



CAMBRIDGE ETHNIC COMMUNITY FORUM



CECF AGM & IMPACT REPORT 2025

April 1st 2024 - 31st March 2025

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 **Wed. 12th November**
7 pm - 9 pm: Online

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Charity No. 1086241 Company No. 04175678

Introduction

This year has seen our projects and services remarkably busy. Having obtained funding for a new Health Project, Healthier Futures - Circles of Change. The newly appointed coordinator, Mahasin Abdullaah, got busy recruiting a team of volunteer Health Ambassadors to work on this important project. We also received funding to help us meet an increased demand for our development services, for community groups, from V4CE\Comic Relief. This enabled our part-time Development Officer to become full-time this year.

Our CHESS, Equality Service and Ukrainian project continued to be extremely busy with their services in big demand throughout the year. Our Refugee Services were especially busy, supported by another recently appointed advisor, Shopna Begum. The enclosed reports will outline the magnificent work that has been getting done.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff and volunteers for their dedication and hard work. I would also like to thank my fellow Directors and Trustees for their commitment throughout the past year without which the CECF could not function.

To our funders – Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge University, Lloyds Bank Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Comic Relief/V4CE and the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation together with our supporters, a special thank you too.

Asaduz Zaman
Chairperson

Community Capacity Building



We approached this year with an intention to focus more time on direct capacity building with community groups, being more discerning on time spent with agencies/organisations. We recognise the importance of working with other organisations and the network this brings not only to CECF, but by extension, the communities we work with. We also engaged in two separate projects, offering opportunities for individuals and as ways to connect with communities.

BME Organisational Development Support

Advice surgeries

We conducted a total of 43 advice surgeries with 17 different groups in this period. This is an increase from 39 advice surgeries last year with 13 groups. Groups supported this year included those we have long term engagement with, such as the African Caribbean Research Group (ACRG), The Ghanaian Association in Cambridge (GHACA), Cambridge African Network (CAN), CB Mentoring and the Karim Foundation among others; groups we have re-engaged with such as the Cambridge Chinese Community Centre (CCCC); and groups we are newly engaging with such as Sharp Shooters, Move, Feed, Be, ESEA Cambridge, Cambridge Ladies Group and Cambridge Pencak Silat.

11 sessions were conducted in person, with 6 occasions of groups coming to the CECF office and 5 occasions of CECF going to a group's location. 7 sessions were conducted online, and 25 sessions were a combination of phone, email and text. The flexibility in our approach to communication makes

it convenient for groups to access support and for us to develop stronger relationships.

Advice and support sought were around items such as funding, grant applications, group structure, sourcing free and affordable venues, marketing, safeguarding, event planning and public liability insurance. Part of this support included setting up and supporting direct meetings with funding officers. Many of the surgeries result in ongoing advice and support, rather than one-off sessions. One outcome included a group being able to host an event that was at risk of cancellation as they had overlooked public liability insurance, which CECF speedily supported them to obtain. Another outcome was ESEA Cambridge being able to receive Council funding to support their East and Southeast Asian Heritage Month, which over 200 people attended. This was a direct result of CECF agreeing to hold funds as the group does not have a bank account.

Case study

We conducted eight surgeries with one group, covering a multitude of issues as the group itself is involved in a lot of different activities. Regarding the group's community cricket academy that had low attendee numbers, we shared funding suggestions such as the City Council Summer Activity Grant, which is open to unincorporated groups, to enable a free trial period to a wider audience. The group are planning to apply for this next year. We also marketed their Christmas Ball & Black Excellence Awards to raise money for the cricket club, which included an award to a longstanding CECF member of staff.

We provided information on legal structures for the group to decide if they would like to become incorporated as a way of broadening their access to funding. As a result of this information, they confidently decided on registering as a CIC.

In response to their planned unsecured Windrush event in June 2025, we introduced them to a local venue who could provide the venue for free, which they booked. As the group is unfunded, we suggested advertising for volunteers to paint portraits of Windrush elders, rather than paying artists as they had planned, suggesting free local platforms such as, VolunteerCambs and the Cambridge Arts Network as well as university students. Some of the feedback from our time spent working with this group included:

"I really appreciated speaking to you today. Thank you so much for the information. This information is highly valuable"

Learning sessions

Three learning sessions were held during this period.

The first session, entitled 'Fundraising – increase income diversity for community groups' was run in October 2024, attended by 8 individuals, representing 5 groups. Feedback included:

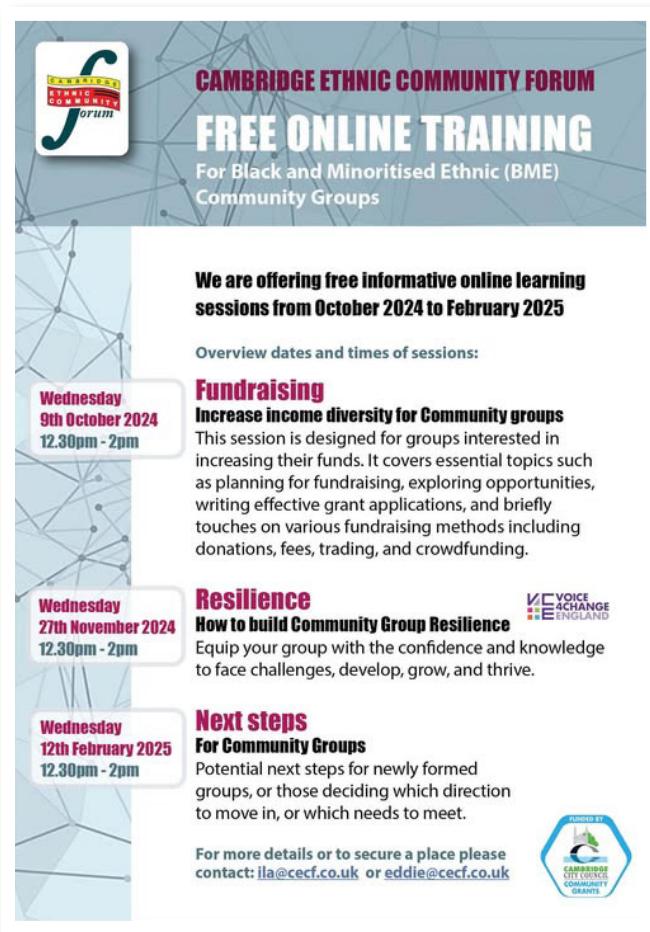
'Clear explanation with actionable advice'

'Very clear and easy to understand. Really helpful'

'I understood more how to apply for grants'

The second session was 'Resilience – how to build community group resilience' in November 2024. This was delivered by V4CE and attended by 10 individuals, representing 4 groups. Feedback included:

'It was good to understand the various aspects of resilience training and what it entailed. it was good to understand the importance of forging effective partnerships and its impact on organisations'



The banner for the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum Free Online Training features the forum's logo (a stylized 'f' inside a red and white banner) and the text 'CAMBRIDGE ETHNIC COMMUNITY FORUM' and 'FREE ONLINE TRAINING' in large, bold, red letters. Below this, it says 'For Black and Minoritised Ethnic (BME) Community Groups'. The banner also includes details about the sessions: 'Wednesday 9th October 2024 12.30pm - 2pm', 'Wednesday 27th November 2024 12.30pm - 2pm', and 'Wednesday 12th February 2025 12.30pm - 2pm'. It also mentions 'Fundraising Increase income diversity for Community groups', 'Resilience How to build Community Group Resilience', and 'Next steps For Community Groups'. The banner is set against a background of a network of lines and dots.

