

Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum

AGM & Impact Report

April 1st 2020 – 31st March 2021



Contents

Page

Trustees Report by Heidi Perez	2
Capacity Building & Race Equality Report by Eddie Stadnik	4
Emergency Food & Fuel Provision Report by Eddie Stadnik	10
CLAS Report by Ana Maldonado	13
Refugee Services Report by Ana Maldonado	14
CHESS Report by Sam Budu	19
BBO Report by Panna Chowdhury	21
Crafting the Self Report by Suzan Murrad	24

Trustees Report

Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF) is a growing charity with a wide vision: “a world where diverse communities live in harmony and every individual, regardless of race, nationality or ethnic origin, has the opportunity to realize their full potential.” Having the structure of an umbrella organization allows it to reach as many people as possible and adapt to the current situations to better serve Cambridge’s Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Our main projects are: (1) Build Better Opportunities (BBO); a partnership with the Papworth Trust to support BME individuals develop skills towards employability, (2) CECF Refugees Services provides practical citizens advice and support based on an individual's need including referring asylum seekers and refugees to educational services, such as English language classes, and (3) Cambridge Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS) listens, supports and represents those suffering from inequality, discrimination, harassment and victimization in their workplace, school or service centers. All our services are free of cost to users and handled with care by our staff: Eddie Stadnik (CEO), Ana Maldonado (Refugee services), Sam Budu (CHESS), Panna Chowdhury (BBO), Suzan Murrad (Crafting the Self short-term project) and volunteers.



Chairperson, Heidi M. Perez Cordero

Our finances are managed by our finance officer Lucia Medici, our treasurer Valerie Berkson and audited by an independent examiner, Geoff Mann, FCIE. The 2020-2021 report of the finances shows an improvement in our income from £102,803 to £183,579 establishing an increase of 78.5% for the financial year ending on 31 March 2021. This increase made it possible for CECF to carry forward a total of £41,865; £36,661 more than in the previous year when only £5,204 was carried forward. The improvement of the finances, which greatly benefited our clients, was possible thanks to Cambridge City Council, The National Lottery Community Fund, The Evelyn Trust, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Cambridgeshire Community Foundation, Amazon Community Fund, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Furthermore, we were able to raise £4,187 for the Refugee Hardship Fund, thanks to the generosity of individuals and institutions in Cambridge.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started the Forum has gone through a process of re-thinking and transforming services to better serve the minority ethnic residents of Cambridge. Three essential services were offered to people in need. CECF launched the “Crafting the Self” project under the leadership of Suzan Murrad. As the programme coordinator she developed an art programme for migrant and refugee women that aims to support mental health and wellbeing using art as a resource.

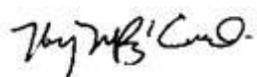
This project was kindly funded by The Evelyn Trust. The Forum has continued their collaboration with The Karim Foundation to fulfill the need for food provisions in Cambridge. Listening to the needs of the Minority Ethnic Communities, CECF started facilitating online professional development under the leadership of Ila Chandavarkar. Workshops were delivered that addressed: (1) dealing with the impact of Covid-19 in community groups, (2) how to create policy documents relevant for Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and (3) planning how to recover from the pandemic.

CECF is constantly engaging with the BME communities by supporting them through social media and sharing events on Facebook, mailing lists and the CECF website. This year one of the most important goals was to start development of a Race Equality Toolkit for businesses within Cambridgeshire. The toolkit was in response to the call of action from the Black Lives Matters movement in July 2020. This document addresses the public, private, community and voluntary workforce sector to promote equal opportunities to diverse ethnic communities in the workplace. It establishes the grounds of how to foster a fair workplace, including procedures such as recruiting, retention, professional development, and managing dismissal.

As part of our community response our staff has been a key part of listening, observing, collaborating with trustees, and making services available to BME communities. They have been keeping a flexible approach to re-address services to facilitate them efficiently and with care. There are no words to express how grateful we are to our staff and volunteers. Our staff and volunteers are very dedicated and always go far and beyond expectations.

I invite every resident of Cambridge to listen to the voices in our communities and join efforts to support each other.

Heidy M. Perez Cordero



Chairperson

On behalf of the Trustees of Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum.

Capacity Building

The following Capacity building and Race Equality work was grant funded by the Cambridge City Council. This reporting year has been a tumultuous year with the fallout from - 'The Windrush Scandal', Coronavirus and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd. This clearly illustrating that there is a way to go with regards to equality and justice for Black, Asian, and other Minority Ethnic communities (BME). This reporting year has therefore been a very challenging one with the Forum having to adapt to working in very difficult circumstances because of the Coronavirus health crisis. However, with our experience and knowledge of the already existing inequalities facing the sector we knew that this crisis would disproportionality affect those we work with. National research has shown that Coronavirus has disproportionality affected these communities in the UK both health wise and financially. Our own anecdotal evidence is that the economic effect on the BME communities in Cambridge is equally disproportionate. The Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF) has risen locally to these challenges, in partnership with the rest of the voluntary and statutory sector in Cambridge.

We were not connected to the Cloud at the beginning of this funded year, relying on an ancient office server with all our files on it. This presented challenges to home, or remote working, providing services and gathering information during this first year of COVID-19 crisis. This compounded by our office server completely crashing at the beginning of November 2020. However, with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, in January of 2021, we moved over to the Microsoft Cloud. Purchasing laptops and mobile phones for more effective remote working both in the current crisis and moving forward. Funding from the Lloyds Bank Foundation also enabled us to replace all our old office computers with brand new ones.

1. Organisation Management

We have been very successful in a transition to online Trustee meetings through Zoom software. These being held on the 15th of April, 3rd of June, 5th of August and 7th of October 2020. Followed by two more on the 20th of January and 10th of March 2021 after a very successful AGM. These meetings were attended by 13 representatives from 9 of the Black and & Minority Ethnic (BME) community groups that make up our membership. Bangladesh Welfare and Cultural Association Cambridge, Cambridge African Network, Camcarib, Cambridge Chinese Community Centre, Chinese Families Together, Escuelita CIC (Spanish Community), Jewish Residents Association, Khidmat Sisters and The Sudanese Community Group. Agendas were prepared, minutes taken, and actions identified were dealt with in a prompt and timely manner. These meetings and the active participation of our Trustees have helped the CECF improve its engagement with the BME communities in Cambridge, at this time of crisis and uncertainty, also of course improving awareness of what the Forum does. Ensuring that emergency provision is reaching those that need it.

We held an online AGM on Wednesday the 25th of November 2020. There were superb presentations from CB Mentoring, Karim Foundation, and the Arthur Rank Hospice. The attendance of up to 40 people was an improvement on the previous two years. The Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire was also represented. Particularly encouraging was knowing that the Arthur Rank and Karim Foundation used this as a great networking opportunity later going on to do a solid piece of community work together.

Our Finance Officer did a fantastic job of keeping our finances in order and ensuring that we have had our accounts examined or audited in the quickest time ever.

The Chair conducted monthly supervisions with the CEO and has been very supportive of our funding applications, playing a pivotal role in helping us secure a significant grant from the Evelyn Trust. Her dynamic personality and enthusiasm have helped carry us through these very difficult times. The CEO has kept in regular contact with staff who have been home working. However, as a charity providing emergency and urgent support to some very vulnerable people. We have like Fairbite, at Arbury Court, maintained an office presence throughout the Coronavirus crisis. However only after a risk assessment and with rigorous COVID-19 Health & Safety guidelines in place.

2. BME Engagement, information, and Support

The continued resilience of communities and individuals has been of primary concern for the Forum. For this purpose, we produced a directory of COVID -19 support which was especially created with the BME communities in mind, however the added value being that this was also a resource that the wider communities could benefit from. This was distributed throughout April & May of 2020. This was put on our website 15th April 2020, and on our CECF Facebook page reaching over 4K people there. This was also highlighted through our developing partnership with the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance (CFPA).

