

Project Seventeen

Annual Report 2019-20

Charity number: 1152621





Our year at a glance

We worked with **119** new clients and their families

62% of families accessed support under s.17 and **81%** benefitted from improved housing and/or finances

30 training sessions delivered for frontline workers

310 calls to our telephone advice line answered

Jointly held the secretariat for the **All-Party Parliamentary Group on No Recourse to Public Funds**

Influenced **local change** in London authorities



About us

Project 17 is an organisation working to end destitution among migrant children. It works with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support.

We believe that all children have the right to a home and enough to eat, regardless of their parents' immigration status. To achieve our vision, we provide advice, advocacy and support for individuals. We build capacity in other organisations and we campaign for the improved implementation of statutory support.

Project 17 works towards ensuring that local authorities comply with the duties imposed on them by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. Section 17 enables local councils to provide accommodation and financial support to avoid children being taken into the care of the local authority.

This duty exists even if the family has no right to work, no access to welfare benefits and social housing and no leave to remain in the UK. Project 17 exists to ensure that individuals eligible for support under Section 17 are able to access it effectively.

Values & Behaviours

Principles

1. A commitment to challenging social injustice with an inclusive and feminist approach.
2. A commitment to learning from the experiences and the resilience of our clients.

Behaviours

1. Working with a family-focused approach by displaying care and empathy and building trust through non-judgmental, honest relationships.
2. Creating a supportive warm and open working environment.

Operations

1. Working tirelessly to deliver expert services in an innovative, adaptable and professional way.
2. Maintaining and strengthening external relationships that support our core principles





Introduction

2019-20 was a challenging year for Project 17. We started the year having lost some funding for our frontline work and reduced the scope of the service. We worked hard to rebuild the advice service and strengthen the rest of the organisation, ending the year with more capacity and a growing team.

We restructured the way we deliver capacity building services, moving from having a dedicated staff member delivering training and advice and support for professionals, to splitting the responsibilities among our advisers, ensuring that those supporting professionals also have practical experience and real-world knowledge of the issues on which they are advising.

Just as we were in a more stable position internally, Covid-19 hit. Like everyone else, we completely changed the way we worked to comply with government restrictions, protect the health of staff and volunteers and support our clients.

Our staff

Amy Murtagh, Interim Director (until October 2019):

Amy joined Project 17 in 2014 as an Adviser. In 2018 she took on the role of Interim Director while Abi was on maternity leave. Amy has a Graduate Diploma in Law and an MA in Human Rights. She previously worked at the legal charity Rights of Women and worked with survivors of trafficking at Ashiana Sheffield.

Abi Brunswick, Director: Abi is the Director and one of the founders of Project 17 and is responsible for the overall running of the organisation. She has worked in the migrants' rights sector since 2008. Prior to establishing Project 17 she ran a small generalist advice service for migrants and refugees. Abi has an MA and a Graduate Diploma in Law. Abi was on maternity leave until August 2019

Afsana Aramesh, Outreach Adviser (until July 2019):

Afsana has worked with us since December 2016. She covers advice sessions at various centres in Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey and Lambeth. She previously worked at Coram Voice for 12 years as a specialist advocate, providing advocacy for young refugees, migrants, looked after children and care leavers.

Eve Dickson, Policy Officer: Eve is responsible for Project 17's policy and research work. She also supports families to make complaints about local authorities. Eve previously coordinated Akwaaba's children's project and helped set up NELMA's accompanying scheme. She has a PhD from Queen Mary University of London, where she currently teaches and also works as a research assistant at UCL.

Sydney Shea, Administrative Officer (from May 2019): Sydney began volunteering with Project 17 in late 2018. In May 2019 she took on the newly created role of Administrative Officer, supporting all strands of the organisation. Sydney has an undergraduate degree in History from SOAS.

Miranda Lickert, Training and Development Officer (until January 2020): Miranda delivers Project 17's capacity building services for other organisations, as well as managing her own caseload. She previously worked as a housing adviser for Shelter. Miranda has a PhD in Latin American Cultural Studies and an MA in Race and Resistance.