'I learned about methods for analysis e.g PESTEL'

The final session, 'Next Steps – for community groups' was designed as a response to a trend in group needs. This session was cancelled due to lack of numbers, despite people initially signing up. We are reflecting on how to make sessions more accessible and how to better communicate the content.

These sessions contributed to increasing group knowledge, such as how to apply for grants and different ways of raising funds. Group representatives reported feeling more confident and motivated to draft funding proposals. They also planned to apply the learning, such as use of the project tools and project planning.



BME Engagement

Civic Engagement

We worked with representatives from the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Mayoral Authority to market an important bus franchising consultation. We organised a focus group at Arbury Court, attended by 9 predominantly BME individuals, in addition to ensuring that the survey was shared with newer migrant communities, such as the Hong Kongers and Ukrainians.

Meetings

We attended over seventy meetings in this period, up from around fifty last year. One meeting was with Cambridgeshire County Council, who approached us to request that we present for them during Race Equality Week, which we did with positive feedback. The aim was to strengthen CECF's relationship with the County Council, to make their personnel aware of the services we provide in case of use to their clients and to promote race equality. We met in person with Cambridge City Council and discussed their new scheme, 'Match My Project', which matches community requests to resources businesses may be willing to offer for free. We highlighted that if the requirement to participate in making these requests was to be incorporated with a bank account, groups that are currently excluded from funding for these reasons would also not be able to benefit from this help-in-kind initiative. The project lead appreciated the input and later revised the requirements.

Another significant meeting we had was with BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, who invited us and our community contacts to their open evening. We extended the invite, and they reported that we had brought in the highest number of people to the event. At least three of the community groups in attendance went on to feature on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, one group featuring the very same week. These were ACRG, a Caribbean community group, Makani Cambridge, a relatively new Arab community group, and Sharp Shooters, a local football club for underprivileged children in the CB4 area. Sharp Shooters not only featured that week, but some children from the club went

on to be guest football pundits for the Euros in the following months. Representatives from Sharp Shooters commented that they would never approach the BBC with their news and that there was a need for an ambassador to bridge the gap, such as through the role they felt CECF was playing. We shared invitations from the BBC to the 'Make A Difference' Awards 2024, which several of our groups attended, as well as inviting people to make their own nominations for the 2025 awards. Through connecting communities with organisations and institutions such as the BBC, we believe that this contributes to improved places and spaces, where people feel represented and welcome in areas where this may not have been the case before.

Several meetings were also held in this period with Voice4Change England, with whom we are now a strategic partner and work closely to mutually support and grow the BME VCSE both locally and nationally.

Outreach

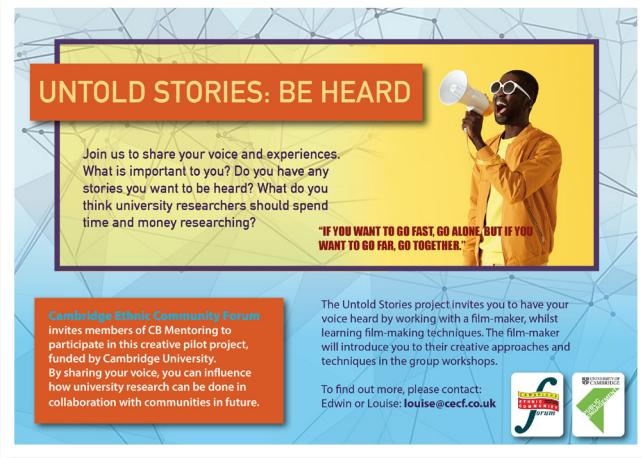
Sixteen of our meetings in this period were outreach, up from eight last year, such as attending the Patients Not Passports information event; attending an Eid event hosted by Willingham Muslims and the launch of ACRG's 'Legacies of Windrush' project at the Museum of Cambridge; presenting at the Chinese Academy's internationally attended symposium on translation; attending Cambridge Hindu Association's AGM as an independent observer; attending the East Timorese community's Independence Day celebrations and meeting their ambassador; attending and supporting Women's Voices for Africa's (WV4A) food festival event, among others. Some clear outcomes from these engagements were that Patients Not Passports later went on to make an application to become an Associate Member of CECF, which strengthens our ties and joint aims in supporting access to healthcare. WV4A were successfully able to hold a ticketed reception desk which generated income to help cover event costs. They reported that it had been the first time they'd had the capacity to do that and that CECF on the ground support was the reason.

Projects and added value

This year, we were involved with Untold Stories, a pilot project funded by Cambridge University Public Engagement exploring lesser heard voices and community knowledge, with a view to how this can influence academic research. The project had an entirely co-creative approach with regards to both community organisation partners and their respective community groups. We partnered with both Cambridge Ladies Group and CB Mentoring on this opportunity, each group producing their own film.

Our involvement in the Untold Stories project led to many others reaching out as a result. An opportunity that arose from one of those contacts was a 3-part creative non-fiction writing course, entitled 'Remembering Our Stories, Writing Ourselves'. Through CECF's collaboration on this, 11 women from 9 different ethnic backgrounds signed up, including Kazakh, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, Hong Kongers and Pakistani among others. This project is significant as it is appealing to a different demographic, predominantly more educated and financially comfortable and from more varied ethnic backgrounds. The writing project continues into 2025. Both projects contribute to two of our overarching aims – firstly, of tackling BME individuals' feelings of not belonging or being outsiders. These are spaces of involvement and connection, where people are able to be themselves and build confidence. Secondly, both projects promote cohesion and good relations between communities, including the host community. The existing groups that participated in the Untold Stories are two of six across the city and will meet their counterparts at a citywide sharing event in May 2025. These projects have broadened our engagement with groups and individuals and improved our ability to support them through our other services.

Reported by: **Louise Tan and Eddie Stadnik**
Development & Organisational Support Officer and CEO



Race Equality Services



CECF appointments, online or telephone sessions for Black & Minoritised Ethnic (BME) communities

Our Equality Service focuses on breaking down barriers and improving access to essential services ensuring that both long standing and newly arrived communities can build better lives, reach their potential and contribute fully to society. Support is wide ranging and holistic and service users often have more than one matter they require assistance with, such as housing, education, employment, ESOL, access to immigration support and healthcare, volunteering and training opportunities, domestic violence services, and others.