We have been providing fortnightly surgeries and/or regular specific development support to BME communities throughout this crisis, adapting from face to face to online surgeries and telephone work. On the 11th of May we completed

work that we had started earlier with a new Ghanaian Association in Cambridge (GHACA). Two surgeries with two members of the committee helped them modify their constitution to be what they wanted as well as in line with Charity Commission guidance. We also helped in fundraising, supporting them in making an application to Awards for All. On the 20th and 24th of April, we assisted the Khidmat Sisters by helping them review their achievements through the year so they could complete the Cambridge City Council Grant Monitoring form. This was followed up with email advice given on 17th September for their grant application. We have also been involved in helping the group develop links with COPE to widen the access and availability of services for their members. During July and August this year, we worked with 'Chinese Families Together'. They had initially come for help with a constitution to help them register their Saturday School as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. We referred them to CCVS. They returned to review this, as they felt that having had some time to run the school, they needed to consider changes. Advice was given both through emails as well as a Zoom session on the 19th of August.

Because of the severity of the crisis facing the BME communities we felt that it was very important to especially support community initiatives that helped alleviate this. To this end we provided urgent, regular, and prompt capacity building support to our partner organisation, in providing emergency





culturally dietary appropriate food and fuel provision to the BME communities, - 'The Cambridge Muslims COVID-19 Response'. On June 12th of 2020 we had a Zoom meeting to discuss with them what sort of charitable structure they wished to pursue. There were several Zoom sessions, with emailed advice, to help them draft a constitution to register as a CIO. Of note, was advice that helped them phrase their objects in a manner that was extremely relevant to them by incorporating a clause about the spirit of support in line with Islamic principles that remind all of the need to care, and to serve and educate humanity in a spirit of humility and compassion. This tailored support in terms of objects that are meaningful to BME groups can only be provided by us and we have used this example in encouraging other groups to think about their objects. We were pleased that the Charity Commission only needed a couple of weeks to agree registration of this CIO. The group felt these sessions had been useful as shown by their email:

'Kal and I are delighted to announce that the KARIM FOUNDATION is a now a registered charity! The Registered Charity Number is 1191413. It's official!

Thank you both for all your help and support in making this happen. We wouldn't have done this without your input. It wasn't an easy process'.

This was a significant achievement as our partnership helped hundreds of BME residents in extreme poverty because of the crisis created around the Coronavirus, as well as keeping them informed of available support.

However, the Coronavirus wasn't the only crisis – although it made all the others worse - and like the Cambridge City Council, we revisited our work with the cities Black communities because of Black Lives Matter (BLM). During August we advised and helped a local Social Enterprise, Rock of Virtue Café, also providing COVID related services, that we had helped previously in June by reviewing their action and business plan, and which was featured in a Guardian newspaper article. We also referred them to the national Voice4Change England organisation which specialises in supporting BME social enterprises.

During this Coronavirus crisis, health and wellbeing has been flagged up as a significant issue, particularly for young people. Combining our concerns for this with helping empower the cities Black communities we have been working from June 2020 through until March of 2021 supporting the launch of a new initiative, CB mentoring.

This has been set up by a group of local Black professional men and women to provide education, mentoring and social-cultural learning for young black youth, male and female. We have provided advice, information and guidance on safeguarding and governance – through Zoom meetings, emails, and telephone calls. Made introductions to the wider community and organisations like Centre 33. We have also facilitated Patrick Vernon OBE to their Patron.

The selfless mentors going out of their way to help disadvantaged Cambs children

Professionals from a range of esteemed sectors, such as law and medicine, are using their own time to empower and support disadvantaged children across the county - especially Black children and children from ethnic minorities who need help navigating a racist world

SHARE   

By **Debbie Luxon** Community Reporter
11:57, 31 Jul 2020 UPDATED 15:11, 31 Jul 2020

NEWS

Enter your postcode for local news and info

Enter your postcode

Go

In     YourArea



They had been advised on their draft constitution by the Cambridge CVS (CCVS) but they wanted another look with our specialist BME perspective. We helped them insert some clauses. We gave a lot of help with their registration as they unfortunately had a Charity Commissioner who appeared to question the fundamentals of the service, rather than focus on whether the group had an appropriate charitable purpose and structure. For example, she wanted to know if the group was endorsed by the University and if they were required to register with the NRCSE. Another requirement was to answer detailed separate questions on safeguarding even though the group's safeguarding policy had been sent and the questions were all addressed in the policy. Each set of questions were over 15 with a lot of technical language and this went on for four sessions. It was a daunting requirement for any group starting out. The group acknowledged that they would have given up on registration without the help of CECF.

'I hope you are both well, just a quick email to let you know we have finally received our charity registration number from the Charity Commission!

On behalf of myself and the other trustees I would really like to thank you both for all of your time, assistance and guidance throughout this process. We really would not have been able to do it without you both.'

In September of 2020 we were contacted by Anita Scott, of the Scott Foundation. She wanted to set up a CIO with membership for a group that will help BME people in poverty, and a particular focus on helping those with disabilities. A model was prepared for her with an invitation to a Zoom session to go through this so she can adapt the model to what she wants. In December of 2020 a surgery was run for the Sudanese Community Association who wanted help with developing policies e.g. safeguarding and data protection. Work is continuing these. In January of 2021, a Zoom session was set up for Edward Imhagwe, from the Cambridge African Network. He wanted advice on a separate group that he had organised with some other people which would cater for the needs of particular tribes from Nigeria. The group has a constitution, but Edward wanted to be sure it was suitable for registration as a CIO. The constitutions have been compared and a model prepared from the CIO with members template, ensuring that key clauses and the spirit of the old constitution are retained. This followed by a Zoom session to review this.

Our help with constitutions is not limited to Charity Commission templates. We get groups to recognise how they want to run their group, phrase their objects in a way they feel is inspirational to them, and put in the rules they feel are needed for their particular group. We used this expertise to set up a specialist online workshop for BME groups on constitutions, on the 10th of November 2020 titled "Making Governing documents relevant for Black and minority ethnic groups". We also ran two more online sessions on the 19th of October and 9th of December 2020. The first was on redesigning services and communication because of the changes brought by the Covid pandemic. The third was on planning services for a path to recovery and how to resource these. These training sessions were followed up with resource packs.

'The training was really helpful. There were many impacts on certain aspects and groups of people I did not know till this session, and there are so many we can do to improve the situation within our group and our service'

'My observation about my group is that many group members would like to feel being integrated as part of a larger community, while maintaining our own ethnic, cultural and religious identity. My experience is that our spirit is energised when we as a group joining in a good cause led by a wider initiative-be it ethnic or non-ethnic related. When we have contributed to a wider community and made connection with 'others', we feel empowered and not excluded. Organising such activity helps encouraging some group members who are more shy and reserved to expand their social connections and appreciate universal values shared by others and ourselves'

Our BME Consultation meeting took place with our CECF Trustees online who represent many of the city's diverse ethnic communities. This was held through our meeting on the 10th of March 2021, with the meeting focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the different community groups represented. At least three of our Trustees have been very seriously ill because of Covid during this reporting year. Some have family members or know community members who have died. So, it was a very sobering meeting. But it was also useful to share experiences and touch upon the issues around the take up of the vaccines. Heidi our Chair was to re-visit Trustees with updates from meetings that she had attended on this topic. This information to be shared with the wider communities.

We delivered an online civic engagement session in partnership with the community engagement officer of the UK Parliament, on Friday the 26th of March 2021. This was well attended with 19 participants and Arabic interpreting provided.

We have been working with the Cambridge City Council in supporting the voluntary sector through this critical time as part of the COVID-19 Cambridge City Council Reference Group.

Through this work we have been developing BME community group relationships and networking. We have been especially successful at improving our partnership with CCVS.

