Action For Refugees In Lewisham

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
2020/2021

Registered Charity Number: 1116344
Company Number: 05819537

ABOUT AFRIL

Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) is a small, local charity. Founded in 2006, we support refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants in south east London to lift themselves out of poverty and rebuild their lives in the heart of our community. We provide both crisis support to meet immediate needs, and long-term, flexible programmes to tackle the underlying problems that lead families to be in crisis, empowering them to move from dependence to independence.

Over time our client group has changed according to the demographic of our borough and we have transitioned from mainly supporting refugees to working with a more diverse group of families who have complex needs relating to insecure immigration status. We work with other local and national organisations to ensure that we can maximise resources locally.

We are a team of 10 part time paid staff (3.2 full time equivalents) and around active 80 volunteers.

Our office is based in the Leemore Centre in central Lewisham and we deliver services across the borough, including the Church of the Good Shepherd with St Peter, Lee and St Saviours primary school. Our clients travel from across South East London to access our services.

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OUR VALUES AND APPROACH

At AFRIL, we:

- Work with service users to develop services and support that meet their real, and not perceived needs.
- Work collaboratively with local and national organisations to ensure that services are relevant, appropriate and effective.
- Work with service users to enable them to build their knowledge, confidence and skills

Our work is grounded in our values of professionalism, inclusivity and solidarity. We strive to be community led and community based.

WHAT WE DO

We deliver 3 core services:

- **Helping Hands Foodbank Programme:** providing food, toiletries and clothes to destitute and low income asylum seeking, refugee, and migrant families and individuals; as well as a range of wellbeing activities including our Allotment of Refuge;
- **Rainbow Club Supplementary School:** providing supplementary Saturday education and wellbeing activities to children from early years to 11 years old from asylum seeking, refugee, and migrant families;
- **Advice and Advocacy Service:** providing AQS accredited advice and support in housing, income, and integration for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, as well as referral and signposting in immigration matters.

In addition, since 2021 we have added an **Immigration Advice Service** in partnership with Southwark Law Centre and funded by Trust for London. An experienced immigration solicitor works closely with AFRIL projects and other partners to provide in-depth quality immigration advice and representation to support clients to resolve the underlying immigration issues that lead to poverty and crisis.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

At AFRIL's last annual general meeting, I thanked a long list of people and organisations - staff, volunteers, partners, funders - for helping ensure not just that AFRIL managed to survive and maintain support for our clients through an exceptional year, but also that AFRIL thrived and expanded what we were able to offer to those most in need of our help. Here we are, a year on, and we have another 'exceptional' year under our belts, having spent 2021 making remarkable and previously unimaginable adjustments to how we live and work. And once again, the formidable community that is AFRIL has risen to the challenge and provided support, help, advocacy and allyship to some of the most vulnerable people in and around our community here in south London.

I am immensely proud of the work of every single person who forms part of what AFRIL does, and hugely grateful to everyone whose generosity of time, money and spirit makes that work possible. The egregious term 'hostile environment' hardly does justice to the barriers, difficulties and prejudices heaped in the way of those who seek the protection of the UK today. The commitment, expertise, effort and work of every one of AFRIL's staff, volunteers and supporters contributes an important piece to the dismantling and undermining of that hostility, supporting people who have a right to live and thrive here in one of the wealthiest nations on our planet.

I am not the person to tell the story of the last year of AFRIL's work; that is laid out here in our annual report, told by the people who made the story possible. But before you read that story, I will take the opportunity to put on record my very specific thanks to each and every one of my fellow trustees who have given their time, commitment and expertise over the last year to support AFRIL's work and its development - including those who have stepped down from the board during the course of this year. I will also add my thanks for the phenomenal work done by our outgoing Director Katie Commons, who brings her knowledge and experience to bear now to the board table, as she takes up a role as a trustee. And I will very warmly welcome Sophie Wickham into the role of Director, and thank her for the very considerable impact she is already having on the next phase of AFRIL's development and its work.

Gareth Redmond-King
Chair, Board of Trustees

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

When I joined AFRIL in September 2021, our remarkable staff and volunteer team were 16 months into delivering services in a global health pandemic. In a short space of time, the world has changed beyond recognition, and we have adapted. I would like to personally thank Katie Commons for steering this ship.

AFRIL's clients are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community, by virtue of their immigration status and the restrictions that entails. However, they are also some of the most resilient and inspiring people I have ever met. No one chooses a dangerous journey or destitution in the UK if what they are leaving behind isn't worse. The deaths of men, women and children in the English channel this year have been a devastating reflection on our society, and AFRIL has added its voice to the calls on government to increase safe routes of migration so that people are not forced into impossible situations. As I write this, the Nationality and Borders Bill is making its way through the House of Lords and worryingly seeks to further erode the protections available to people fleeing persecution. AFRIL will continue to add our voice, and more importantly amplify our clients' voices, to oppose these regressive steps.

At a local level this year, AFRIL's Food Bank pivoted to a delivery service thanks to our volunteer cyclists and drivers, and increased the number of families provided with essential food parcels almost twofold. Disruption to mainstream education has had a disproportionate impact on refugee and migrant children and our Rainbow Club supplementary school has seen an increase in registrations and need. Our Advice and Advocacy service is working with more clients with greater complexity of issues, and coming out of lockdowns has seen a sharp rise in crisis situations such as families with children being made street homeless. Our new Immigration Advice partnership with Southwark Law Centre has been incredibly important in tackling the root cause of our families' poverty and exclusion. We have added an array of online wellbeing activities at the request of our clients, and the Allotment of Refuge has come into its own as a safe, green, welcoming space to build community and connections during this challenging time.