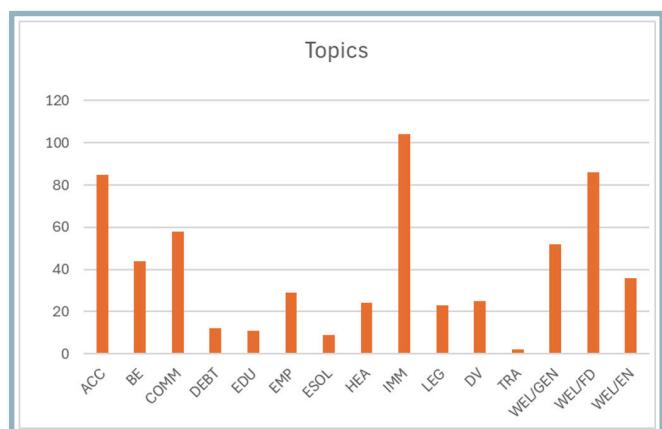
This year, we supported a total of 366 beneficiaries through this service, comprising 247 adults and 119 children and other family members, with over 600 pieces of work.

41% of all beneficiaries were from a South Asian background, of which, 45% were Bangladeshi; 16% of all beneficiaries were Black Caribbean or African; 14% of all beneficiaries were from an Arab, Iranian or Turkish background; 10% of all beneficiaries were of White European or English background; 7% of all beneficiaries were from an East or Southeast Asian background and 12% were of an unknown ethnic or national background. The three broad groups that have most engaged with the service this year remain consistent with our data from previous years.

7 service users were street homeless or destitute, constituting 3% of all service users and were from BME backgrounds. This is a drop from 12 people

last year, which constituted 5% of all service users. We believe this is in part because solutions were found in some cases. For example, we were able to support one person with finding temporary accommodation outside of Cambridgeshire. However, we also believe it is in part because we were not able to provide help from our Crisis Fund, as with the previous year, due to limitations in funding.

In terms of the main issues that service users sought support with, number one - 29% in relation to welfare, including food and energy, which is a drop from a figure of 48% last year. This doesn't reflect a drop in essential need however, particularly as a worrying 70% of all welfare still revolved around urgent energy and culturally appropriate food, showing a consistent ongoing trend for this provision. Number two - 17% in relation to immigration, an increase from 12% last year; and number three - 14% were in relation to accommodation, increased from 11% last year. These were closely followed by seeking community networks at 10%, support with welfare benefits at 5% and employment at 4%. A full breakdown of issues can be seen in the chart below.



Our immigration related enquiries constituted a substantial part of our telephone enquiry work, which we signposted when appropriate to reputable immigration solicitors. Other immigration enquiries were to book appointments with Migrant Help, who provided direct assistance with eVisa applications on site at Arbury Court, and was an important partnership this year.

There was an increase in community related enquiries this year, with both agencies and individuals seeking information or to be linked to groups. For example, Winter Comfort requested help in linking a destitute service user with a community group that consisted of people of similar ethnic background. There was also an individual Hong Konger who wanted introductions made to the Hong Kong community.

Case Study

Manju's Story (Name and details have been changed for confidentiality purposes)

Manju, a 29-year-old woman from a South Asian background, approached the Equality Service after fleeing domestic violence. She had endured domestic abuse for over 6 years, was isolated and had no legal immigration status, and spoke limited English. Manju had no idea where to go or what to do. She had no money for food or to buy essential items for daily living. She was unable to access support due to language barriers and a lack of culturally sensitive services. She was able to access bilingual support from our services who understood her cultural context and could communicate in her native language.

We provided immediate crisis support in the form of food vouchers and shop cards to enable Manju to buy essentials. We provided bilingual support and advocacy through every step of her journey. We also referred Manju to IMPAKT for specialist domestic abuse support. We continued to support Manju through this transition until she was relocated to a women's refuge.

Manju is now rebuilding her life. She has been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain and is attending counselling services, peer support groups and ESOL classes. Combined, these have

helped increase her self-confidence, self-esteem and have improved her mental well-being and independence.

Manju's English language skills have improved through attendance at ESOL classes, and she is now navigating employment and housing services. Manju now hopes to find employment and to be able to make a positive contribution to society.

"I'm free from the nightmare... now I feel I am somebody, worthy to feel alive, heard, and helped. Without the Equality Service, I don't know where I'd be today." – Manju

Feedback from other service users:

While most funders require formal feedback forms, we recognise the power dynamic involved in that and the fear that help may not be available again if people are honest in how they feel about the service. Alongside formal feedback forms, we therefore capture informal and unprompted feedback, which people give of their own volition, some of which is shared below:

"Thank you is a small word and not enough to express my gratitude."

"Your help means a lot!"

"Everything is complicated to understand - our only hope is you CECF."

"I feel a big weight off my shoulder's when I visit CECF, everything is explained to me well and I leave going away in better mind and am happy"

Partnership Working

We participated in at least 16 meetings, both online and in person, with a variety of agencies and organisations during this funded year that come under our Race Equality Services remit.

CECF can provide crisis help in the form of small grants for food and energy needs and through issuing shop cards. We can support our service users with the provision of culturally appropriate food through our partnership with the Karim Foundation and issuing Food Bank Fuel and

Food vouchers through our partnership with the Cambridge City Food Bank. These are important partnerships in delivering on the ground support.

We explored more partners to assist with the essential needs of our service users and to this end we became a member of National Energy Action (NEA). They are a source of help in negotiating on behalf of service users with energy companies to help resolve fuel debt, access extra help and they also issue their own small fuel grants.

We became members of the Cambridgeshire Migration Forum and raised issues around local provision for the e-Visa scheme. We also actively advocated for funding for therapeutic casework for asylum seekers and refugees. Consequently, a subgroup was created to look at how funding may be sought for this and it remains part of an ongoing conversation, having previously raised the issue with the Programme Director of Strategic Commissioning ICB NHS, at the NHS Cambridgeshire South Care Partnership Integrated Neighbourhood Conference.

We started working with the Cambridge City Food Bank to support the Trussell Trust Campaign to give people a liveable rate of Universal Credit. We met with the Food Bank and other local groups at Mill Road community Centre, to agree a way forward. We were also signatories to a letter the Food Bank organised to our local MP, Daniel Zeichner, in October 2024, because of how this especially affects so many of our service users from Black and Minoritised Ethnic backgrounds.

We worked with Cambridge City Council and Migrant Help to provide on-site provision for e-Visa applicants from December 2024 through to the end of March 2025, which was the government application deadline.

Workshops

We offered two workshops in this period. One was delivered by Pohwer, a charity offering free advocacy, information and advice services for people who experience disability, vulnerability, distress and social exclusion. The other was delivered by Effect UK, a newly formed organisation which provides 'a support network

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for businesswomen from the global majority and diverse nationalities! The session was an entry level workshop on how to make a business idea a reality. 10 people attended from 8 different nationalities. 100% of those attended found the session useful and felt they gained knowledge. 9 out of 10 felt it increased their confidence on the topic, with one attendee unsure. Some feedback included:

"It was excellent. Please increase more time so we can learn more. It was very successful."

"Simple steps and practical."

"I'm so glad I learnt the basics and found what I'm missing and what the next step is."

In response to what action attendees might take as a result of the session, some answers included:

"Now I recognised my business idea. I will get more help on how I can start my business."