Race Equality Services

For minority ethnic groups and community members, based at the Forum, 3 days weekly, 10.00am – 5pm. Run on behalf of BME communities to work towards eliminating discrimination, to reduce social & economic inequality by improved access to services especially for those on low income or unemployed. BME community access to advice and services on site – Race Equality Services, effective telephone referrals and signposting where appropriate. Promoting equal opportunities & including good practice, information, training & advice to the wider voluntary sector & statutory organisations.

To do this we had to adapt the following due to COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions

CECF run drop-in sessions for the BME communities were suspended and frontline staff supporting clients saw people only through emergency appointments who had issues of homelessness, extreme destitution, or medical needs. This we were able to do because of the nature of the work and legal exemptions in lockdown rules allowing this in certain types of charity work. This was done only after a COVID-19 risk assessment and with strict health and safety guidelines in place.

However, most of these emergency appointments were for the refugee service so will not be recorded in this report. There were a few emergency appointments for migrant or for the established ethnic communities; but most of those enquiries, or issues were dealt with through our reception phone and online services.

Through our Race Equality Service, we identified a need early in the pandemic for culturally dietary appropriate food, and together with other funding obtained we helped about 100 households in the reporting year (300-350 beneficiaries). Together with the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS) which we operated at the CECF through a dedicated and trained member of staff. With the CECF Race Equality Service as its cornerstone we helped organise, provide, and deliver up to £20,000 of emergency food and fuel provision during the pandemic. This effort was combined with help provided through our CECF Capacity building service to enable a new charity the 'Karim Foundation' to obtain its charitable status and together providing a powerful partnership in coordination and delivery of emergency provision to the city's diverse ethnic communities at this very difficult time.

Reception phone and online services

With at least 500 contacts in the funded year coming through reception as phone calls or emails for information or to access services. (This figure does not include CHESS or REFUGEE Services beneficiaries or service users). This figure is undoubtedly higher however recording was problematic with staff and our community development workers and interpreters working remotely. Our office server also crashed later in the year. With funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, we managed to move over to the Microsoft Cloud in the last quarter of this reporting year.



Accessing NHS Health Services in England – A workshop for our diverse minority ethnic communities

At this time you maybe concerned about your health and how to get the help that you need. This workshop aims to better inform you about your entitlements and improve your knowledge about how to access NHS Health services.



Join us for a short online workshop on Monday, 9th November 2020, starting at 10am and lasting until 12 noon. If you are interested please do contact us to register on Sozan.cecf@gmail.com or eddie.cecf@gmail.com Alternatively telephone 01223 655241.



Some of the points that we aim to discuss

How can you register with a GP? Should you pay for your medication or not? Will my children receive free treatment? I can't speak English very well. How can I be understood? Your community and COVID-19.



Race Equality Services for BME Residents –

We ran two workshops. The first held online, Monday 9th November. This for people who were English speakers. The second on Monday the 30th of November for Arabic speakers. This to give more time with Arabic translation to help people, who came to England more recently, and could not speak or understand English confidently. To ensure that they were able to understand the health system

especially during this uncertain time. At least 16 participants attended these workshops online and we

had health professionals who kindly gave some of their time to spend time at these workshops and answer participant's questions.

During this reporting period time we had several enquiries from people wishing to volunteer however did not take any on new volunteers on due to the practicalities and issues around office and remote working.

Partnership working with voluntary sector and statutory service organisations

We have been active as a steering group member of the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance (CFPA). Attending meetings during this reporting period. By Zoom because of the Coronavirus epidemic (COVID 19). We have developed a resource for the communities. We are also now represented on the Board of Sustainability Food.

Through our wider partnership with the CFPA, more specifically Cambridge Sustainable Food, we helped by referral or signposting beneficiary families, in need. During this period, we facilitated a major donation of food from the Cambridge Central Mosque to Sustainability Food. We also organised translated material about the Cambridge Food Hubs into community languages. This was posted out to all our beneficiaries in the CB1, CB2, CB4 and CB5 postcode areas.

The Cambridge Central Mosque also did a great job coordinating with us, in delivering promptly emergency provision, in the form of dry food packs, during Ramadan. Through outreach our volunteer community interpreters & development workers were able to help us reach some of the most marginalised people.

We attended numerous Council meetings online regarding COVID-19.

We also attended online consultation meetings with Helen Crowther the Cambridge City Council and Anti-Poverty Officer, including on issues around the Black Lives Matter (BLM) motion that City Councillors passed. Following on from this we have been commissioned to do a Race Equality Toolkit for Cambridge businesses.

CECF also added to its portfolio of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training by developing training for Cambridge CVS on Recognising and Challenging Unconscious Bias. The first session was run on the 11th of October 2020 for 12 participants from 10 voluntary sector groups. Feedback was positive:

"Thankful that this was available to us. I learnt a lot and will share with the rest of my team."

The session size was restricted to ensure a fully interactive session. There was a waiting list and CCVS ran a second session on 21st February 2020 and planned a further one in October 2021. As a result of this training, CECF was also asked to run two sessions for Cambridgeshire Healthwatch on the 18th and 26th November 2020.

Emergency Food & Fuel Provision

The following is a summary of the emergency food provision and fuel support Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF) provided from the 1st of April 2020 due to the Coronavirus health crisis, up to the 31st of March 2021. Funded by grants to the CECF from the Amazon Community Fund, Cambridgeshire Community Foundation (CCF), National Lottery Community Fund, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Local authority Covid-19 grants facilitated through the Cambridge City Council, CECF Refugee Hardship Fund and a public fundraising campaign by the 'Cambridge Muslim's COVID 19 Response' (later Karim Foundation).

During this reporting period assistance was provided to at least 96 households and at least 300 people to the value of over £17000. 53% of those households were from some of the most deprived wards in Cambridge. CB2, CB4 and CB5 Postcode areas. 6% were from CB7 Postcode area, East Cambridgeshire. So, nearly 60% from areas that were already statistically deprived areas prior to Covid.

16% of those households assisted were asylum seekers, with 20% being refugees. Non-EU migrants made up 17%. Black and ethnic minorities from the European Union (EU) 5%, with those from the UK making up our single biggest category at 37%. 5% of Households assisted were EU, or UK White category.

82% of those households that we assisted that stated having, or having had employment, also stated they had been directly affected by Covid. Some had lost jobs or their business, many had reduced income and others struggled to get employment during the Pandemic. To begin with a third of those we were helping were No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). 52% of those same households, who stated health issues, had health issues related directly to Covid. This ranged from having Covid, through to having to Shield because of their vulnerability. 15% reported having depression or mental health and wellbeing issues. This figure is undoubtedly higher, with unreported cases, because of the stigma that can be attached to this in some of the communities.

This is only a summary and doesn't begin to describe the welfare complexities of individual or group circumstances. Asylum seekers being evicted and the refusal of the Home Office to provide support on the basis that the law says nobody can be legally evicted during the COVID-19 crisis, which didn't necessarily reflect the reality on the ground. Or the plight of those Migrant (Non-EU) beneficiaries with NRPF, who couldn't access or find employment. Those self-employed struggling to access support as their income was devastated.

This support was provided due to the vulnerability of many of our service users and the lack of culturally dietary appropriate food provision to some of those most in need, in our cities culturally diverse minority ethnic communities. Our partnership with the 'Cambridge Muslim's COVID-19 Response' (later Karim Foundation) was invaluable. This partnership delivering vital emergency food provision to both Muslim and Non-Muslim families and individuals in need, whilst catering for cultural and dietary requirements, whether Halal meat or Yam flour.

Through outreach our volunteer community interpreters & development workers were able to help us reach some of the most marginalised people.

This support provided communities and individuals with a unique and organised source of culturally dietary appropriate emergency food provision at a time when many had lost jobs, or had their incomes reduced. Others struggling to access welfare benefits they might be entitled to. It ensured that they received foodstuffs that they were able and happy to eat. For those particularly having to self-isolate or shield it was a lifeline. People had food to eat, or the means to obtain it ensuring that their basic needs to survive were met. It served to encourage those affected by COVID-19 to self-isolate knowing that their basic food needs would be met. Many families felt that their needs were not being met by and so our assistance was most welcome and a great morale booster.