Looking back on this past year, we have been sprinting a marathon. AFRIL's staff and volunteer teams have been working tirelessly to meet the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants in south east London and beyond. Demand for services has increased substantially and we have not only responded to restrictions by dynamically adapting our service models, but we have supported more people than ever before. As a fresh pair of eyes, I am incredibly impressed with the resilience, commitment and passion of AFRIL staff and volunteers, who have kept our families afloat during this time. However, I am equally concerned about the human impact this has on individuals on the front line, at AFRIL and across the sector. This is a time for reflection, adjusting to the 'new normal' and ensuring that the wellbeing of our staff and volunteers is placed side by side with the wellbeing of our clients, so that we can continue to deliver the support to the people we serve and change lives for the better.

Looking forward, there are naturally challenges on the horizon. Although AFRIL secured some covid funding to meet the additional costs of services this year, we know that we need to work incredibly hard to secure the funds to ensure AFRIL can both continue to meet this increased need and is sustainable in the long term. However there is much to look forward to. This experience has brought us closer to our clients - we know them better and they trust us more. We have built a real community and we work together to ensure services are what our clients want and need. We have built strong, lasting partnerships in our locality and beyond and have confidence in our ability to adapt and thrive in adversity. I am so grateful to all our supporters and volunteers for making this possible and I hope you enjoy reading this report and reflecting on the successes of the past year, against the odds.

Sophie Wickham, Director

THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT - AND THEIR NEEDS

The people we support are **first and foremost members of our community** - they are **mothers and fathers, daughters, sons, aunts and uncles.** However, their immigration status has come to be a defining factor in their lives. In this respect, the people we support fall into three categories: those **seeking asylum, recognised refugees and vulnerable migrants** who fall outside these categories. Many of the latter have outstanding protection issues, including issues around **gender based violence and trafficking**, but were unable to successfully claim asylum due to complexity and the culture of disbelief in the system, and who are now on a longer route to settlement due to having children in the UK.

This year we worked predominantly with **families headed by single mothers**, the common thread being that their **immigration status negatively impacts upon their lives**, in particular their ability to access housing and income and to integrate into the community. Part of our work is to support the wider community to understand the problems that our service users face, and provide opportunities for integration and joint community activities in order to develop a local movement of solidarity and ensure that the people we support can not only access the support that they need, but feel like they belong.

Immigration status

On first approaching AFRIL **75% of families had insecure immigration status** - most with complex immigration problems, human rights issues or outstanding protection needs yet had an asylum claim refused. 26% of them had Limited Leave to Remain for up to 2.5 years with a No Recourse to Public Funds condition; but arrived at AFRIL with time running out and no income to be able to pay the Home Office fees to apply to extend it. **10% were resettled refugees from Syria**. Of those with insecure immigration status when they first accessed our services, **51% had no legal representation** due to the huge cuts to the free legal advice sector since 2012.

The UK Immigration system is complex and difficult to navigate, and it is almost impossible to secure leave to remain without legal representation. The majority of our clients fear detention and removal, including being separated from their children if they disclose their immigration status.

Income and Housing

Families come to AFRIL with a multitude of issues:
For those with insecure immigration and housing, their primary concerns are to be able to provide a safe place for their children to sleep and food on the table.

On first accessing AFRIL services **77% of families were on an extremely low income**; **39% had no income whatsoever,** reliant fully on borrowing from friends or acquaintances.

63% were without settled housing:

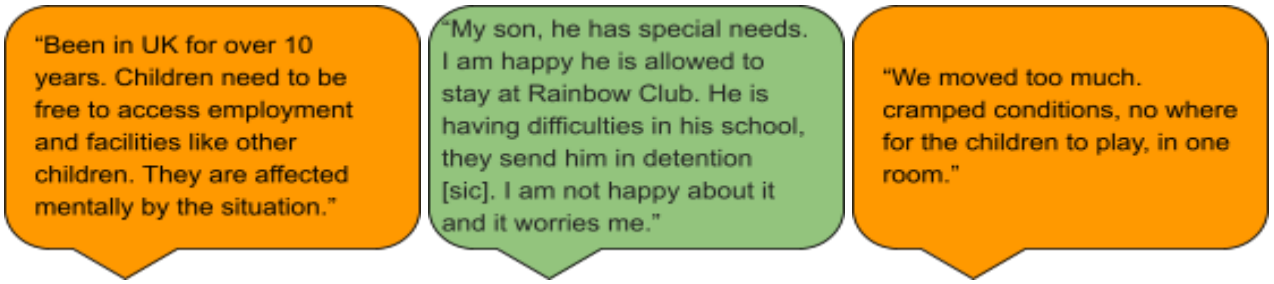
- **11%** of clients were living in asylum support accommodation, most on a full board basis in a local hotel requisitioned by the Home Office for asylum seekers. These clients were temporarily housed there under section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and did not know if or when they would be moved on a no choice basis to a different part of the country.
- **54% of families were in insecure or unsafe housing situations**, living with friends or acquaintances, illegally renting or in temporary accommodation. Several were 'sofa surfing' and living hand to mouth. **6% were street homeless.**

Those with refugee status have an uphill struggle to adjust to life in an unfamiliar environment, often being forced to transition from a successful profession or trade in Syria to unemployment in London. Those families granted refugee status after years in limbo, after the initial euphoria, have a harsh reality to contend with. They usually have 28 days to leave their accommodation but need to wait six weeks for Universal Credit;

often, this is not explained to them, so we pick up families who have become destitute and in debt despite securing status.

On top of this, many parents tell us they are concerned about being able to support their children in Education when they do not speak English well or understand the UK education system.

We asked our clients: Is there anything worrying you?



OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

119
TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES SUPPORTED

259
TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE HELPED

1,638
CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOOD PARCELS DISTRIBUTED

99
CHILDREN AT RAINBOW CLUB

94%
OF CHILDREN SAY THEIR MATHS HAS IMPROVED AT RAINBOW CLUB

40
HOUSEHOLDS SUPPORTED WITH IN DEPTH ADVICE AND ADVOCACY

22
IMMIGRATION ADVICE/ REPRESENTATION CASES

43%
OF CLIENTS REPORTED INCREASED CONFIDENCE SINCE COMING TO AFRIL

OUR IMPACT - WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

Overview: In 2020-2021, AFRIL supported 259 individuals from 119 families. 127 of these were children and many clients were accessing multiple services. We have seen the need in our community increase this year, both in terms of number of people and complexity.

Our Rainbow Club supplementary school provided specialist supplementary education to 99 children from 59 families from early years to 11 years old. This represents a 24% increase on the previous year. Our Helping Hands Foodbank supported 163 adults and children from 62 families. This represents a 48% increase from the end of last year. Our Advice and Advocacy Service has supported 40 families with complex practical issues: each family has on average 4 interlinked matters that need to be resolved. This represents a 53% increase on the previous year. Between January and May 2021, our new Immigration Advice Service provided specialist advice and representation to 10 clients with 16 dependents, and provided an in-depth assessment and detailed one off advice to an additional 12 clients and their families.

Our clients talk about the impact of coming to AFRIL

Before coming to AFRIL:

"I was very stressed and not coping."

"Very frustrated. Borrowed money from people. Very stressed."

"Found it hard to get help or to know where to turn."

Now that I am with AFRIL:

"I tried my best to be happy even though I was in difficulties but AFRIL gave me more positive thinking."

"My children are so happy they smile when the food comes."

"Not always cheerful. But now feel better knowing [AFRIL] is available to offer support."

As well as resolving the acute practical issues our clients face, AFRIL works to improve their emotional wellbeing and resilience. Our annual evaluation project asked AFRIL clients to describe their feelings of wellbeing before and after accessing AFRIL services.

FOOD BANK PROGRAMME

AFRIL's weekly Saturday Helping Hands Foodbank is run in partnership with Good Shepherd St Peter's church, Lee.

"It's not the food, although that is important of course, it's the welcome, knowing you care."

This, in part, answers the question of why we don't just provide a food voucher to every refugee family in need. **The food is the beginning** but the welcome, consistent concern and wrap-around service is what makes the food bank more than just a parcel of healthy food.

"You are friendly, your concern, I see it in your face."

Over the last year during the pandemic AFRIL's food bank programme has **supported some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of our local community.** As one of the few food banks dedicated to supporting refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants with no recourse to public funds, our reach is much wider than Lewisham borough. This year we have supported **75 adults** and **88 children.** Most of our families live in Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley but some travel from other London boroughs. Our Food bank members are asylum-seekers, undocumented migrants or refugees experiencing food poverty. All the families registered with the food bank have fled persecution at home and have sought sanctuary in the UK. Foodbank support begins with **weekly food parcels including fresh fruit and vegetables and toiletries, nappies, baby wipes and sanitary towels**, but also includes well-being activities for adults and children, letters in support of immigration applications and signposting to partner services.

2020-2021 in numbers:

62 HOUSEHOLDS SUPPORTED **163 TOTAL PEOPLE HELPED**

1,638 FOOD PARCELS DELIVERED BY 52 VOLUNTEERS

We began the year still in Lockdown with the doors of the foodbank at St Peter's church sadly still firmly closed. Our foodbank team **worked in partnership** with colleagues from Lewisham COVID food group Network and out of borough mainstream food banks to ensure all our Foodbank clients received a weekly food parcel delivery or a welfare payment so they could shop locally. As lockdown continued, weekly check-in calls with each family became a crucial time to support their mental health, provide advice, signpost to online support and services and share the ups and downs of lockdown. With schools and drop in services closed, decisions about housing, finance and status being put on hold or severely delayed, many clients voiced a sense of **disconnect and isolation** and a feeling of being abandoned. Several mums with pre-school children told us that AFRIL was the one service that was still taking care and **often the only person they spoke to all week.**

"When I was lost and I was introduced to AFRIL God keep blessing you. You kept bringing, organising, ringing. I really appreciate."

In August 2020 we reopened the 'new look' food bank as a **doorstep delivery offer.** The Good Shepherd church volunteer team began packing food parcels again, we became experts at juggling online shopping, and local people, happy to get out and away from their screens and feel purposeful, joined the foodbank team as **volunteer cyclists and drivers** to help deliver food parcels and covid safety essentials to families.

In addition to our core service, from November 2020 to April 2021 the foodbank participated in the **UNICEF frozen food project.** Our food bank volunteers helped deliver **216 additional frozen meals** to families. This provided a pre-prepared 'take away' meal for families in need and helped with stretched budgets.

One of the unintended consequences of lockdown is that our Food bank team has got to know our clients better and developed a greater insight into their wider challenges beyond food poverty. As a result we have developed **a more holistic offer and sophisticated range of services**, whilst keeping to our core objectives. During this year we developed the wider ***Food Bank Programme***, to include the established weekly food bank, a range of online wellbeing activities and the AFRIL Allotment of Refuge.

In response to client requests, we **partnered with GRACE AID charity** to provide a better pipeline for donated clothing and **a more dignified referral and appointment service** for food bank clients needing clothing and shoes. Perhaps the most immediate consequence of the pandemic was that most services went online. Lockdown gave us insight into the challenges many destitute face in having no WIFI and little funds to buy data and stay connected. The team partnered with HUBBUB phones and Catbytes device library to increase digital inclusion for clients through access to laptops, phones and free data.

The **art@home group** was our first experiment with online activities in June 2020 - a fortnightly art group developed as our first well-being activity to connect families together during Lockdown. We have an average of **10 participants** each time including 6 children, and delivered **24 sessions** in this period. This class has enabled a different relationship to develop between parents and children since the rest of week our (predominantly) single mothers have to focus on practical head of household work. We have observed the mutual peer support that has developed and during discussions about art, children and parents have had opportunities to share more about their lives and experiences and tools for resilience in a mutually supportive environment.

"You are always around for everyone. No matter your age, religion, your background."

Learning from the art group helped us realise that almost any activity is possible to deliver online. Throughout the year foodbank staff, volunteers and partners have joined families in regular online art, **shared poetry reading, sewing crafts, cookery, and gardening groups.** Through these groups, we have shared **joy, concern, sadness, laughed, learned, surprised ourselves and shared tools of resilience,** and personal belief. Our volunteer cyclists and drivers joined in excitedly adding activity packs containing art, play, cookery or gardening materials and worksheets alongside food parcels and fruit and vegetables.

We ran **55 wellbeing sessions** in this year (in addition to the allotment gardening group):

- **30** individuals attended the **art** group this year
- **13** individuals participated in shared **poetry** reading sessions
- **11** individuals participated in an online **cookery** class
- **7** individuals took part in an online **sewing** craft

Our **Allotment of Refuge** project to **'relove' our allotment** began in December and has had an **incredible impact** on our families. As a welcoming green space, One Tree Hill allotment provides a place of calm for volunteers, staff and families. Together we remodelled the plot, created new raised beds, built a flexible-purpose shelter and most importantly shared our learning and knowledge about growing food. **Together we celebrated our first harvest**. Whilst we were redesigning the site during lockdown, We ran **7 online 'sofa gardening'** workshops for Foodbank and Rainbow Club children to bring the allotment to their homes and encourage them to think about where food came from and start food growing projects at home. Once building work was done and COVID easing allowed, families began revisiting the plot. We delivered **11 gardening and nature workshops** for children and their families, enabling **62** children and their parents to learn about food growing and preserving nature. This would not have been possible without our **57** allotment volunteers and the plot holders and members of One Tree Hill Allotment Society who welcomed our families have actively supported our plans.

Our Tuesday and Saturday gardening teams are **integrated teams of AFRIL members, plot holders and local people**. Together they continue to add elements to the site (such as the gossip patch) and experiment with new planting (such as Yams and corn in our polytunnel).

This project has achieved true integration as demonstrated by the Allotment society now as a matter of course extending an invitation to AFRIL families to join in their calendar of events such as the annual open day, apple pressing day and Bonfire Night and annual wassailing blessing of the orchard. Our families take up these opportunities with enthusiasm because they feel welcome, safe and respected.

"Thank you for helping me fit in at AFRIL and for all the experiences I have gained here. I have had the best experience at AFRIL and I think that it is an amazing place! Congratulations on what you have achieved at the foodbank in recent years! I'm sure you will continue to help so many families for a long time to come." *Beth, Foodbank Programme volunteer*

RAINBOW CLUB

Rainbow Club

The Rainbow Club Supplementary School welcomes **primary age children** from asylum seeking, refugee and vulnerable migrant backgrounds, supporting them to **excel in education and build confidence and wellbeing.**

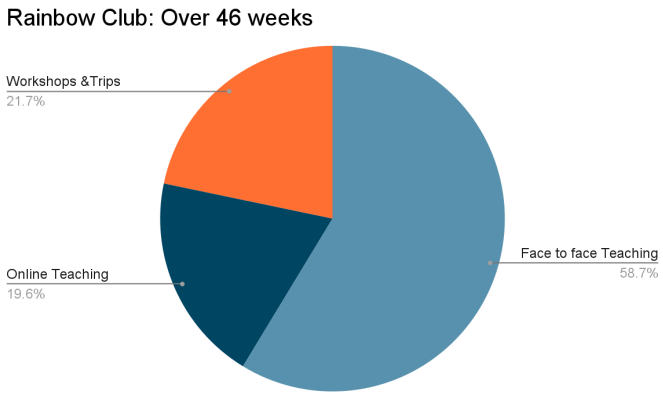
Many Rainbow Club families are vulnerable and marginalised, and parents worry that they are unable to support their children in school as well as they would like to. A recent report from the Educational Policy Initiative concluded that refugee and asylum seeking children in England are estimated to be 15.5 months behind non-migrant children in English and Maths GCSEs, and 17.3 months behind across all GCSE subjects. (Hutchinson and Reader, 2021). **44% of Rainbow Club parents felt that they did not have a place they could ask for help if they were in difficulty.** 65% were not confident in helping children with homework with 48%

having little/no ability to read and write in English. **22% of children had a low level of English language capability on registration.**

72% of parents identified barriers to integrating into the community including language, poverty, lack of access to services and fear of drawing attention to their immigration status. 18% of families are living in temporary accommodation, 11% are reliant solely on family/friends for support and 41% are in receipt of local authority housing, many under section 17 of the Children's Act. **21% have no recourse to public funds** meaning that they cannot claim benefits or housing assistance. The rest have extremely low incomes. We have seen families living in temporary or social services accommodation be moved significant distances at short notice and we see mothers skipping meals in order to pay the bus fare to keep their children in school.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, Rainbow Club provided specialist supplementary education to **99 children** (59 families) from early years to 11 years old. This represents a **24% increase** on the previous year.

99 CHILDREN **270 LEARNING PACKS POSTED** **60 HOURS ENGLISH/MATHS PER CHILD**



What a Saturday school day looks like:

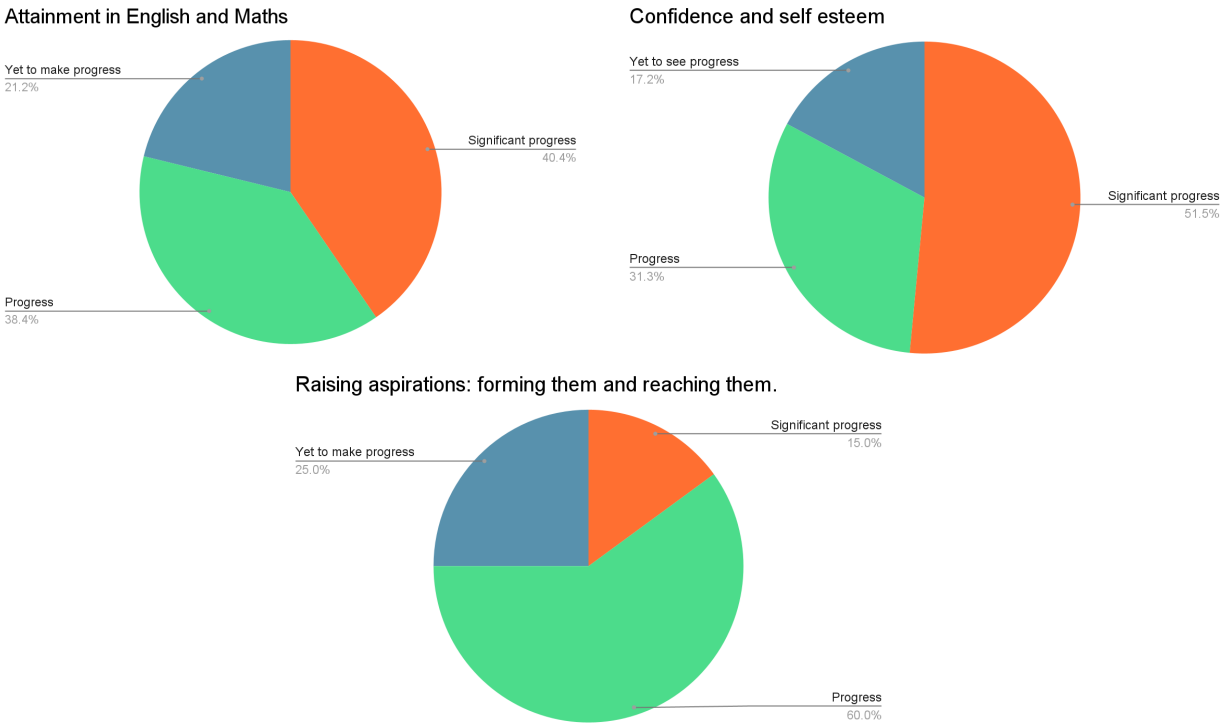
- *Breakfast*
- *Classroom time: 3 classes*
- *Maths and English tuition*
- *Sports lessons*
- *Arts and Crafts*
- *Musical instrument lessons*
- *Fun and Friends!*

The school year started with face to face provision each Saturday, with our **expert teachers providing English and Maths tuition to all children**, enhancing their progress within the national curriculum. Creative expression is an important feature of education for our children, with additional **weekly art, music and sports** sessions. Older children have the opportunity to take **musical instrument lessons** through our partners Fairbeats. Each term we organise a **fun educational trip**, this year saw outings when covid restrictions allowed to the Migration Museum and the National Maritime Museum, alongside a series of food growing workshops at AFRIL's Allotment of Refuge. In addition, Rainbow Club children participated in a drama workshop with Rose Bruford College, a local drama school, and had a fantastic outdoor performance from the Flying Seagulls Circus Project.

Between April and November **we pivoted to remote learning** due to the Covid 19 pandemic and government lockdowns. Home learning packs were regularly sent out to each family with English and Maths worksheets, as well as Art materials. Every Saturday, children joined Zoom sessions with their class teachers to review their work. We focused on small group sessions to retain attention and actively adjusted our model of teaching and assessment based on ongoing learning of what worked best for students. Volunteer teaching assistants provided reading sessions, using **online eBook libraries** that children could then access themselves to continue reading during the week. Our Art teacher **recorded instructional videos** that were uploaded for the children to follow at home. Fairbeats, our music partners, held their music sessions online as well, and **posted out 35 ukuleles and fifes** for the children's instrument lessons. During lockdown we remained in regular contact with parents and were grateful to receive **20 tablets** with 6 months free data from the Good Things Foundation as part of their 'Everyone Connected' initiative, in partnership with

Children in Need and Vodafone, to improve digital access for families. These devices were crucial in helping families to access not only our online Rainbow Club sessions, but also for their mainstream schools where children were regularly having to isolate.

The UK Poverty Report 2020/21 published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that **people already experiencing poverty were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.** This has been born out by our experience working with disadvantaged families at AFRIL. Covid-19 restrictions had a significant impact on the progress of our students: **39% found lockdown hard** because they were not able to get help with Maths and English as much as they would have done when the school was open, and **36% missed their teachers**. In addition, when asked what was difficult about home learning, 49% said not seeing their friends, showing the importance of peer support in learning environments, and **15% said not having enough reading books at home**. AFRIL has a collection of donated books that we regularly offer to children to take home after Rainbow Club.



Despite the incredible challenges of the pandemic, we have seen improvements in Maths and English across all classes. The majority of students have made significant progress. For some children, this means that they have advanced beyond expected attainment levels for their age group; for others, starting from a baseline of little or no English language they have still made gains.

Most students made progress during the period of remote learning although some made just a little or in a couple of cases took a step back. This was due to a variety of factors including family pressures of insecure housing or increased poverty. For many, it was difficult to concentrate with the whole family in one room. We worked closely with AFRIL's Food Bank to support families. We adapted our model, alternating and staggering subjects and music lessons, as siblings often shared the same device, and worked in smaller groups. When face-to-face resumed, teachers reassessed pupil attainment levels and worked hard to target resources and support to those children who needed to catch up.

We take applications/referrals for Rainbow Club throughout the year. Those students who were yet to make progress at the end of the year were mostly new students to the school. This year we have more children with Special Educational Needs; some are statemented and others awaiting statementing. Again, their gains may have been less dramatic, but we have seen the majority move forward.

94% of children surveyed felt that their Maths had improved this year

85% felt that their English had improved this year

We have seen positive developments in confidence and self-esteem across all age groups, despite the baseline issues our children face, and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions in the middle part of the year. For children living in poverty and poor quality housing, the impact of parental uncertainty and stress with regards to immigration status, and for whom English may not be a first language, self-esteem and confidence can be significant issues and impact on their educational attainment. We see that improvements in English and Maths attainment improve self esteem. The space outside core subjects where children can work collaboratively and creatively is equally important. Children have weekly sports and arts and crafts activities with a focus on teamwork and problem solving. Children gain recognition for their soft skills and support for others such as a kind act or volunteering to help with a group task. These instances add up to enhance the children's overall confidence and individual development.

There was **100% positive feedback** from the children surveyed about the classroom environment: they felt **learning was fun, fair and that they felt able to ask questions** to their teachers and assistants.

Providing students with the knowledge and experience to form and subsequently fulfill their aspirations is a priority at Rainbow Club. In this outcome, we have noticed a direct correlation between attendance and progress. Trips had to be put on hold during times of lockdown and reconfigured to make them safe once restrictions were lifted. During the period of remote learning, opportunities to interact with our volunteer team were more limited. Our volunteers bring and proactively share their wide range of professional and personal experiences with the students to support the development of aspirations. This said, we worked hard to maintain the fun of Rainbow Club to keep students engaged so that once we could resume our full programme of activities. We are delighted to have had such great collaborations and partnerships this year, despite Covid restrictions, giving Rainbow Club families chances to explore new opportunities and environments.

90% of parents surveyed stated that coming to Rainbow Club had been beneficial for their child. Parents noted that they had improved their capacity to support their children to develop and pursue aspirations, even within the context of lockdown, supported by our work to provide personalised resources for each family and to develop parents' skills, knowledge of the UK education system and social connections through AFRIL's Parents' Forum.

CASE STUDY
When Amanda (not her real name) first joined the Rainbow Club during lockdown she was quiet and timid, but over the course of the year she has grown in confidence. She met her teachers and peers online due to covid restrictions. When we resumed face-to-face teaching, Amanda was excited to finally meet them in person and thrived. In our end of year pupil questionnaire she said her favourite thing about Rainbow Club was "*seeing her lovely teachers*". Amanda has to travel quite a distance to attend each week, yet her attendance is impeccable. Her mother has commented on how much they value the service which is why they are so committed to the journey.

ADVICE AND ADVOCACY SERVICE

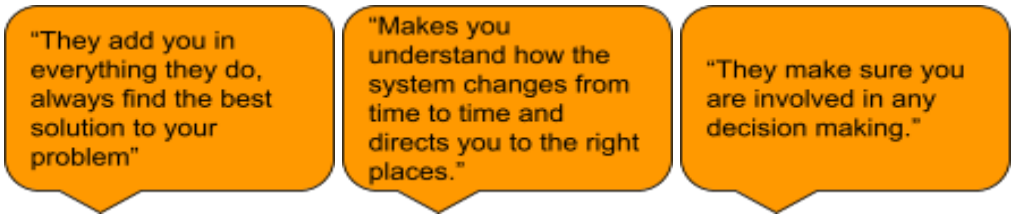
Our clients face a range of practical difficulties arising from immigration status, which need to be resolved through holistic support. Our Advice and Advocacy Officer conducts confidential in depth assessments and work plans in partnership with clients to resolve complex issues.

Last year across our Advice and Advocacy Service we worked with **40 clients with an average of four cases each** to be resolved. This work focussed on individuals who were particularly vulnerable, often due to poor health, trauma or language issues.

The key issues are access to appropriate income and accommodation. All of our clients, except resettled refugees, have no recourse to public funds so cannot access mainstream government support. Some women remain in abusive relationships as this is their only source of housing and food. Our Advice worker **advocates** to Social Service to conduct child in need assessments and provide emergency accommodation where there are children involved, **provides destitution payments** for food and essential items, **makes referrals** for Immigration Advice, and makes requests for the NRPF condition to be removed from grants of temporary leave. This is alongside **registering children in school**, negotiating discretionary **free school meals**, and **supporting clients to understand** the entitlements and limitations on their access to healthcare. For clients granted refugee status, we assist them to get National Insurance numbers, **apply for welfare benefits**, access employment and training opportunities, **make budgeting plans** and access specialised debt and legal advice.

We take an empowerment approach to advice and advocacy, respecting our clients' agency and capabilities. We will spend longer with a client and coach them through completing an online benefits application, rather than default to doing it for them. In this way we support our clients from dependence to independence.

When asked about their experience of our Advice and Advocacy Service, our clients said:



Over the lockdown period, AFRIL transitioned to providing support to our total client group of 150 individuals and families via weekly welfare calls. As part of this, our Advice and Advice and Advocacy Officer acted as a resource to support non-advice members of staff to build their understanding of the issues faced by the client group, and to make appropriate, targeted referrals. This enabled us to increase the reach of our Advice and Advocacy Service at a time when many of our clients were disproportionately affected by the restrictions and we faced increased demand for our services.

CASE STUDY

Grace (not her real name) and her 3 children had been staying with a friend during the pandemic and was struggling to feed her children, having no recourse to public funds or permission to work. When collecting a food parcel she told us the friend had asked them to leave as she could not afford to support them anymore. The family returned to the house to find all their belongings outside. AFRIL's advice and advocacy officer made an urgent referral to the local authority on the basis of children having been made homeless. After many telephone calls and emails, the local authority provided emergency accommodation. We made an emergency food payment from our destitution fund so the family could eat that day and get the bus to the temporary accommodation. We called Grace the next morning to discover the accommodation was without bedding or equipment so the children had to sleep under their costs. We secured linen donations and purchased pillows the same day. Our advice worker spoke to the school and secured discretionary free school meals and made a referral to our Immigration Solicitor to look into options for regularising her immigration status.

IMMIGRATION ADVICE SERVICE

As part of our work to offer the best possible advice and advocacy to this vulnerable group, and to help **resolve the underlying issues** that prevent clients from supporting themselves independently, we have worked to develop and strengthen partnerships locally and across London. This has resulted in an Immigration project funded by Trust for London and **in partnership with Southwark Law Centre** that enables AFRIL clients to access quality, free, asylum and immigration advice and representation.

Launched in January 2020, in its first 5 months **10 clients** and their **16 dependents** were provided with good quality advice and **representation in their immigration cases**, to prepare and submit applications for leave to remain. In addition, **12** clients were provided with an in depth assessment and detailed advice on their immigration situation. All **22** clients expressed that following the service they now **understood their immigration status** and the restrictions that this entails.

Families and individuals accessing the Immigration service are in a range of situations, including

- **Families with long unresolved status in the UK**, or **temporary leave that expired** or was soon to expire, with a NRPF condition. Most of these clients have private and family life grounds to regularise their status - either applying for leave for the first time or an extension of previous leave with an application for a fee waiver for those on very low incomes. Many of these families had been previously operating 'underground' - the only contact with authorities being the child attending a school - for fear of detention and removal, including being separated from their children.
- **Asylum applicants**, many of whom are being housed in Pentland House, the Lewisham hotel requisitioned by the Home Office for new arrivals to the UK. There are currently significant Home Office delays – none of these clients have as yet even had their initial asylum interview.
- **Victims of modern slavery**
- Other **human rights** issues engaging Article 8, Article 3, trafficking and fleeing gang violence in countries without a government framework for protection.

Unrestricted by the legal aid fee system, the Project Solicitor is able to dig deeper into **complex cases** and make applications to the Home Office to regularise immigration status. We apply for application **fee waivers,** a major barrier for destitute clients and is our gateway to quick referrals to housing solicitors, and have a **100% success rate** in this. **To date there have been no decisions on the substantive applications** to regularise status, due to Home Office delays.

We **share our experience and best practice** with other organisations and the second year of the project will see an increase in second tier capacity building work to support the development of immigration advice provision in the borough.

CASE STUDY
Fatima (not her real name) and her 7 year old son were homeless and destitute when they approached AFRIL. With no recourse to public funds she had been relying on informal support from friends and church since her child was born. There was strong circumstantial evidence and trafficking indicators. Fatima had no solicitor. AFRIL's food bank provided a weekly parcel of food, toiletries and covid safety items like facemasks whilst our Immigration solicitor assessed her case. He identified strong human rights grounds and made an application to regularise her status in the UK. The Home Office fee was a barrier so we applied for a fee waiver, which was granted. AFRIL worked in partnership with a specialist agency and secured the client and her child safe housing and income support from the local authority. Fatima is now in a position to join more wellbeing activities and her son is thriving at Rainbow Club.

THE AFRIL TEAM

STAFF AND TRUSTEES 2020-2021

Director: Katie Commons (February 2020 - September 2021), Sophie Wickham (from September 2021)
Food Bank Director: Helen Mason**; Education Coordinator:** Kieran Tang-Wright; **Advice and Advocacy Officer:** Shahazad Magrabi; **Food Bank Administrator:** Kate Charlotte Hashimi; **Rainbow Club Classroom Teachers:** Ruth Michaels; Ndaiziyei Murimba; Vita Baliaj; **Rainbow Club Subject Teachers:** Moses Olu Mason, Melanie Pearl Hering.
Board of Trustees: Gareth Redmond-King (Chair), Sonali Banerjee, Alexandra Braun-Woodbury, Divaughn Burnett, Margaret Ruth Gravelle, Michael Hargadon, Samantha Reyes Ronso, Ronald Tran.

We would not be able to deliver the breadth or quality of services we do without our **amazing team of volunteers.** Thank you to everyone who donates their time to AFRIL.

FOOD BANK VOLUNTEER

Jon Cooley on his experience volunteering with AFRIL

"I've been a regular volunteer driver with AFRIL since October 2020. I'd previously been a sponsor of AFRIL as I'd been very impressed by the great work they were undertaking with refugee families within the borough. The impulse to assist as a driver came about because of Covid, where in common with many people I felt a need to be more personally involved in activities benefiting the local community. To be fair I also had significantly more time on my hands, as my activities as a musician had hit a brick wall. So AFRIL became part of a portfolio of volunteering including assisting another local food bank and doing shifts at a vaccination centre. These provided a much needed structure to the week plus a source of social interaction, which for us retired folk ain't a bad thing.

There have been two main activities. On Fridays I have been collecting food from Ewart Hall Hub in Forest Hill, run by the great team of Laura, Louise, Joy, Everton and others, to take to St Peters in Lee for Angela's skilled collation. These comprise allocations from Felix Fareshare and Cultural Foods. The Skoda is usually packed to the roof. On Saturdays I have been an occasional delivery driver from St Peters to individual families round Lewisham and neighbouring boroughs. This is a great chance to very briefly meet AFRIL's clients, improve navigation skills and observe the progress of the seasons.

Looking back over this time two things stand out; firstly how time has flown by – I can't believe sixteen months have passed. Secondly, what a great bunch of people are involved in AFRIL and Ewart Hall. All totally committed, whatever the weather, and brilliant company."

Thank you to our funders, supporters, partners and all who have supported our work this year.

Church of the Good Shepherd with St Peter, Lee - our amazing food bank partners
St Saviour's School - our wonderful Rainbow Club partners
Southwark Law Centre - our fantastic Immigration Advice Service partners.

Over this period we have been **very grateful** for financial support from all our **individual and community fundraisers** including everyone who contributed to our Big Give campaigns, Blackheath Quakers, South-East London Humanists, Dulwich College and Prendergast School.

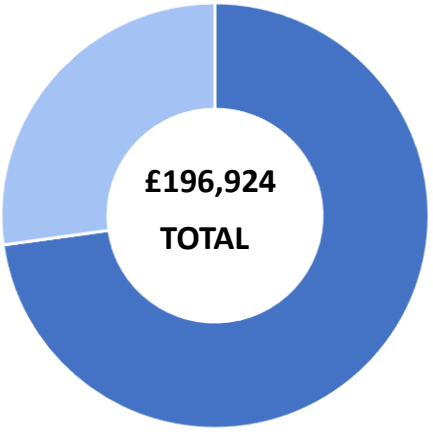
We would like to **thank our Trust Funders**: 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust, BBC Children in Need, The Childhood Trust, The Charities Aid Foundation, Centre for Investigative Journalism, Feminist Review Trust, Greater London Authority, Groundwork London - Grow Back Greener, Henry Smith Charity, Leathersellers Charitable Trust, London Churches Refugee Fund, National Lottery Communities Fund, The Respond and Adapt Programme, Trust for London and The Topinambour Trust.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

INCOME 2020-2021

£143,354 Restricted grants

£53,570 Unrestricted grants and donations



EXPENDITURE 2020-2021

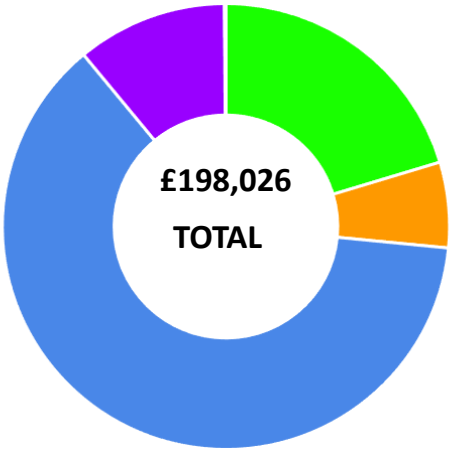
£123,715 Staff salaries (incl. NI, Pension)

£40,274 Programme costs
(Rainbow Club, Food Bank, Allotment, Advice, Immigration)

£12,281 Core costs
(incl. rent, IT, insurance, printing and phones, independent examiner and professional fees)

£21,540 Destitution Fund
(Food parcels, emergency payments, client grants)

£216 Fundraising costs



NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS: -£1,103
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD ON 31 MAY 2021: £140,292 (£45,958 restricted)

The financial statements shown are a summarised version of the financial statements for the year ended 31st May 2021, independently examined. The full statutory report can be obtained by contacting AFRIL at:

Action for Refugees in LewishamF3 Leemore Central Community Hub, Bonfield Road, Lewisham, SE13 5ES
Phone: 0208 297 4111; Email: info@afril.org.uk