"Start planning business."



Delivering EDI Training

We continued to deliver EDI training to statutory and voluntary groups, aware that this contributes to the systems and environments in which BME individuals and groups are situated. The value of delivering training is to create reflective spaces for individuals and organisations with a view to eliminating race discrimination, for example, through raising awareness of unconscious and organisational bias and systems and promoting equal opportunities.

We delivered 4 training sessions in this period. We jointly ran an in-person Active Bystander session with CCVS, to explore how attendees can play a role in tackling identity-based prejudice and violence in their community. This session was attended by 5 people of white British backgrounds from various organisations. In response to two questions about whether as a result of the training, they would act differently if they encountered similar situations in the future and whether they would take action to reduce harm, all of the people who answered these questions said yes. Some other comments included:

"Very helpful course"

"Such needed training. I feel more empowered to actively challenge racist or prejudicial views and behaviour. Thank you."

We attended 'Engage', a community engagement conference with many local organisations present. We delivered 'Step Out', a session on how organisations can better engage with and meet the needs of BME individuals and communities, which was attended by 18 organisations. The feedback was very positive, including "You pitched it just right."

We usually deliver 3-hour sessions on various aspects of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. A local branch of an international charity only had a 2-hour window and requested that we create a bespoke session for them, which we did, entitled EDI Conversations. This session was delivered in person to 40 people as part of their training day. 93.10% found this session useful, with several people commenting on the impact of the shorter time frame. Some comments included:

'Lots to think about on a personal and institutional level, well managed and felt like it's opened an ongoing conversation.'

'I found this session really useful, and it was great that the guest speaker was really engaging with our questions and allowing us the time to question and consider things.'

In response to what people might do differently as a result of the session, some comments included:

'I might discuss with senior teams how we might monitor pay equity across various characteristics, and even possibly improve transparency'

'Review recruitment processes.'

'Pay more attention to my biases and expect to see and support perception challenges and change at xxx'

On recommendation from this charity, we have been approached by a private company to deliver a bespoke EDI session for their newly formed EDI

committee in 2025. This is also with a view to delivering sessions companywide.

We delivered two online sessions entitled 'Race Awareness Conversations' for South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) last year, which had low attendance but was highly regarded, with participants suggesting that it should be mandatory to attend. As a result, SCDC asked us to repeat the session online again this year as part of Race Equality Week. 9 people attended, with all 9 saying they found the session useful and 7 people feeling that their confidence on the topic had increased as a result. In response to what they might do differently as a result of the session, some comments included:

"More likely to speak up or report it when witnessing racism"

"Continue conversations within the team and wider organisation."

"Just be more aware of my own actions and those of others in my team and the unintentional bias"

We are proud of the impact we are having on both individuals and organisations as part our commitment to race equality.

We also hosted two training sessions for our Trustees in this period, one on Governance and the other on Finance, both delivered by Red Ochre. All our Trustees are from BME backgrounds, many of whom are group representatives. Developing in their roles as Trustees not only strengthens CECF but also results in transferable skills which can be used to increase the organisation and resilience of the community groups of which they are part, thus strengthening the BME VCSE.

Reported by: **Louise Tan and Panna Chowdhury**

Development and Organisational Support Officer
and Equality Services Advisor

Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS)



Cambridgeshire Human Rights and Equality Support Service (CHESS)

provided advice, assistance, representation and advocacy to 51 individuals and families with 66 beneficiaries in employment, education, housing, criminal justice, family and children and welfare benefits. These were provided by phone, email, written correspondence and online. CHESS also provided advice and assistance to organizations, including Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire County Council, the Greater Cambridgeshire Authority and others.

These were in the areas of Employment, Housing, Education, Criminal Justice, Health and Social Care, Policing, Family and Children, Neighbourhood Disputes, Welfare Benefits and Miscellaneous.

Outcomes

Our service users are from diverse backgrounds, and most are on low incomes who could not afford the services of solicitors, so they come to CHESS for its free advice, assistance, representation and advocacy. Some said, they came to CHESS because CHESS understood their problems better and believe them.

Without the free services of CHESS, they would have lost their jobs, housing, rent deposits, etc. For example, one ex-tenant was sued by the landlord for alleged damage to the property and loss of income because the landlord claimed the ex-tenant did not vacate the property on time. The landlord was claiming over £800.00 in addition to the deposit. The ex-tenant could not afford a solicitor, and CHESS assisted her to prepare the defence statement and filed the response with the court. We advised and assisted her to defend the claim at the County Court, accompanied her to the hearing as "McKenzie Friend" and won. The court refused to grant the landlord's reliefs. After the hearing, the ex-tenant who is also a parent said,

"I have not had a good night sleep for months after receiving the court summons but now that the case is over, I can sleep peacefully. "Without CHESS, this man would have taken over £800.00 and my deposit from me, money I don't have. Thank you, Mr Budu"

A mother was falsely accused by the husband of threatening him with a kitchen knife at home. She was arrested from the family home in the middle of the night by police and detained. She could not

afford a solicitor and was not entitled to legal aid. CHESS advised, assisted and represented her to prepare a statement to the police and the court. CHESS challenged the allegation as irrational, her arrest, detention and her bail conditions as unreasonable as she was prevented her from seeing her three children, though she was not a risk to the children because the allegations were frivolous. Through CHESS, the police were forced to amend the bail conditions, and she was able to see her children. The case against her was dismissed by the Crown Prosecution Service for lack of evidence.

A landlord refused to return the deposit of a healthcare worker for alleged damage to his property at the end of a short-term tenancy. The ex-tenant approached CHESS for advice and assistance. CHESS wrote to the landlord and reminded him that under the Tenants Deposit Scheme, he could not keep the deposit without evidence of the damage including photos at the beginning and at the end of the tenancy and the landlord refunded almost all the deposit to the former tenant, who agreed to accept part payment instead of claiming the total deposit to avoid the stress, though the ex-tenant was adamant that there was no damage to the wallpaper during the occupation.

Our employment advice, assistance, representation and advocacy also enabled the beneficiaries to remain in their jobs, challenged unfair and discriminatory practices as well as take the stress off them. For example, the workers found our advice, assistance and representation to them in disciplinary and grievances cases very helpful to them. We assisted them to prepare their statements with details of events such as dates, those involved, etc. These are details many were unaware that they were critical to the success of their cases. Over 70 percent of our employment work beneficiaries are Cambridge residents.

Though CHESS services are free, in monetary terms, at least our advice, assistance and representation would have cost over £60k if they were paid. For example, in the two Employment Tribunal Case Management and one Preliminary hearing held and if the Claimants were represented by Solicitors

at the Case Management hearings and a Barrister at the Preliminary hearing as the employers were, that would have cost them not less than £10k.

Through CHESS, we did not only save our services users from the stress of losing their jobs and housing but also saved money they would have spent on solicitors as well as the refunds of rent deposit, etc. These, we believed improved their socio-economic conditions and their wellbeing. For example, despite clear evidence that a service user was not guilty of charges and the allegations were frivolous, she was initially advised by a solicitor to plead guilty for a lesser sentence. She was very pleased that she accepted CHESS's advice and refused to plead guilty as the case was dismissed by CPS for lack of evidence. It shows how some solicitors misrepresent minority ethnic people within the criminal justice system, the fact that some do not get justice.