'Thank you very much for your help' - The quality of the food is amazing'.

'He says the food is very good and wholesome' - A big thank you to you and your colleagues and volunteers at the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum'.

'Many thanks to you and your team for the food parcel that you delivered to xxxxxx. He is so excited that he has got some fresh halal meat and many other goodies. He asked me to convey his gratitude for your huge help when he in such great need'.

Our communication for welfare, as well as to help meet food needs, by telephone and email was also vitally important. It helped us reach some of the most marginalised including those with language barriers and those having to shield. Through this communication we picked up other needs such as urgent medical. This communication contributed massively to people's health and wellbeing, lifting people's spirits, knowing that someone cared.

"We felt that we had been forgotten, thank you so much".

"You have restored my faith in humanity!"

This assistance was in the form of at least 165 shopping deliveries made to those having to self-isolate or shield, or collections arranged free to the beneficiaries, at least 242 shop vouchers provided. We also issued 26 Foodbank vouchers, both paper and electronically, in addition to 7 Foodbank fuel vouchers. Paying out 23 small fuel grants for those who didn't have pre-paid meters.

The Cambridge Central Mosque also did a great job coordinating with us, in delivering promptly emergency provision, in the form of 49 dry food packs, to both Muslim and Non-Muslim households during Ramadan and later in January of 2021.

We made numerous referrals to the Fairbite shop at Arbury Court, as well as the Cambridge Food hubs. Other beneficiary families were also signposted to local Foodbanks in East and South Cambridgeshire.

During this period, we worked hard to improve our knowledge and ability to also refer to local provision where this was appropriate. By referral to the Fairbite shop at Arbury Court we helped to start to break down the barriers that the Foodbank have had with some of the BME communities. We also referred people especially in East and South Cambridgeshire to more local provision which we saw as a start to them more effectively meeting the wider community needs.



'Thank you so much for your extensive and very helpful email! It's really great to know of the multiple areas of support my client could access – Richmond Fellowship'.

Through our wider partnership with the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance (CFPA), more specifically Cambridge Sustainable Food, we helped by referral or signposting 4 other beneficiary families. During this period, we facilitated a major donation of food from the Cambridge Central Mosque to Sustainability Food. We also coordinated the provision of Christmas fruit and veg hampers with Cambridge City Council and the Foodbank to families and individuals.

We organised translated material about the Cambridge Food Hubs into community languages. This was posted out to all our beneficiaries in the CB1, CB2, CB4 and CB5 postcode areas. By arranging translation of Cambridge Food Hub information into different languages we boosted the attendance of people from those communities in going to those great sources of help. Councillor for Trumpington, Katie Thornburrow, stated in a meeting that that there was a notable increase in people attending from the BME communities at the Trumpington Food Hub, after our letters had gone out.

Our partnership work during this period has made a real impact on the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance, with the beginnings of meaningful change regarding the needs of the wider communities being more effectively met.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (CLAS)

In October 2020, CECF became a partner of Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS). This scheme is led by CHS Group and provides information, advice and practical help to household experiencing hardship. This needs-based assistance enables low-income families and individuals to improve their immediate financial position, cope, and better support themselves and use relevant resources to succeed in the long term.

The scheme offers 3 types of awards: Green Good vouchers: recycled white goods, furniture, and paint through referral to our partners such as Re-use. New goods such as cookers and mattresses and supermarket vouchers for food and clothing.

CECF was allocated a core budget of £2000. This was supplemented in December 2020 by another £1,500 with the Covid and Winter Grants which were aimed at providing extra support to vulnerable households during the Covid winter months. The COVID-19 Grant gave CECF champion more flexibility on the eligibility criteria and were able to help some people with no recourse to public funds affected by the pandemic.

Through CLAS CECF has helped 14 families/households during this year. Most of the awards granted were in the form of supermarket vouchers. We also issued 3 green vouchers which were redeemed at Cambridge Re-use in furniture and household items. We also were able to assist a family with a new mattress and another with a new washing machine.

Case Studies:

A mother with no recourse to public funds with a young child going through chemotherapy. She was paying for her daughter's cancer treatment with her husband's earnings in Nigeria. As a result of the pandemic, the husband's business was financially affected. Her daughter suffered from vomiting due to the treatment and she found it hard constantly washing by hand her bedding and clothes. Through CLAS we provided her with a washing machine.

"My washing mashing was delivered about 5 minutes ago, thank you so much. You will not understand but this has taken a huge burden off me. A huge thank you to you and your team."

A Refugee family on Universal Credit with very little knowledge of English received an unusually high-water bill. This unexpected amount put enormous pressure on their finances. Through CLAS, we were able to relieve this pressure issuing supermarket vouchers, while the high usage of water was investigated.

"I wanted to appreciate you for your kindness to me and my family during the quarantine".

We were able to help a lady who had set up a new business as a hairdresser just before the pandemic. With the first lockdown, she had to close her salon, and found it increasingly difficult to pay the business loans she had taken few months earlier. When she came to us, she was overwhelmed by the amount of debt. We issued her with supermarket vouchers to buy food and essentials while she applied for Universal Credit and made a referral to Stepchange for help managing her debts.

Refugee Services

Introduction

Asylum seekers & Refugees are one of the most economically deprived groups in the city that the CECF assists. Denied mainstream benefits, housing & legally unable to work, many are destitute, or require assistance with basic necessities. Many cannot speak English confidently and struggle to find good quality free immigration advice or help with their cases. Some are traumatized because of their experiences and require counselling. Others suffer from physical or mental health problems and struggle to access services for these issues. On gaining Refugee status or Leave to Remain they face new problems of accessing benefits, housing, and work.

Migrant Help is the name of the centralised organisation which holds the contract from the government for the support of those seeking asylum; this means that there is only a telephone service for those clients across the Eastern region. Community organisations like CECF provide the face-to-face services for very vulnerable clients and help them to access the central service.



In 2016 the Cambridge City Council commissioned CECF to do some research into the needs and numbers, particularly of adult asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge, that were not included in any re-settlement programme. There were growing concerns that there maybe a discrepancy in support between those who are helped through official resettlement programmes and those who must make own way and are processed through the mainstream asylum route.