Shadin Dowson-Zeidan, Adviser (from August 2019): Shadin joined Project 17 as a full time Advisor in August 2019. Before this she was working with young asylum seekers and previously co-ordinated a visiting project for people in immigration detention and supported people who have experienced violence and domestic abuse. She has an MSc in Migration, Mobility and Development from SOAS.

Hannah Hoseyni, Adviser (from February 2020): Hannah began covering advice sessions at various centres across London, but soon changed to working remotely along with the rest of the team. Hannah previously worked at The British Red Cross as a casework coordinator, providing advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees. She has an MA in Human Rights.



Volunteers and Trustees

A huge thanks to our volunteers and trustees. We wouldn't exist without their hard work and commitment.

Volunteers

Kofo Williams

Felicia Owokinrian

Ifetayo Akingbehin

Sydney Shea

Trustees

Clare Jennings

Sue Causton

Felicia Owokoniran

Gwawr Thomas

Sue Ponter

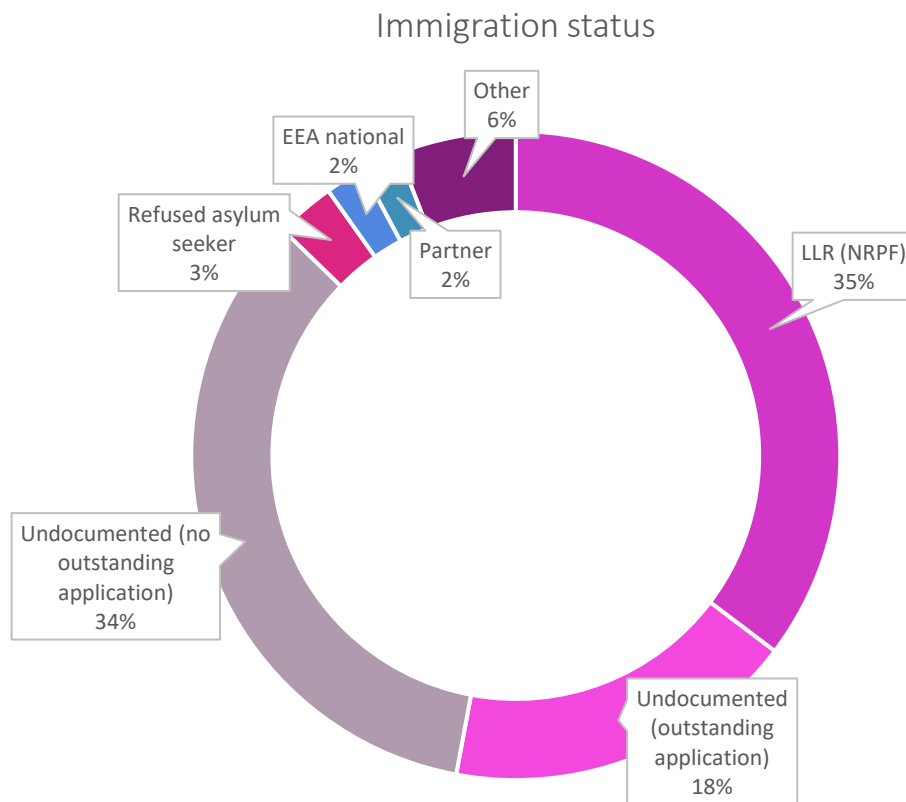
Claire McGuinness

Rupinder Parhar

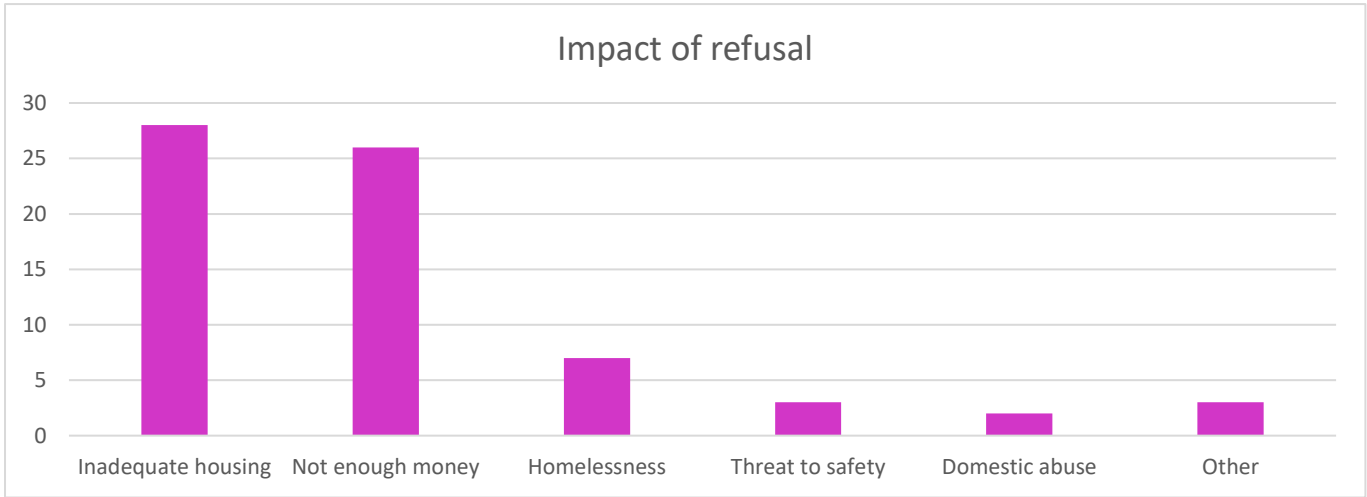
Advice Service

This year we worked with 235 families, including 119 new clients.

More than a third of people we worked with had leave to remain based on their right to private and family life but were excluded from the usual welfare safety net by the NRPF condition attached to their leave.



59% of our clients had already tried to access support under s.17 before they approached us. Frequently reported reasons for wrongful refusals included immigration status and local authorities telling clients that they were ‘not destitute’.



When clients were referred by Project 17 for support, they experienced less unlawful gatekeeping but 15% still experienced significant delays in assessments, and a further 15% had their credibility attacked. 11% experienced aggression from council staff and 9% were told that there was no support available.

Outcomes

81% of clients benefitted from improved housing and financial circumstances after working with us.

- In 48% of cases, families were provided with support following advocacy, without the need for legal action.
- In 14% of cases, support was provided following legal intervention.
- In 15% of cases clients were granted recourse to public funds, so the s17 case became academic.
- In 4% of cases, support was provided without the need for advocacy.

We also made specialist referrals for immigration advice and domestic violence support; we provided direct financial support, foodbank vouchers, and support in kind; and provided related advice such as help with evictions and declarations of parentage.



Feedback

We asked a random selection of clients for feedback. We got 36 responses:

80% rated the service as 10 out of 10

86% said their situation improved after coming to Project 17

100% said they better understood their situation and options after talking to us



"From the beginning I was homeless, no money. Project 17 helped us: writing to the council, arranging documents, getting accommodation even when the council refused, help[ing] us with hotels. They made sure that we got our weekly support and helped a lot and I am grateful. They also assisted with a charity immigration specialist and a solicitor to assist with the council."

"I have had the best experience. They are the best people... Project 17 always follow up with me and do it efficiently. They gave me more knowledge, told me many things I didn't know, my experience with them was awesome"

"Thank you to Project 17, they were there for us when we needed them the most"

Case Study

We met Beatrice* at one of our outreach sessions. She was a lone parent with a young son, David. They had been sofa surfing for months. David had not been able to register for school because they had no fixed address, and neither of them had seen a GP in years.

On the day they approached us they had nowhere to go and attended the appointment with their suitcases. They had already approached their local authority for support but had been wrongly turned away after being told that they were not eligible for support because of their immigration status.

We made an urgent referral for accommodation and financial support under section 17 of the Children Act. Initially the council refused support, first saying they were not eligible, and then that they were not in the council's area. However, following advocacy the family was accommodated that evening.

It took over three months for the council to provide financial support, during which time Beatrice and David struggled to meet basic needs. We made two payments out of our Destitution Fund, applied for a grant for the family, and sourced a second-hand television. We also supported Beatrice to get help to register David for school.

A partner agency supported Beatrice to apply for leave to remain on human rights grounds. She now has limited leave to remain and access to mainstream benefits. She was able to move on from s.17 support into more stable housing and can now work and claim mainstream benefits.

**Names and identifying features have been changed*



Training

30 training sessions

549 participants

83% rated the training as 'excellent'



"Engaging trainer, clearly passionate, learnt so much, should be mandatory training for all social work teams, advice was excellent and very clear and helpful, in depth"

"Handouts and materials were easy to follow, training informative and easy to apply, incredibly useful relevant and informative, very knowledgeable trainer, clear and engaging training, understood s17 intensely, trainer was engaged and responsive, well defined, good energy from trainer, informative and engaging"

"Informative and useful, engaging, well structured, presented well, trainer was excellent, knowledgeable, material was comprehensive, clear and articulate, engaging style, made section 17 support really clear, brilliant training- glad to have come, clear thorough and supportive environment"

Telephone advice line

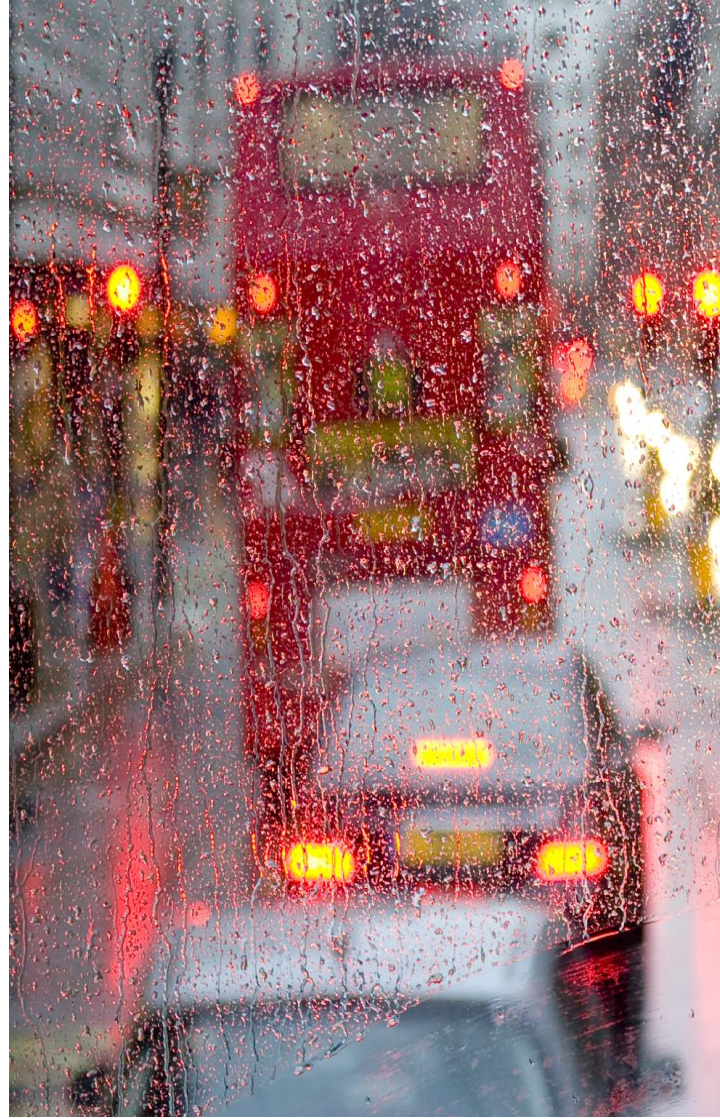
During this year we received 310 calls from professionals asking for advice about families they were working with.

We did a feedback survey of 53 callers and 92% rated the advice as 'very helpful.'

"You gave me confidence to act on behalf of families who need support."

"Talked me through step by step and with different outcomes".

"Working with people with NRPF where a lot of doors get closed, Project 17 was a ray of light!"



Strategic work

Locally:

Independent reviews in Haringey and Lewisham found significant failures. Lewisham has now adopted and implemented a more lawful policy, significantly reducing 'gatekeeping' that prevented access to support. Haringey has increased its rate of financial support for all families. Strategic complaints in Greenwich, Lewisham, Haringey and Newham led to offers of compensation for clients and, where the Local Government Ombudsman was involved, positive decisions identifying poor practice and finding fault were made.

Nationally:

Our national work has included acting as co-secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on No Recourse to Public Funds. The group hosted an event about NRPF in the school day in partnership with other key sector organisations. It produced several briefings for MPs and Peers and supported Parliamentarians to draw attention to NRPF through parliamentary questions and a debate in the House of Lords. In this way we helped to increase the profile of NRPF, with the Mayor of London and over 60 MPs calling for the condition (as it relates to people with leave to remain) to be scrapped.

Working in partnership has increased the scope and reach of our messaging. We are working with academics and social workers to produce guidance for non-specialist social workers on how to assess and support families with NRPF through the section 17 process. We have worked with families to hear their views and priorities, facilitating focus groups for the Children's Commissioner and for our own research. We are also developing a more ambitious project through which people with lived experience of NRPF will meaningfully lead on much of our strategic work.



Looking Ahead

Towards the end of this year, the Covid-19 pandemic began to affect every aspect of our work and our lives.

Next year we will focus on our response to the pandemic and the accompanying restrictions. Families with no recourse to public funds are likely to be particularly hard hit. As people already experiencing discrimination and destitution without a welfare safety net, we know that our clients and others with NRPF will struggle to feed themselves and their families; may have difficulty maintaining hygiene and self-isolating overcrowded and unsuitable accommodation; and are likely to lose their income.

We will aim to adapt and grow our services, so that we can take on clients remotely, expand our frontline provision and adapt our capacity building and policy work so that responds to the changing environment.

Financial information

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Total funds 2020	<i>Total funds 2019</i>
<i>INCOME</i>				
<i>Grants & donations</i>	£43,815	£198,481	£242,296	<i>£228,297</i>
<i>Other income</i>	£3,400	-	£3,400	<i>£2,625</i>
<i>Total income</i>	£47,215	£198,481	£245,696	<i>£230,922</i>
<i>EXPENDITURE</i>				
<i>Charitable activities</i>	£29,495	£163,829	£193,324	<i>£213,268</i>
<i>Governance costs</i>				<i>£10</i>
<i>Total expenditure</i>	£29,495	£163,829	£193,324	<i>£213,278</i>
<i>Net income</i>	£17,720	£34,652	£52,372	<i>£17,644</i>
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>				
<i>Funds brought forward</i>	£43,381	£104,400	£147,781	<i>£130,137</i>
<i>Transfer between funds</i>				<i>£124,222</i>
<i>Funds carried forward</i>	£61,101	£139,052	£200,153	<i>£147,781</i>

Thanks to our funders

A B Charitable Trust

Hilden Charitable Trust

LHA London

London Catalyst

Matrix Causes Fund

The Mercer Company

Metropolitan Migration Foundation



Network for Social Change Charitable Trust

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Oak Foundation

Strategic Legal Fund

Sam and Bella Sebba Trust

Trust for London

Tudor Trust

Taurus Foundation

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Louise Mankau for pro bono employment advice

Matthew Gold & Co. Ltd for fundraising efforts

Kate Osamor MP for chairing the APPG on NRPF

The Salvation Army in Catford and Hackney, for donating Christmas presents for our clients' children

Everyone who walked with us at the London Legal Support Trust walk

The individuals who give regular and one-off donations to support our work