Our free advice, assistance and representation to the beneficiaries also reduce inequality, poverty and enhance diversity and inclusion. For example, our work with employers and service providers such as Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, NHS Trusts and others improved access to services for disadvantaged and low-income groups.

There were two significant results in our housing services. Our advice, assistance and representation to a family when the landlord sued for damage to doors, carpet and loss of income for not vacating the property on time. the ex-landlord secured an ex-parte eviction order from the court.

Despite the tenant vacating the property before the one month notice by the court order, the landlord demanded payment for one month notice, one month utility bills and council tax when she was no longer occupying the property. The landlord was simply cheating the ex-tenant to renovate the property. We wrote on her behalf to inform the landlord that he could not claim loss of income since the tenant vacated the property before the deadline given by the court and therefore his property was available to him to rent. Second, he must provide photographic evidence of the carpet and the door at the time of

occupation and at the time of end of occupation. Instead, the landlord told the ex-tenant that CHESS was misleading threatened her that if she does not pay the amount he was demanding, he would take her court, and she will be banned from the renting market.

When on our advice the ex-tenant refused to pay the landlord, he sued her at the County court. CHESS assisted the ex-tenant to complete her response and her witness statement for her and advised her on the evidence she should provide to the court.

On the day of the court hearing, CHESS Manager accompanied her to the court as a "Mackenzie Friend" because she was worried the court might rule in favour of the landlord and she will have to borrow money to pay.

At the court the ex-tenant was pleasantly surprised the District Judge told the landlord that there is no law that allows him to claim loss of income from the ex-tenant when she vacated the property earlier than the court ordered. As the landlord could also not show evidence that the door and carpet were damaged by the ex-tenant, the judge considered them to be tear and wear that he could not claim under law.

The second case involved refusal by a landlord to return the ex-tenant deposit after nine months tenancy. We wrote to the landlord and pointed out to him that he could not keep the deposit under the Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme and also reminded him that if he failed to return the deposit, CHESS would assist the ex-tenant to go to court.

This case is interesting by the fact that the landlord asked the tenant to leave the keys to the property somewhere when she vacated the property for him

to collect later. The tenant being new in the UK did as she was asked to only for the landlord to accuse her of damaging wallpaper. The tenant did not know she could have taken photos of the property on the day she vacated the property as her defence. We advise all new tenants to take photos of the property when they first take occupation and also on the last day of occupation as the defence against claims of damage by landlords in the future.

In general, our free advice, assistance, representation and advocacy had positive impact in the lives of the beneficiaries because we did not only save them money but stress that was injurious to the health and wellbeing. This also benefitted other family members in the households such as children and husbands, wives and or partners.

These unscrupulous landlords are aware that most tenants do not know their rights under the Tenant Deposit Scheme and therefore take advantage to make unlawful demands such as keeping deposits damages that are simply tear and wear, which landlord are not allowed claim from tenants at the end of the tenancy.

Our advice is that please seek assistance from advice service providers such as CECF/CHESS and your local CAB before you forfeit your deposit. You can also use the web to find information on advice service providers.

Reported by: **Samuel K Budu**
CHESS Manager



CECF
Refugee
Services



Report for Asylum Seeker and Refugee Services

Introduction

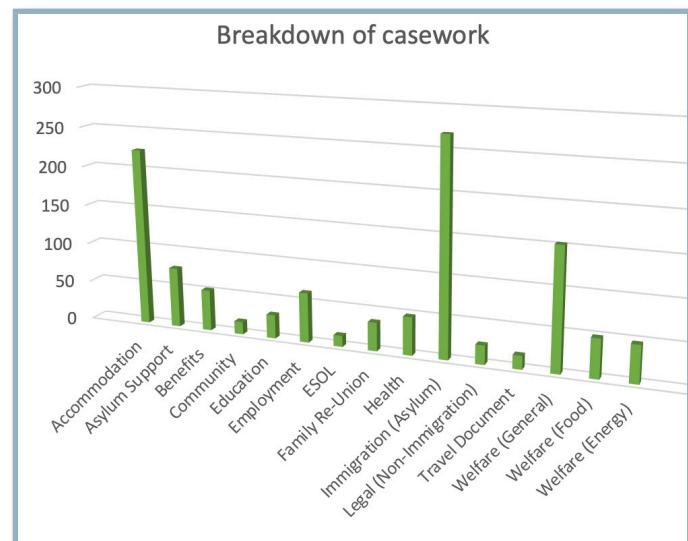
This report covers the period from 1st of April 2024 to the 31st of March 2025. During this period, our application for continued registration with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) was approved in the category of Asylum and Protection, in addition to this we were also approved to provide Immigration advice. We attended the new Cambridge Migration Forum quarterly meetings led by Cambridgeshire County Council. We also worked in partnership with Cambridge City Council and Migrant Help to assist people in creating accounts and applying through the new Home Office eVisa scheme.

Much of our work revolved around Cambridge City, however our Lottery funding enabled us to assist further afield. A significant part of this work was with asylum seekers housed in a hotel by the Home Office in Bar Hill, a village near Cambridge

Beneficiary Breakdown

We have assisted at least **649** asylum seekers and refugees during the 2024-2025 period, including dependents. This is more than 50%

of the figure from the **353** recorded as having been helped the previous year. **199** of our beneficiaries were males, **185** female and **265** were children. There were at least **32** different nationalities represented, with the largest numbers of beneficiaries from, **Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan**. The majority of asylum seekers and refugees we helped were not part of any Home Office Re-settlement Scheme. For example, Afghan Re-settlement schemes, or the Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme, as they are supported in the main by the Cambridge City Council or South Cambridgeshire District Council. However we did assist some of these families with specialist advice or help.



These issues were tackled through **1118** interactions and pieces of casework completed in the year by our Advisers. Many issues requiring multiple interventions and intensive work to achieve an outcome.

Key Issues

Immigration (Asylum) 24% of all pieces of work
 Accommodation 20% of all pieces of work
 Welfare (General) 14% of all pieces of work
 Welfare (Urgent Food and Energy) 8% of all pieces of work
 Welfare as a whole 22% of all pieces of work
 Asylum support 7%
 Benefits 5%
 Employment 6%
 Health 4%

A significant proportion of the welfare needs were related to emergency access to food and paying utility bills. Particularly from those families affected by the benefit cap. We provided help in the form of small grants from our Refugee Hardship Fund for food or energy needs, issued shop cards and were also able to help with culturally appropriate food thanks to our partnership with the Karim Foundation, in addition to issuing Foodbank Fuel and Food vouchers through our partnership with the Cambridge City Foodbank.

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 **649 beneficiaries** who are displaced people in this area and also provided a referral point and information point for other agencies in the city who would otherwise not have known where to turn.

Impact 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, or employment opportunities, all lead to longer term integrational outcomes for the individuals and families concerned. We also supported service

users with disability related welfare benefits applications such as PIP, Carers Allowance and Disability Allowance.