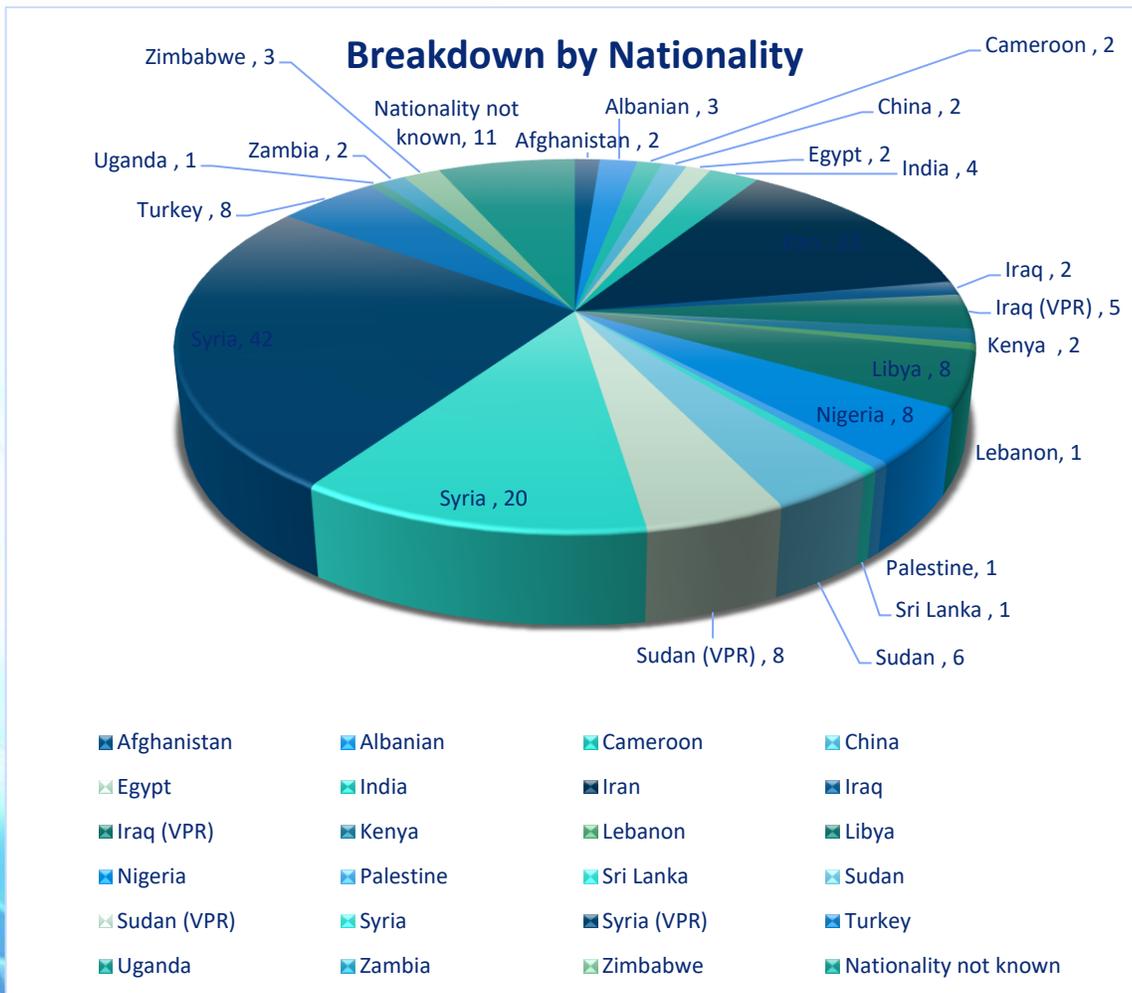
A Report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees, *Refugees Welcome? The Experience of New Refugees in the UK*, published on 25 April 2017 also highlighted issues around what is being described as a two-tier system of support developing nationally between those helped through refugee re-settlement schemes and those that were not. Following on from our report which highlighted needs we were successful in being awarded a contract by the Cambridge City Council to run a specialist service for asylum seekers and refugees in the City, and this contract has been extended annually.

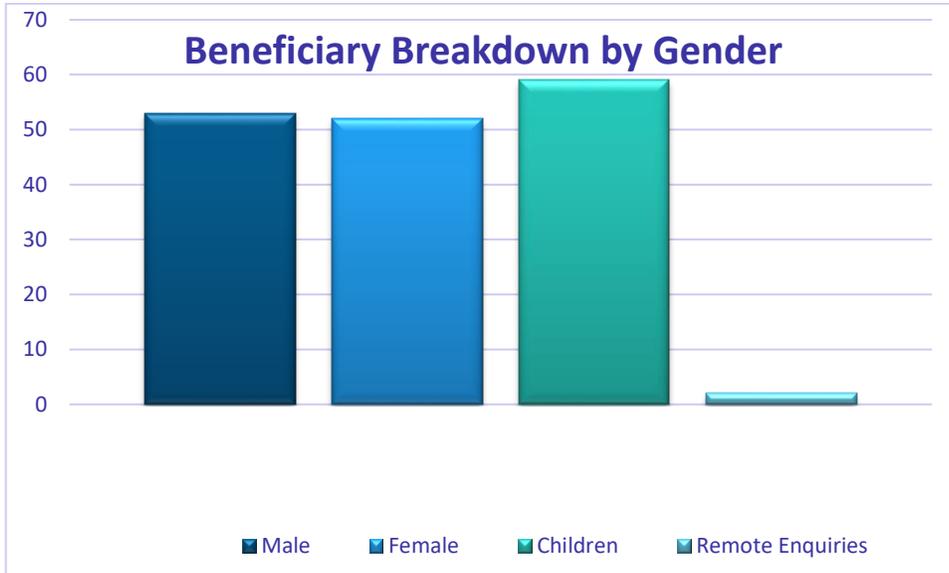
The service commenced on the 1st of August 2018 and this report covers the period April 2020 to March 2021 entering the third year of the service. This has been a particularly challenging year with much of

the service taking place remotely due to the Covid 19 pandemic and client welfare needs increasing. Our organisation is registered with the OISC for Asylum and Protection work at Level 1 and during this reporting year we worked towards upgrading our capability with Level 2 registration. However, it had to be put on hold as the testing centre initially closed because of Covid. We believe that our service through this contract has made a significant difference in the city to enabling this vulnerable group to access the help and support that they need. Our focus is on delivering a high-quality service to the communities of asylum seekers and refugees in Cambridge.

Beneficiary Breakdown

We assisted at least 166 asylum seekers and refugees during 2020-21, including dependents. This is a 16% increase from the figure recorded as having been helped the previous year. At least 21 different nationalities are represented, with the largest number coming from Syria. Whilst the majority of asylum seekers and refugees we helped were not part of the Home Office Re-settlement Scheme, 55 beneficiaries were from families supported by the Cambridge City Council through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme.





Service Delivery

CECF is based in the North of Cambridge which has some of the most impoverished wards in the city. Cambridge is often perceived as a well-off city. However, there are extremes of wealth and poverty, and poverty is made worse by the high costs of living. Cambridge was ranked by Centre for Cities as the most unequal city in the UK for two years in a row. Many of the asylum seekers and refugees who turn to us for support live in the North of Cambridge.

Our Premises provide an accessible operating base for the service, and we have adapted to increased on-line and remote working because of Covid. As a voluntary sector hub, we offer communal space where groups can gather and very importantly rooms for private interviews. There is Disability Access, and it is within walking distance for some of our beneficiaries. There is a good bus service provide by the Citi1 and plenty of free car parking. We provide reimbursement of travel expenses for those who have limited resources to attend appointments from our CECF Refugee Hardship Fund. We work closely with partners and are part of the 'Cambridge City of Sanctuary' refugee network.

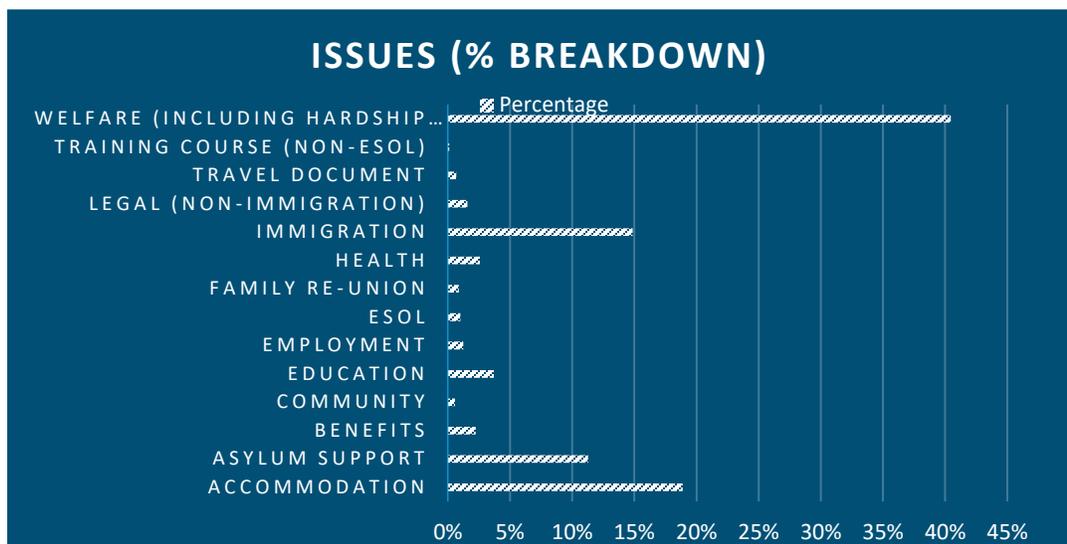
Confidentiality is of the utmost importance and to this end our service adheres to strict processes bound by the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR Regulation. Our service provision is also regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), and we are currently able to provide Immigration Services to Asylum and Protection Level 1, with a view to increasing this to Level 2 in the near future to enhance the service we can provide.

