC that will be launched in the West Midlands. It was initially developed as a response to the Nationalities and Borders Act and the requirement for strategic litigation to challenge inequalities. It brings together NGOs and legal professionals to develop responses to challenge key issues that impact on a wide group of people.

It launched last year in London with several meetings around the proposed Rwanda deportation policy. There are also four general meetings a year when NGOs/third sector organisations can bring specific issues for discussion. An example was a recent discussion around accommodation and asylum support. It is hoped to create a space for greater links with smaller organisations who have not necessarily have contacts with legal firms.

There is a period of funding for three years to expand nationally with support for training and capacity building in the third sector.

The first meeting in the West Midlands is scheduled for the 1st November at RMC in Birmingham followed by quarterly online meetings. All meetings will be closed and invitation only to ensure frank and confidential discussions.

1. **Other Updates**

KM highlighted a new project around UASC advice that is being conducted at CELC to provide initial advice to children and social workers. It has been operating for three months and the largest problem encountered so far is around sourcing legal aid for children as capacity remains limited.

1. **Any Other Business**

DP announced that she would be stepping down as Chair in the New Year. Expressions of interest are welcome from members who would like to take on the role.

DP also highlighted that immigration fees are due to increase on the 4th October.

1. **Date of next meetings and agendas**

Next meeting is to be held on the 9th November. Dr. Amanda Beattie from Aston University will present findings from recent research around refugee housing.

Meeting Closed