Examples of positive outcomes during this period

- Provided accredited immigration and asylum advice to 7 households
- We supported an unrepresented asylum seeker with their witness statement and present documentary evidence for their asylum claim.
- Assisted with 3 No Time Limit Applications.
- Made 10 successful ILR applications for 4 families.
- Made 2 application's for leave in line to Remain for a 3-year-old child who did not have any immigration status, and a new-born child of refugees.
- Helped 2 refugee children obtain British nationality.
- 54 beneficiaries obtained help in creating and setting up eVisa/UKVI accounts.
- Successfully applied for travel documents for 11 households.
- Contacted the Home Office on behalf of 11 Households. The work involved chasing BRPs, rectifying mistake in ARC cards, notifying the Home Office of change of address and amending an ILR application.
- 44 referrals/signposting to Legal Aid solicitors. The queries were about family reunion, appeals, and asylum representation.
- Made 4 Asylum Support applications.
- Assisted 9 households access accommodation. The work involved making homeless applications, registering with HomeLink and assisting in looking independently for private housing.

- Assisted 5 households with applying for housing and furnishing the accommodation through signposting and referrals to Cambridge re-use and CRRC.
- We assisted 3 families moving from temporary accommodation, and helping with furnishings, to longer term accommodation. This was done liaising with the Cambridge City Council, DWP, CRRC and referrals to re-use and Emmaus.
- Assisted 6 service users' access ESOL classes at CRC, CWRC and CELS.
- 2 service users gained employment. One through a referral to BEAM and the other through direct help from our refugee services.
- 2 referrals to CCVS for volunteering.
- 2 service users referred to specialised counselling.
- 3 successful Cambridge Aid applications.

Case Studies and Feedback

Case studies

1. We helped a homeless asylum seeker access emergency Home Office accommodation. This service user had his application for Asylum Support refused and had been street homeless for 3 weeks. We advocated to the Home Office on their behalf and asked for a reconsideration. The home office then accepted his application, and the service user was awarded Asylum Support.
2. A young refugee whose family we had previously helped accessing accommodation, came to us for advice on accessing higher education. She hadn't been in education since she was 14 when they left their country, and she had just turned 19 when she arrived in the UK. She had been attending ESOL classes but was determined to resume her education and get a vocational qualification. She was not eligible for fully funded GCSEs due to her age; however, we signposted her to a local Adult Education provider that offered fully funded

GCSE courses. When talking about how she was managing daily life, she mentioned that she was the main carer for her mother who had limited mobility due to severe back pain and mental health problems. We supported her with making applications for PIP for her mother and Carer's Allowance for her. We also signposted her to a charity supporting young adult carers.

This case study is an example of the complex needs our service users can have and how we support them address the challenges they face to meet those needs and help with move on and next steps.

Feedback

Feedback was received from 35 service users with 100% positive feedback. We also received informal feedback via WhatsApp and telephone.

Comments

'Your service is unique, dealing with many problems in one place. Especially because I don't know how things work here in the UK, and language is a problem.'

'I wanted to let you know that I received my travel document yesterday. Thank you so much for taking the time and effort for this.'

'Thank you for helping me with my family's settlement application. Also, for booking the free biometrics appointment. I didn't know there are free appointments and was worried I had to pay £700 for the 5 of us!'

'Thank you for sorting out my ILR application. I feel more settled now that I have all the correct documents.'

'I received your support when I needed. Thank you for caring about me and supporting me during my long and hard journey to become settled in this country.'

Reported by: Ana Maldonado and Eddie Stadnik
Refugee Services Advisor and CEO

Ukrainian Project

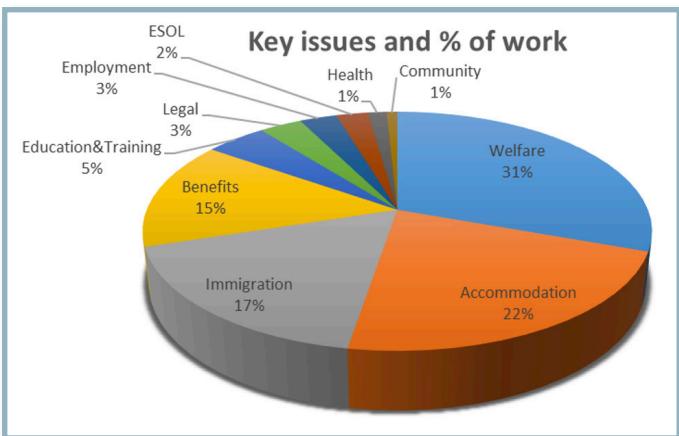


A Ukrainian project has been running at the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum since April 2023. This project was the first of its kind in Cambridgeshire and quickly became one of the most important and effective ways of supporting Ukrainian refugees in the area.

Over the past year, demand for such support has remained high. We helped Ukrainians with common issues such as housing, benefits and welfare, as well as some new challenges they had to face, for example, the transition to eVisa and the Ukraine Permission Extension.

- **275** Beneficiaries including family members
- **498** interventions or pieces of work carried out on their behalf
- Impact achieved over a range of **10** key issues including welfare, immigration, and accommodation.

In total, from April 2024 to March 2025, we helped 137 Ukrainian families, comprising 275 people. We accomplished 498 pieces of work for them. The proportion varies a bit over the months; however, the majority of beneficiaries (around 75%) were residents of Cambridge.



Settling in

Over the last year, the main reason people approached us was for welfare-related issues. This is unsurprising, as during this period many Ukrainians were still moving from hosted arrangements into their own accommodation. This required a great deal of resilience and money, as most social housing comes unfurnished and without flooring.

Although support programmes from local councils - which allowed Ukrainians under the Homes for Ukraine scheme to obtain basic furniture and white goods free of charge - were still in place, these programmes did not cover other essentials such as flooring or household items like irons, vacuum cleaners, or microwave ovens. For people on benefits, it is usually impossible to pay £800–£1,000 at once for flooring.

Additionally, those who arrived under the Family Scheme were not eligible for this support at all. As a result, many of our clients with welfare-related enquiries were Ukrainians who came to live with relatives, often elderly people with little or no English. Our help in finding available grants, making applications on their behalf, and coordinating communication with other agencies (such as Besom and CRRC) was therefore crucial.

Welfare-related enquiries were the most common, making up 31% of the total, with 152 enquiries from March 2024 to April 2025. To help families obtain basic household essentials, we submitted dozens of applications for different grants, securing £5,375 in total for their needs. In addition to Cambridge Aid grants, we helped clients make

applications to the Household Support Fund, all of which were approved. We also collaborated with CRRC and Besom to source necessary items from their donations. CRRC were also able to help our clients with carpeting (both purchase and fitting), so clients did not need to pay anything. The funds we received were mostly used for flooring, washing machines, fridges, cookers, vacuum cleaners, and microwave ovens.

Housing issues

Accommodation has remained a pressing issue for Ukrainians over the past year. Consequently, we received numerous accommodation-related enquiries - a total of 110, accounting for 22% of all enquiries.