Our advice sessions are managed by two highly experienced staff who have previously worked with the British Refugee Council, supported by two volunteer advisors. We have the use of CECF trained volunteer community interpreters and telephone interpreting through CINTRA Language Services Group. We have had at least 895 interactions with asylum seekers and refugees during this reporting period (appointments, visits, telephone calls, messages, or emails). This an increase in workload over the previous year despite a curb in our drop-in surgeries, with only emergency appointments and a big increase in email or telephone solutions due to Covid.

This reporting period coincides with the on-set of the national Lockdown due to the COVID-19 Health crisis. Whilst most of the CECF staff worked from home, the Refugee Service maintained an office

presence, continuing to see the most urgent welfare cases on a Face-to-Face basis, although with strict Covid protocols in place for both staff and clients. As much work was done as possible remotely.

Issues Dealt With



These issues were tackled through 895 interactions and pieces of casework completed in the year by our Advisers, involving 166 beneficiaries. Note that many issues required multiple interventions and intensive work to achieve an outcome.

The Impact of the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Service

We have provided a service which has far-reaching impact on the individual lives of the 166 beneficiaries who are displaced people in this area, and provided a referral point and information point for other agencies in the city who would otherwise not have known where to turn. The year was dominated by immediate and urgent welfare issues as can be seen from the chart above.

Impact, however, was not only in terms of alleviating immediate food, accommodation, or health stresses, but also in enabling future integration, well-being, and satisfactory re-settlement. Our interventions in enabling, for example, access to legal support, access to language classes, student financing, or employment opportunities, all lead to longer term integrational outcomes for the individuals and families concerned.

From the 895 pieces of work or interactions carried out within the service, after welfare, dealing with accommodation issues is the second largest category.

The following highlights some of our key outcomes:

Accommodation - Obtained accommodation for 3 individual refugees in Cambridge through partnership working with 'Refugees at Home', and extension of hosting for another. Arranged for 2 Asylum Seeking households to obtain Asylum dispersal accommodation. Achieved one emergency placement in accommodation by Social Services. Obtained a discretionary housing payment for one beneficiary and

arranged emergency accommodation for another with the local Churches Homelessness project pending an appeal against an asylum accommodation refusal.

Asylum Support - Obtained asylum support for 6 asylum seekers and one maternity grant.

English Language - Provided signposting to on-line courses for at least 3 beneficiaries.

Family Reunion – Made two referrals to the Refugee Legal Assistance Project (RLAP) and provided interpreting for arranging Family Re-unions.

Health – Liaised with GP Surgery regarding urgent prescription (see case study below).

Immigration advice – Signposted to immigration Solicitors and dealt with Change of Address information to Home Office and dealt with lost Biometric identity cards.

Welfare (Including Hardship Fund) – Through our Refugee Hardship Fund we helped at least 34 Refugee service beneficiaries and their families, distributing more than £1357 worth of assistance for bus fares to CECF and hospital appointments, mobile phone purchase, mobile phone top ups and solicitor's fees. Asylum seekers and refugees were also assisted separately through the CECF emergency food and fuel program.

Case Studies

Client AA –

We assisted an Iranian refugee family with very little knowledge of English language. The father had a serious medical condition and was running out of medication. They went to the GP surgery to request a repeat prescription and it was closed due to lockdown. They were desperate as this medication was vital to treating the medical condition. We brought in a Farsi speaking CECF community interpreter to our offices at Arbury Court and conducted an onsite conference call, contacting the surgery, and followed their new instructions to request a repeat prescription via email and explained to the client the procedures for them to collect the medication. The client was able to collect his medication the following day.

Client BB –

We assisted a homeless Cameroonian lady with No Recourse to Public Funds with 2-year-old son. We contacted the ward councilor and client was given emergency accommodation in hotel (Dec). The client had been referred to social services for a Child in Need assessment for her son. Social services made a Human Rights assessment instead of Child in Need assessment and refused to support the client. CECF contacted a solicitor who sent a pre-action letter and as a result social service started supporting mother and son and gave accommodation to the client in Northampton. The mother subsequently got Humanitarian Protection.

Client CC -

Homeless young Iraqi asylum seeker who had been evicted from his AS accommodation because his asylum appeal had been refused. CECF helped client to get accommodation in B&B through Cambridge Churches Homeless Project while client appealed against the discontinuation of AS with the help of the Asylum Appeals Project. The client also needed an immigration solicitor to lodge further submissions. We referred client to an immigration solicitor and paid from our Refugee Hardship fund for the transfer of his file from his old solicitor to the new one (£75). Client won the appeal and was dispersed to Coventry.

Client DD –

An asylum seeker who had to renew his ARC identity card and was told by the Home Office that they had to take all his biometric data again. We arranged with the HO for the client's biometric data to be taken at our premises, by an immigration officer, as he could not travel due to being extremely vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS)



Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS) provided casework advice, assistance, advocacy, and representation to 26 individuals and families in education, employment, housing, COVID19 Support (health and social care) and welfare benefits during the 2020/2021 financial year. Due to the pandemic, there was no face-to-face casework advice at Arbury Court. All advice, casework and representation were conducted by email, written correspondence and on telephone as well as by zoom where possible. This reduced the total number of clients for the year who normally visit the office for advice, assistance, and representation.

14 out of the 26 were Cambridge based, 5 from South Cambridgeshire, 4 from Cambridgeshire and 3 from outside the county. Almost all had multiple advice, assistance, and representation. There were 20 females and 6 males and within the ages of 18 to 59. In terms of ethnicity, 24 were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds with only two being White.



Though there were only 26 individuals that contacted us directly to seek our services, the beneficiaries were more than 26 because most of the individuals had families that also benefited. For example, in housing most were families of two to three or more and the two that received COVID19 support were households of two and three members. Education also often involved more than one beneficiary, particularly when parents seek advice for their children. For example, six children under the ages of 18 benefitted through their parents but not included in the 26 individuals and families.

Employment casework takes most of our advice and representation time as they can last from a minimum of three months to two years if it goes to Employment Tribunal. Only one claim of race and sex discrimination was lodged with the Employment Tribunal but was resolved amicably through out of court settlement. Three other workers were supported with advice and representation in internal disciplinary actions and continue to receive ongoing advice, support, and representation.

The reduced service uptake could be attributed to some people from BME backgrounds lacking access to IT equipment and broadband. Some of those who used our services told us that they could not complete our Client Registration and Consent Forms and return them to us because either they do not have computer or laptop but only mobile phone without Microsoft software. As a result, CHESS suspended the requirement to complete Client Registration Form. However, we could not suspend the Consent Form particularly if we had to contact another organisation on behalf of a client since the organisation would not respond to CHESS without consent form signed by the client.

CHESS continued to be a member of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary's Stop and Search Community Scrutiny Panel and has recently joined the Professional Standards Department's Scrutiny Group of the three counties (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Hertfordshire). This is a group that reviews how complaints against police officers are dealt with and provides independent advice.

In the last quarter of the year, CHESS contributed to the development of a Race Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit for employers and service providers in Cambridge, which was commissioned by Cambridge City Council following the Black Life Matter.