Some people were unaware of the support available to those on a low income, while others needed our help with Home-Link applications and a general understanding of the bidding process, banding, and prioritisation system. We also received requests from individuals who had been offered accommodation they considered unsuitable. We helped them challenge these decisions and advised them on possible outcomes of the process. This support helped them feel more confident and reassured about their prospects. Being well-informed, they gained a clearer understanding of what to expect and how to achieve their desired outcomes.

Immigration matters

Over the last year, immigration-related enquiries have become some of the most popular, entering the top three (87 enquiries accounting for 17% of total). The reason for this was two major changes implemented by the Home Office.

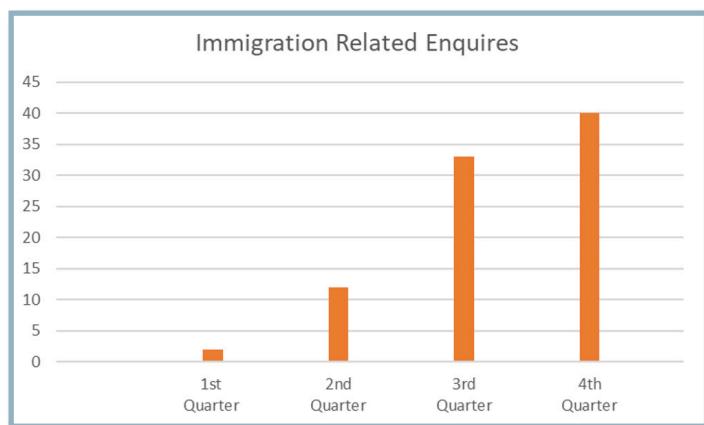
The first was the requirement to create UKVI accounts and gain access to an eVisa instead of using BRPs. This transition was expected to be completed by December 2024; however, it is still ongoing. The second change was announced in February 2025 and introduced

legal requirements for the UPE (Ukraine Permission Extension) scheme, which allowed Ukrainians to extend their visas for a further 18 months.

Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum was ready to meet this challenge by registering with the IAA (former OISC) at Level 1 (Immigration). As a result, CECF is legally authorised to provide immigration advice within this level, submit applications on behalf of clients, and escalate cases with the Home Office.

Due to the introduction of the eVisa, we received numerous enquiries regarding the differences between BRP and visa expiry dates, generating share codes, methods of proving immigration status while travelling, etc. We helped more than 20 people create their UKVI accounts and gain access to their eVisas. Those who had issues with eVisas were referred to Migrant Help and received help.

In January, we started receiving more questions about visa extensions, which had been promised by the Home Office. However, the biggest increase in requests occurred in February and March, once the requirements for the extension were published. People wanted to understand when to apply, what documents to prepare, and how to submit an application. The extension rules also left open questions about the route to settlement for Ukrainians under the Ukraine scheme. As a result, many Ukrainians were interested in exploring other options that might be available to them, such as Work or Study visas. We received a number of enquiries of this kind and provided advice accordingly.



Our statistics show how this demand grew over time: while from April to September 2024 we received only 14 immigration-related enquiries, between October 2024 and March 2025 the number increased to 73.

Chasing Up Benefits

Benefit-related enquiries were the fourth most common, totalling 70, or 15% of all enquiries. The primary issue we addressed was following up on benefit applications. We also helped clients report changes in their circumstances for current claims and understand any updates made to their accounts by councils, the DWP, or other relevant bodies. Additionally, we assisted with benefit applications - mostly Pension Credit and Housing Benefit - and provided advice on Universal Credit and disability-related benefits claims.

Collaborations

In December 2024, in collaboration with NEA (National Energy Action), we delivered a workshop titled "How to Save on Heating in Winter," which attracted 16 participants. Attendees asked many questions both during and after the event. We also made a few referrals to NEA so they could provide further assistance to clients.

Additionally, between April 2024 and March 2025, we distributed over 230 tickets to the Botanic Garden and around 70 free tickets to the Museum of Cambridge. These opportunities were very popular, and we continue to maintain our collaborations with these organisations.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

- A Ukrainian family of three, with a newborn child, was living in temporary accommodation when they approached us for help regarding an offer of accommodation they had received from the council. They had been invited for a viewing and were concerned because the accommodation was outside Cambridge, the city in which they

normally lived. We discussed the situation and provided advice on what their refusal might mean for them.

- Unfortunately, the accommodation was in poor condition and located on the third floor with no lift, making it impossible to take their pram upstairs. They decided to decline the offer and began preparing arguments to challenge the decision. In the meantime, they were offered more suitable accommodation via Home-Link. They agreed to accept this new offer; however, it was subsequently withdrawn due to the intervention of a council worker, who explained that the family was no longer eligible as they had already been offered another property.

- We identified a breach of procedure in this action and assisted the family in compiling a complaint letter and in identifying a council contact who could support them. Once the letter was sent, the council withdrew their offer of accommodation, which the family had deemed unsuitable, and restored their access to Home-Link. Within a couple of weeks, they were offered another property via Home-Link, which they considered suitable and into which they happily moved.

Case Study 2

- A Ukrainian man approached us saying he could not access his UKVI account, as a friend in Ireland had initially helped him set one up. He had used his Irish mobile number, which he no longer had access to, and an email address for which he had forgotten the password. His only valid document was his BRP, as he had never held a foreign passport, and his Ukrainian passport had been issued in a territory that is now occupied and has since changed its name.

- We tried various combinations to resolve the issue and ultimately decided to create a new account for him to see if that would work. Fortunately, it turned out that he had confused the UKVI account with another service and had never actually had one. We then helped him create a UKVI account, gain access to his eVisa, informed him of its expiry

date (which he had been unaware of), and assisted him in obtaining a share code for his employer and benefit applications. Additionally, we provided guidance on obtaining a valid Ukrainian ID and advised him on where to apply for a visa extension.

Case Study 3

- A Ukrainian woman was referred to us by an ESOL provider as she was very distressed, crying frequently and appearing extremely unhappy. She explained that she was experiencing issues with her sponsor. We contacted her to better understand the situation and discovered that her sponsor was controlling her every move, constantly judging her and making unpleasant comments about her behaviour.

- The woman mentioned that she was in touch with the council, who were aware of her difficulties and that she would soon be provided with alternative accommodation. We attempted to clarify what support had been offered and what accommodation was due, but the client could not provide clear answers, as she was unable to communicate with the council in English and relied on her daughter as an interpreter.

- After speaking with her daughter, we realised that no accommodation had actually been promised. The council had only advised her to create a Home-Link account. The temporary accommodation that could have been provided immediately had been declined by the client because she believed she would be placed in a hostel with mixed-gender rooms and five other people. She also feared that complaining would worsen her situation and that the council would not help her at all.

- Once we understood these barriers, we spoke with the client again. We explained what temporary accommodation actually looked like and how long the process of obtaining accommodation via Home-Link might take. We also reassured her that seeking help is not the same as complaining,

and that serious safeguarding issues with her host were not normal.