Impact Assessment

Most service users of CHESS are from disadvantage and vulnerable backgrounds (Black and Minority Ethnic groups and Disable people). Both groups experience socio-economic disadvantages of low income as well as potential race and disability discrimination. Without our free advice, assistance, advocacy, and representation, many if not all, would have been unable to pay for the services of solicitors and other professionals to advise and represent them. Without our free services, they would have fallen further into socio-economic difficulties and into poverty and be at risk of destitution. Our work therefore enabled them to have some form of economic independence, kept their jobs, remained in their homes and therefore avoided unemployment and homelessness. For disabled people, the PIP and other welfare related benefits awarded to them enabled to live in dignity.

The evidence and the positive impact of our work on the beneficiaries are not only the raw numbers but also in monetary value. The value of our work was over £110,000.00 (estimated) in employment, housing, education, welfare benefit and others. For example, two employment claims resulted in an out of court settlement of over £60,000.00 excluding the cost of representation by CHESS. These are only on annualised basis and not the long-term benefits.

The development of the Race Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit; CHESS's participation in the Stop and Search Community Scrutiny Panel and the Professional Standards Department Scrutiny Group meetings will benefit employers, service providers in Cambridge and the public across Cambridgeshire and beyond.

CHESS is grateful to Cambridge City Council for its annual grant without which our work would not have been possible.

Building Better Opportunities (BBO)

Community Connections South Building Better Opportunities Project at Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum is part of the Papworth Trust funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and European Social Fund. Cambridge Ethnic Community forum joined the BBO project in May 2018 and is funded until December 2021.

The BBO project provides support to people in the Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, who are looking to develop new skills which will assist them in becoming more employable. The Community Connections South Project is focused on bringing economically inactive people closer to the job market, education, or training. The project aims to support individuals with their own development needs, as well as actively enhancing self-esteem and building confidence. Our role is to deliver on a partnership project to build better opportunities for disadvantaged people across the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership area (GCGP LEP).

As the whole country and indeed the world is challenged by the unprecedented impact of Coronavirus in March 2020, it is fair to say that the virus has managed to impact us all in some way or another proving it to be a very difficult year all round, and this has been no different for our beneficiaries if not worse with greater challenges.

Over the past year, Cambridge has seen an increase in Covid-infection rates within the BME Communities, effecting many beneficiaries and their immediate families and friends resulting in financial hardship because of job losses. For some beneficiaries it has sadly meant being affected with the virus or worse, losing a loved one or friend to COVID-19 deaths thereby, leaving the BME community increasingly anxious and worried.

With the increasing numbers of Covid infections rising locally with 3 government lockdowns in March, December 2020 and January 2021 resulted in a significant reduction in the number of new referrals to the project.

The Coronavirus-COVID-19 caused barriers regarding Face-to-Face contact but despite the challenges it had also created more opportunities during this reporting period as more beneficiaries were able to participate in remote learning and online courses from home which otherwise, they may not have been able to do due to caring commitments, location or because of times that these courses ran. Instead, they were able to undertake the course from the comfort of their homes. This further benefited beneficiaries to work together as a family and develop new skills – for many of our beneficiaries they initially found basic IT skills difficult but with the support of their family they were able to pick up new skills and knowledge along the way and now are feeling more confident in IT and have an email address and able to search online.

BBO Outcomes for the reporting year of 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

Education/Training

We have been successful in getting 8 beneficiaries into education, training, or job search.

Employment

Although, this reporting year was a more difficult environment for employment. We managed to help 4 beneficiaries into employment.

Disengagements

3 beneficiaries disengaged during this time largely due to family commitments during the pandemic.

Face to face courses were no longer running and with lesser work opportunities and an increase in loss of income BBO project has continued to provide health and well-being support through email, telephone, and WhatsApp contact. Beneficiaries have been helped to access CECF Emergency COVID -19 food and fuel support, in partnership with the Karim Foundation as needed as well as dry food packs from the Cambridge Central Mosque.

We continue to work from home and maintain government guidance on social distancing. Contacts with existing and new beneficiaries are largely conducted by FaceTime and WhatsApp. This year has been a period of ensuring participants well-being, safety and adhering to government guidance on COVID-19 guidelines on social distancing and safety.

Plans have been put in place by CECF for the period of social distancing guidelines being relaxed over the next few months and are planning to start face-to-face provision in September. CECF have put Risk assessment and safety processes in place to ensure that all are as safe as possible; this is especially the case for CECF considering that BME are a high-risk group for COVID-19 fatalities.

A further COVID -19 lockdown in December 2020 resulted in schools closing, thereby, beneficiaries having to home-school and no longer able to continue online courses because of time restraints, caring responsibilities or simply not having an extra laptop for those with older children who were now having to do online schooling from home.

Because of the government lockdown in January 2021, BBO had had a slow start at the beginning of Quarter 1 in January-March 2021 with no new referrals to the project. During this time BBO has been actively liaising with local community groups; Khidmat sisters, Cambridge Central Mosque, Karim Foundation, Cambourne women's social group, Cambridge City Council and with existing and previous beneficiaries to promote the BBO Project and to encourage new referrals.

Through these Community WhatsApp groups BBO has had a few enquires but due to ongoing fears of infection rates rising in the community, people have been reluctant and afraid to take up the support from the Project and wanted to reconsider this in the summer when infections reduce, and people feel safe to come out.

However, as lockdown restrictions are eased and the rate of Covid infections slowly reducing in Cambridge, for many communities especially in the BME community it has encouraged new interest in participating in Projects again, with the aim of upskilling and in increasing their chances of employment. This is demonstrated by the increase in referrals received mainly from CECF's other projects and services. Referrals to BBO in quarter 1 (Jan to March 2021) have been predominately

from CECF based projects, or services. BBO received 1 referral in February and 4 referrals in March with 1 return of BBO participant and 1 participant has been exited onto a course.

BBO Participants that continue to be affected by the pandemic with financial hardship are supported with emergency food parcel and food voucher from CECF Emergency COVID-19 food and fuel provision.

With plans to promote BBO with marketing in the coming months, BBO is confident of reaching its targets and achieving greater results and success for beneficiaries to succeed with Education, Employment, and job search.

Here are just some of the positive case studies of the BBO Project:

- A Sudanese beneficiary arrived in the UK a few months prior to joining the BBO project and spoke very little English, she had no family or friends in the country and was socially isolated and affecting her mood and impacting on her self- confidence and self -esteem. She wanted to improve her English language skills so she could get a job and be able to support her husband who was on a low income. BBO supported the beneficiary with enrolling her onto an English course with Cambridge Language Society to help improve her soft skills. After successfully completing the course and a period of job searching, job applications and mock interviewing preparations from BBO she was successful at her job interview and is now working as a permanent member of staff in housekeeping department at The University of Cambridge. The beneficiary is very happy at her job. BBO worked closely with her employers and negotiated flexible working hours for the beneficiary so she could start work after dropping her child off at school and finishing before the end of the school day as the hours were different and clashed with school pick up and drop off times.
- A Syrian beneficiary was supported to access ESOL classes with Cambridge Language Society.
- An African beneficiary was supported to access Training and Education with Clarion Futures. The beneficiary had no UK work experience or references and her qualifications from Africa were not recognised in this country. The beneficiary had no access to social funds and therefore was unable to claim financial support. She was living out of her small savings, and it was important for her to get a job before she ran out of money so she could support herself and her teenage son.
- After successfully completing level 2 Food handling and Safety course our beneficiary had gained permanent employment at a residential home in Cambridge as a Kitchen assistant. She later went onto progress and is now working as a Care Assistant with the same employer.

It's been a challenging year at the BBO Project, and I am looking forward to continuing working in partnership with Cambridge City Council, Papworth Trust, Khidmat Sister's, Cambridge Language Society, Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum's –Refugee services, Equality Service, Crafting the Self Project and all partner agencies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board of Trustees, The Papworth Trust, Eddie Stadnik CEO, and all my colleagues and volunteers at Cambridge Ethnic forum for their continued support during the past year.

Crafting the Self



Project Summary

This health and wellbeing project in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University, started with an initial pilot phase because of the problems that the COVID-19 Pandemic had presented.

We recruited a paid worker Suzan Murrad, as a project coordinator, during the first funded month of the project in October of 2020. Suzan is a bilingual English-Arabic speaker with a background in working with migrant and refugee women. She officially started on the 1st of November 2020.

We spent time doing some preparatory work, research and booked venues in preparation for a start to sessions in December. Potential participants were initially identified from our projects and service users. They were all consulted, and we were pleasantly surprised to find, despite the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on BME communities, that they were happy at this point to meet in community venues. The project coordinator reported that the women asked were desperate to do activities that

would help to relieve the stress they were suffering. We conducted a selection process for artists and had a marketing flyer designed.



COVID-19 risk assessments were conducted on site at the chosen community venues. Arbury Community Centre and Trumpington Pavilion prior to the first two sessions. Artists from the Chinese Community participated in the first two taster sessions that we held on the 7th of December at the Arbury Community Centre and the 16th of December 2020 at the Trumpington Pavilion.

The women introduced themselves with a brief chat about the cultures they came from. They chatted about the different arts and crafts between cultures. The participants were curious to know more about Chinese arts. They practiced Calligraphy and drawing. All the attendees enjoyed and looked forward to the next sessions.

The final Lockdown in January of 2021 put paid to any chances of the sessions continuing in community venues for the immediate future. We moved the sessions online and recruited an artist who we

felt reflected the cultural backgrounds of and with whom the participants could identify readily with. This was Sa'adiyah Khan, of Thrifts Walk Studios in Cambridge. She is an Intuitive & Community Artist - Holistic Art for well-being guide.

The first session scheduled for 13th January was re-scheduled for March 24th to allow us time to organise ourselves and get materials sent out to all participants. All the participants and the artist received the materials before the next session on the 22nd of January 2021. The total number of attendees was 16 including the project coordinator and the artist. English was used however with translations into Arabic and Bengali. The project coordinator assisted and coached the participants on downloading and using Zoom. Participants used a variety of devices to attend.

They started with a briefing about CECF then the project coordinator welcomed all attendees. Everyone introduced themselves. Then the artist -Sa'adiyah Khan- gave a brief about herself and how arts are important and how they can help improve our life's. Sa'adiyah then showed what the materials were for and how they were to be used. They tested two different types of colors, then started to draw. During the session, the participants discussed many different topics. They expressed their feeling about the project. How it helped them to meet each other again, while they are doing something interesting and learning. They expressed their feelings that it was great that the CECF was bringing them together even if online.

Sessions were subsequently held on the 27th of January and 5th, 10th and 26th of February 2021. During these sessions apart from the arts and crafts, there was lively interaction helping reduce the barriers of social isolation and stress many of these women have faced during the Lockdowns.

The following is taken from the project coordinators reports for three of the sessions.

5th February

The session had 10 participants and we started with light breathing techniques to help the participants to feel relaxed. During the session, the participants were asked five questions. Sa'adiyah indicated to them how they can then express their answers through drawing.

1. Best things that happened in the last week.
2. How can you describe yourself?
3. A Person that makes you feel happy.
4. What are you grateful for?
5. Place you love?

While the ladies were drawing, they had an extremely exciting chat together.

10th February

This session had 10 participants and we continued to draw and express our feelings through painting and coloring.

I raised a question during the session to redirect thoughts from negative to positive. What are the positives of the lockdown?

Some of them said, it was a valuable experience, because they get help from their families by participating in new cooking recipes, some of them tried other cultures recipes and they showed us some of its to us. In addition, they became closer to their family members. On the other hand, they could also discover something new in themselves.

26th February

The number of people who attended this session was 14. In this session Susan Mealing from the Refugee Council Therapeutic Service and Heidi Perez the Chair of Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum attended. Susan Mealing gave a short presentation about the link between our mental health and body pains. She showed some causes, symptoms to these pains and raised some solutions. One of the solutions we practiced with Susan is relaxation techniques through breathing. The feedback from all participants was great, all of them felt more relaxed less nervous and they wanted to use these methods in their daily routine to deal with difficult circumstances and feel better.

Finally, all attendees started to draw and our guests as well. The question was raised by me to all participants. What you do normally to help yourself to feel better when you feel sad? There was a great discussion between people, and they shared very useful ideas, like walking, reading or talk to their friend.

I believe that we have made some real progress online with those women. Most are refugee, with some migrant. We have 15 registered participants. Whilst they do not necessarily all attend the sessions at any one time, we have a good average attendance of at least 10 participants. Some weeks more. The benefit of being online has been that all the women can potentially attend a session every week, rather than fortnightly had it been in a community venue. There has also been the added value of their IT knowledge and skills being improved through close support given by the project coordinator. There are 3 more sessions to be held by the 24th of March 2021. The woman told us that they wished to continue online for the time being.

Formal Feedback

What do the participants feel about the project so far?

14 gave formal feedback on three questions.

Were you satisfied with this activity?

Do you feel that by attending and being involved in this activity that it will help you be more confident?

Do you feel that this will help you form new friendships, or feel less lonely?

The response was, yes to all the questions from 13 of the 14 participants asked. Only 1 felt that it would not help her form new friendships or feel less lonely. But she did answer yes to the other two questions.

There were also some additional comments given:

'I enjoyed my time and help to reduce the pressure during the Lockdown.'

'After the session I feel I am better.'

'I was very happy, relaxed and calm downed.'

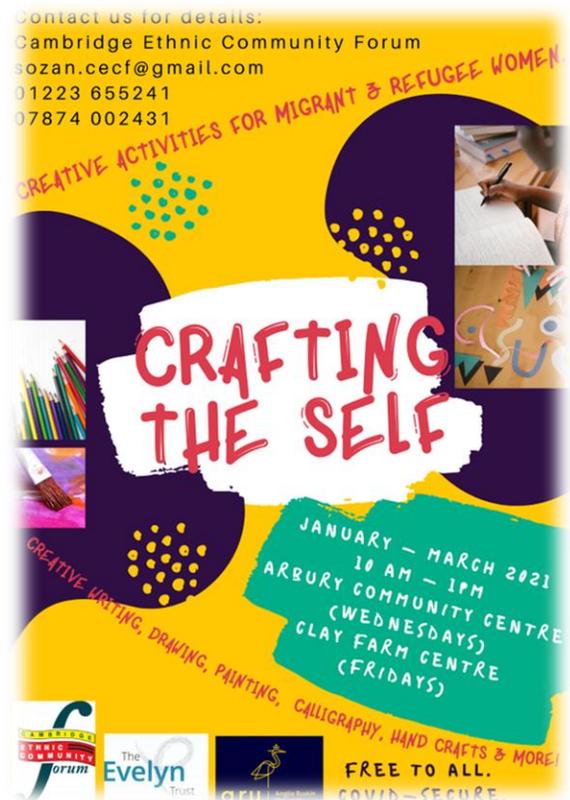
'I feel extremely happy.'

'Keep me calm.'

Moving Forward

We have booked the Arbury Community Centre and the Clay Farm Centre in Trumpington for sessions until the Summer holidays in 2021. However, we didn't want women feeling that they are being coerced into attending sessions at community venues when they might have reservations about still doing so. The Lockdown restrictions were also being eased gradually. We therefore intended on maintaining our current online sessions, with a view to reviewing this in the early summer. We had made some useful contacts and links with the Refugee Council Therapeutic casework team; MIND and we are about to work with the NHS on a Health Project. We will be looking to develop further these relationships and see how they can interact with this project. We of course will be looking to recruit more participants.

Thank you to the Evelyn Trust for their funding and support for this important health and wellbeing project, helping us reach some of Cambridgeshires most marginalised and isolated communities.



Funders Logos



We have received support from the



Cambridgeshire
Community
Foundation



Company Limited by Guarantee registered as Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum No. 04175678 Charity No. 1086241