- Fortunately, she agreed to allow us to act on her behalf. We contacted the housing team at the council and informed them of the situation. Within a couple of days, temporary accommodation was provided, and she moved in. She was very happy with the outcome and expressed sincere gratitude to CECF.

Feedback

'Thank you very much. I still can't believe my issue was resolved.'

'Thank you very much again for your readiness to help and ability to explain what we are eligible for.'

'I hope I can apply to you again as your help is invaluable to me.'

'I can't imagine how I would have gone through all these difficulties without your help. I want to say a huge 'thank you' to you.'

'Thank you very much! I can't imagine how I would have managed that without your help!'

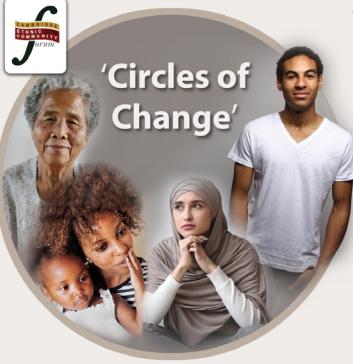
'We know we can always count on your help and support, and that means the world to us.'

'Thank you for your help. I know this wouldn't have been possible without you.'

We would like to thank Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council for funding.

Reported by: **Alla Viktorova**
Ukrainian Project Worker

Healthier Futures report



'Circles of Change'

This project is aimed at tackling **Health Inequalities**

- Community conversations**
Engaging with people in a neutral space, listening to concerns and looking to address those
- Raising awareness**
of the importance of early interventions for long-term illness
- Providing information**
Building community knowledge and confidence
- Advice on**
Improving health through lifestyle changes
- Health inequalities**
Supporting communities to tackle health inequalities in Cambridge and reducing the impact of those
- Providing training**
Culture intelligence training in health settings

For more details please contact:
Mahasin Abdullaah, email: mahasin@cecf.co.uk



The 'Circles of Change' project was launched at the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum in the middle of March 2024. The key objective of the project was to decrease health inequalities among Black and Minoritised Ethnic (BME), refugees and asylum seekers by: 1) breaking down barriers to health services, 2) enabling early intervention in long-term conditions like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, dementia and mental health, 3) improving existing provision and providing additional solutions, and 4) eliminating negative perceptions about certain conditions such as dementia.

Health Ambassadors

The initiative was carried out through grassroots community engagement by recruiting a team of 20 volunteer health ambassadors for the period from April 2024 to March 2025, and ensuring they were trained, monitored, and supported. As the backbone of our project, our health ambassadors are the key to our success as they are the ones who bring in community knowledge, relationships, cultural understanding, and language skills to the project.

They received training focused on improving communication skills, gaining basic health knowledge, and learning about local healthcare. As

an outcome of these training sessions, our health ambassadors acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to be more comfortable discussing health issues. Moreover, they have provided positive feedback after the training sessions, indicating that they have a basic understanding of some medical issues, such as dementia, prediabetes, and gestational diabetes. With the project progress there is increased community engagement through improved skills, knowledge, and confidence of health ambassadors as they can obtain stories about people's experiences with the healthcare system.

The following is a case study demonstrating how being a part of the Healthier Futures team allowed a health ambassador to enhance their skills and confidence while also supporting the community, as stated in their comments,

"Personally, my time with CECF helped me grow in many ways. The diverse events and activities they organized provided opportunities for me to enhance my social skills, broaden my perspective, and connect with people from various backgrounds. These experiences have been invaluable for my personal and professional development, and I am deeply grateful for them."

Community Engagement

Healthier Futures Project participated in several community events and activities across all ethnic backgrounds, collaborating with various community groups and reaching out to about 300 people. Throughout 2024, we held stalls at different events, such as Dementia Navigating Day on 5th July 2024, Cambridge African Network Event on 26th October 2024, accruing twenty contacts and Makani summer party (Arab cultural event), on 30th August, attracted approximately twenty people of Arabic background.

On 4th July 2024, we participated in the online InHIP assessment workshop. Our participation in this community focus group on lipid management was reflected in the ICB/ICS Healthcare Inequalities Programme report, which was released in September and demonstrated how such programs may help battle cardiovascular disease in minorities and vulnerable communities.

We delivered a presentation on healthy lifestyles for families at an International Garden Party, at Storeys Field, on 19th of July 2024. Seventeen people attended, scanning the code of the NHS Food Scanner application that we introduced, so they could choose healthier items, as well as another twelve people who talked to us at our stall. We aim to inspire individuals to take more control of their health by using various tools, such as the NHS Food Scanner application.

As part of a national awareness campaign (Know Your Numbers), we set up a health station, on 2nd September 2024 at Arbury Court, in partnership with Healthy You. Twenty-two people from different minority ethnic communities, had their blood pressure checked at the event. In response to the (Know Your Number Event) which aimed to raise awareness of the importance of regularly checking blood pressure and general health, we know that at least one of the community members attending the event was contacted by a GP to have a full NHS check.

On 19th of October 2024, we participated in a Health and wellbeing event, at Cambridge Central



Mosque, conversing with seventy-six people mostly South Asian, and Arab background, in addition to White English people. As a result, three health ambassadors who have south Asian and Arab backgrounds have helped spread the flyer regarding the prevention prediabetic program in Urdu and Arabic languages to their people. In total, 12 people have been informed about the program and checked their blood sugar levels.

Over a hundred and twenty people from various backgrounds (South Asian, East Asian, African, Arab, and White) attended CECF's AGM on November 12, 2024 – Health and Wellbeing – was the theme. We attended the "No Borders in the NHS" on 8th March 2025 event and learned about their work and shared information with the East Timorese community, as they struggle to access healthcare.

Partnership and Networking

We have effectively worked with community partners in the targeted groups throughout the project to increase awareness of existing healthcare

services. In addition to that, we have formed stronger partnerships with a variety of Cambridge-based organizations and local services, such as Healthy You, Healthwatch, Alzheimer's Society, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and NHS Integrated Neighbourhood Project Manager South Cambridgeshire.

As a result of this collaboration, local partners were informed about the project and its purpose and have supported it ever since. In this respect, we had promising responses from the Alzheimer's Society, which had a stall there at our AGM with a health and wellbeing theme, and stated that they had established numerous new contacts in the community and indicated a desire to be invited to subsequent events. We also had encouraging comments from Healthwatch, which had the opportunity to speak with people at the AGM about their experiences with the NHS and social services. Here are some comments they have made on their experiences with health project:

'Expanding our reach into all areas of the community'

'I have made a number of new contacts and spoken with a number of your members'

'Excellent, very accessible'

'Collecting peoples experiences of using NHS and Social Care Services'

As the project progressed, community engagement improved, and the barriers to accessing health services among the target population became clearer. There has also been an increase in community awareness about the health risks associated with certain lifestyle choices, such as diet and physical activity levels, and how to improve these risks. As we move forward, we plan to do more community outreach and prepare for the health fair, health inequalities training for health professionals, and conduct a health survey.

Reported by: Mahasin Abduallah
Healthier Futures Project Coordinator



A big thank you to all our Partners and Funders

Our Funders:



Our Partners:

