Action For Refugees In Lewisham

IMPACT REPORT
2021-2022

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 12 majority part-time paid staff (3.5 full time equivalents) and around 80 active 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.

Our four core services

Helping Hands Food Bank Programme: 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: Supplementary Saturday education and wellbeing activities to children from 4-11 years old from asylum seeking, refugee, and migrant families.

Advice and Advocacy Service: AQS accredited advice and casework support in housing, income, and integration for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, as well as referral and signposting in immigration matters.

Immigration Project: In partnership with Southwark Law Centre, an experienced immigration solicitor works closely with AFRIL projects to provide in-depth quality immigration advice and representation to support clients to resolve the underlying immigration issues that lead to poverty and crisis.

Our Values and Approach

At AFRIL we:

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

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

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Letter from AFRIL's Chair

Welcome to AFRIL and thank you for reading our annual report. I know this organisation well and have been involved for more than six years now. Yet it still gives me enormous pleasure and pride in the organisation to read the story we tell you each year in this document. It is a story of a phenomenal and committed group of people - staff, volunteers, funders and wider group of supporters - offering their time, passion and skills to support and empower a growing number of people whose circumstances place them amongst the most vulnerable in our society.

At a time of multiple interconnected global crises and worsening knock-on effects in the UK on the cost of living and strained public services, nothing has got any easier over the last year. People fleeing persecution, war and other life-threatening situations, as well as those emigrating to be with family or to seek new opportunities, are confronted by those pressures more starkly than most. On top of which, the UK political and media discourse around migration can make for a more poisonous, unwelcoming and even dangerous situation for those people.

But here in Lewisham, a growing group of phenomenal and committed people - called Action for Refugees in Lewisham - is working hard, and ever more creatively, to welcome, support and empower refugees and vulnerable migrants in our community. AFRIL is a core part of making real Lewisham's commitment to be a borough of sanctuary.

I could not be prouder of the work that this team does. Thank you to every single one of them. Thank you to those leading the core services - our Food bank and allotment, the Rainbow Club, and our advice and advocacy service - as well as the brilliant and committed team of staff and volunteers delivering them, and to those in the centre of the organisation not just running but improving how we do it all. Thank you to those who fund all of this - the trusts, foundations, businesses, individuals, and everyone else who has made a contribution. Thank you to the brilliant team of trustees who work hard to support the governance and support the staff and volunteer team so well. And thank you to our superb director, Sophie, who is taking AFRIL from strength to strength.

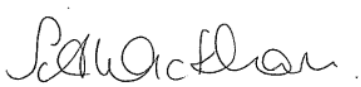
Read on for the full story of AFRIL's year - of what we've done, why and how we do it - to give a clear sense too of what we will carry on doing to maintain and grow that support and empowerment to refugees and vulnerable migrants. And thank you in advance for your support for that work over the coming year too.

Gareth Redmond-King
Chair, Board of Trustees

Letter from AFRIL's Director

This time last year I was writing to you about the year that changed our world. Reflecting now on the year that followed, the volume of change seems more suited to several years. It started with schools having only just reopened and strict limitations on meeting people still in place. Like much of the sector in 2021, AFRIL was adapting and firefighting. We remodelled, expanded provision, and kept our clients safe. Transitioning back to face-to-face provision, juggling changing health restrictions, responding to significant migration patterns with new global conflicts with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan. Both very close to home in different ways, the UK government launched particular safe routes for a limited number of people fleeing these conflicts. The public response was overwhelming and we would like to thank our supporters and funders old and new who felt compelled to help. AFRIL welcomes safe legal routes for migration, however the current options are incredibly limited and as a result most people are still forced into dangerous journeys. We added our voice to calls on government to extend these safe routes to refugees fleeing other conflicts and persecution. Instead, the British government passed the Nationality and Borders Act. Creating a two-tier system for people seeking sanctuary, significantly eroding peoples' rights and safe routes, and making possible the horrendous policy of outsourcing our refugee protection obligations to Rwanda. AFRIL opposes these developments and will continue to support people affected by them. Finally, we closed the year with rising inflation. It has been quite the journey, but thanks to the incredible dedication of staff, volunteers, supporters, funders, and partners, AFRIL has both managed it and thrived.

Rainbow Club managed a smooth transition back to face to face schooling. As expected, children were below their expected national curriculum attainment level and those living in particularly challenging circumstances had regressed. Our outstanding teachers worked hard with children to catch them up and the joy at the return to face-to-face Saturday school was palpable. With lockdowns easing, we saw a concerning increase in safeguarding issues, families being made street homeless, and those in temporary accommodation being moved several miles at short notice. Securing support from local authorities with hybrid or remote working models was particularly challenging. Our Advice and Advocacy Service delivered even more crisis casework than the previous year to support these families, most notably in housing and homelessness. AFRIL's food bank supported more people than ever before with regular culturally appropriate food. Our immigration project in partnership with Southwark Law Centre has continued to be a game changer, enabling more people to resolve the underlying immigration issues at the root cause of their extreme hardship. As a result of working with AFRIL this year 39% of clients improved their income with an additional 35% supported to maintain a regular income; 30% improved their housing status with an additional 33% actively supported to maintain their housing; and despite Home Office delays, 23% have improved their immigration status and 54% maintained their status e.g., through applications for extending Limited Leave to Remain. We launched Together We Thrive, our women led empowerment network, and look forward to developing this work over the coming year. Overall, in 2021-22 we provided holistic support to 90% more people than the previous year and as the year closed secured funding to increase our small staff team to continue to meet this challenge. I would like to personally thank each and every member of staff and volunteer for your dedication, care and commitment to making this happen. I would like to thank AFRIL's Trustees for maintaining our good governance and in particular Gareth Redmond-King for highly effective leadership and support as Chair. Finally, and most importantly I would like to thank the families that we work with for allowing us the honour of walking alongside you during this difficult time.



Sophie Wickham
Director

The people we support

The people we support come from a range of backgrounds and a range of countries. They are people whose immigration status is a prominent feature in their lives, but who should not be solely defined by that immigration status. They are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, friends, community members, volunteers, and employees.

Their immigration status does however have an adverse impact on their lives, particularly in affecting their ability to access housing and income and to integrate into the community. In this respect, the people we support fall into three broad categories: recognised refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants who fall outside of 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 are now on a longer human rights based route to settlement due to having children in the UK.

Immigration, housing and income

A person's immigration status affects their rights. Many people with insecure immigration statuses have no right to work, no right to rent, and have either no recourse to public funds (NRFP) or receive a very small amount of money from the government. This results in many becoming destitute, and even homeless.

75.6% of the people we supported this year had an insecure immigration status when they joined AFRIL. This primarily included those who have complex immigration problems, human rights issues or outstanding protection needs but have had their asylum claim refused (17.3%), those in the asylum process (16.7%), and people with Limited Leave to Remain that expires after 2.5 years unless renewed in time at a high cost (28.6%).

UK immigration policy has been becoming increasingly hostile as migrants, particularly refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants, are often the scapegoat for wider societal issues. This year saw the introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act which includes policies that further complicate the UK immigration system, increases the risk of refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants becoming destitute, and heighten fears of detention and deportation.

This year, 66% of people were without settled housing when they approached AFRIL: 41.3% were living in insecure or temporary housing and 24.6% were homeless, including those who were street homeless, and those who were staying temporarily/sofa surfing with friends or acquaintances. 8.7% were living in asylum support accommodation, most in a local hotel set up as initial accommodation. Currently, people seeking asylum in our area are having to stay in this type of accommodation for over a year whilst they wait for a decision on their case from the Home Office. As has been highlighted by the media, new arrivals to the UK are often experiencing dreadful conditions with a small amount of space and privacy, no right to work and little income from the government. Those who have been provided with full-board accommodation, who have evidenced that they cannot afford to meet their essential living needs, should receive a weekly allowance of £8.24 to cover all other expenses e.g., toiletries, clothes and travel.

On joining AFRIL, 70% of our members were on an extremely low income. A further 27.9% had no income whatsoever and were reliant on charities, family and friends. These figures are likely to increase due to the rising cost of living because refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants are some of the groups of people most affected by the crisis. Many were destitute before the crisis began and, despite the admirable resilience of many of our members, the coming months are likely to be extremely challenging.

Our impact in numbers

People we supported

171 families supported

494 individuals supported

293 children supported

Confidence, wellbeing and community

90% wellbeing improved

88% confidence improved

82% feel less isolated

93% feel part of a community

Immigration, income and housing

79% (more) secure immigration status

74% (more) secure income status

63% (more) secure housing status

Services delivered

1414 food parcels delivered

93% feel happy at Rainbow Club

65 advice cases resolved

31 families represented by an immigration solicitor

Our impact

The number of families we supported this year increased significantly - 91% compared to 2020/21. This year, we supported 494 people, including 293 children, from 171 families compared to 259 people last year from 119 families. This increase shows the very real impact that increasingly hostile immigration policies, the legacy of the Covid-19 restrictions, and the current cost of living crisis are having on refugees, asylum seekers and people with other insecure migration statuses. This has resulted in our services being in extremely high demand with the need for them only increasing. The Immigration Project increased by 200% partially due to increased demand and partially because 2021/22 was the first full year of this service.

Increase in families supported compared to 2020/21

Rainbow Club	+11.9%
Food bank	+6.5%
Advice & Advocacy	+45%
Immigration Advice	+200%

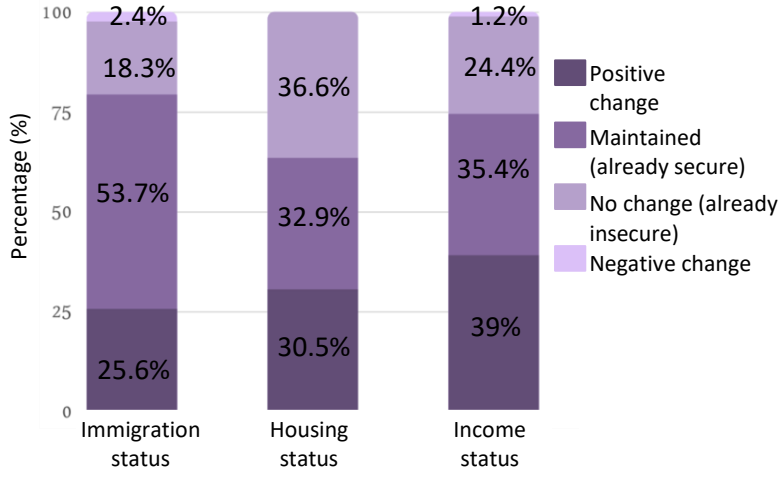
We support people holistically which means many of the families we support access more than one of our services. A common example of this is that families who are supported by the food bank to meet their crisis needs are often referred to the Advice and Advocacy service and our Immigration Project to understand and resolve the underlying issues that caused them to be in crisis. This year, our food bank supported 207 individuals, including 128 children, from 66 families, our Rainbow Club supplementary school supported 111 children from 66 families, our Advice and Advocacy service supported 153 individuals, including 90 children, from 58 families, and our Immigration Project supported 77 individuals, including 47 children, from 30 families.

Immigration, housing and income status

Our Advice and Advocacy Service and Immigration Project work with our members to improve the security of their immigration, housing and income.

Changes to immigration status often take a long time due to delays at the Home Office. Since joining AFRIL, 25.6% have seen an improvement in their immigration status this year. Most often, this is a change from no status to Limited Leave to Remain or Refugee Status, or sometimes Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Change in immigration, housing and income status since joining AFRIL.



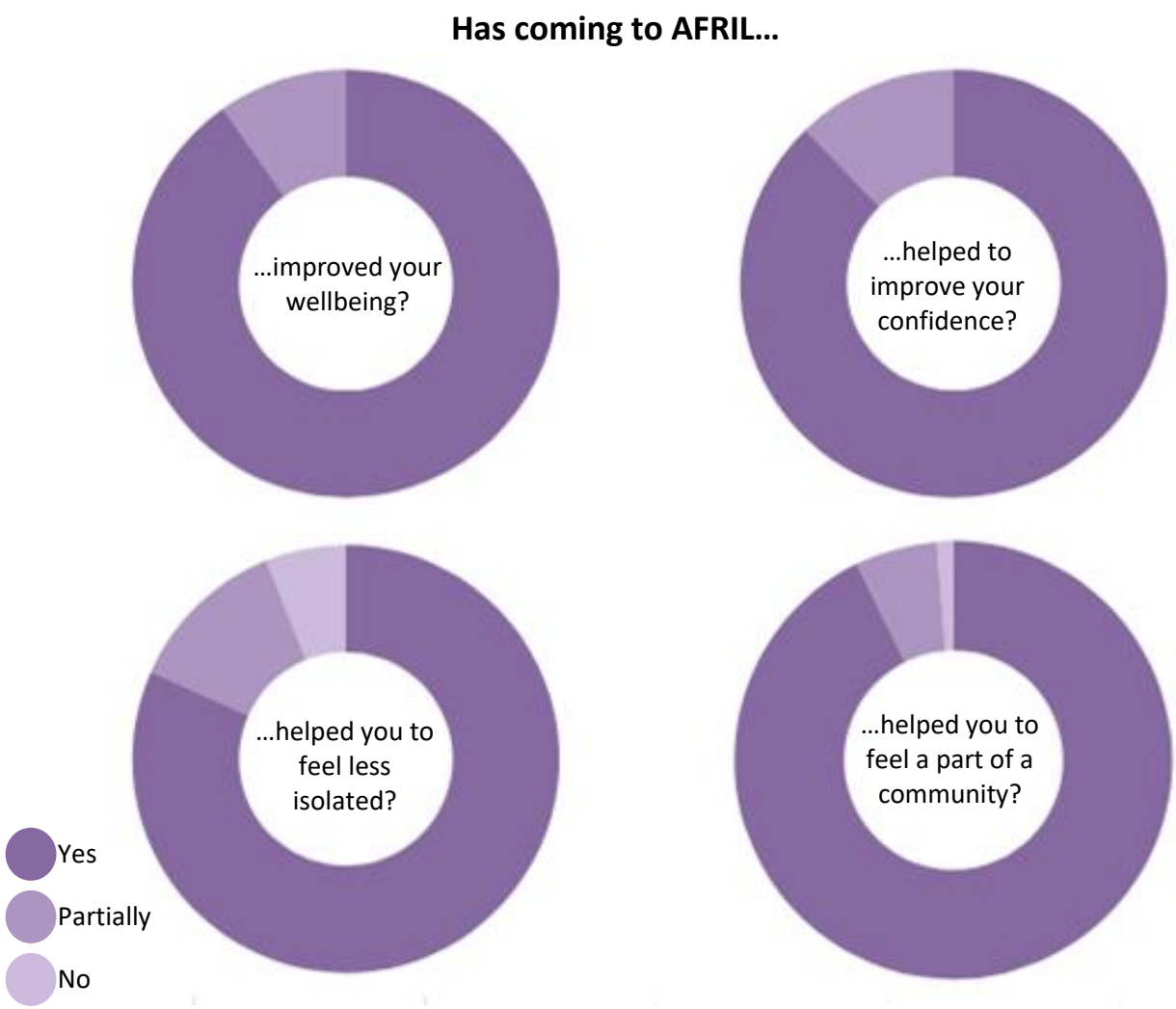
After working with AFRIL this year, 30.5% of families are living in more secure accommodation and 39% have more secure income. These improvements are most commonly a change from living hand to mouth and relying on friends and family for housing and income, to securing local authority housing, often through social services, and receiving welfare benefits or other statutory payments whilst they await permission to work.

Wellbeing, confidence and community

Moving to a new country involves leaving behind family, friends, community, and careers. The people we support are fleeing unsafe situations and have moved to the UK to seek sanctuary and safety. Unfortunately, once they arrive in the UK, they are faced with the harsh reality of the UK's hostile immigration policies which frequently result in those seeking sanctuary becoming marginalised and at risk of destitution. Usually, the people we support do not speak English as a first language so have to navigate the immigration, education and healthcare system in an unfamiliar language, all whilst adapting to life in the UK and caring for their children.

These experiences often negatively impact the wellbeing and confidence of the people we support and can leave them feeling isolated. AFRIL provides services to support our members to improve their wellbeing and confidence, reduce feelings of isolation, and help them to feel part of a community. This is a priority throughout all our core services and is enhanced through our two food bank wellbeing projects: the Allotment of Refuge and art@home group.

In our annual survey, we asked our members about AFRIL's impact on their wellbeing, confidence, feelings of isolation and community. 100% said coming to AFRIL had improved their wellbeing and confidence, 93.9% said AFRIL has helped them to feel less isolated, and 98.8% said AFRIL has helped them to feel a part of a community.



What our members say…

"He [my son] is happy, making friends. It's helping with studying."

Rainbow Club parent

"I'm happy, I'm relaxed, I'm not scared. Everything is good."

Immigration Project client

"Best advice ever help me getting a new home for my family."

Advice & Advocacy client

"It is holding me"

Foodbank member

"Thank you to AFRIL because they've been a very big support to me. Without them I don't think I'd have been able to get to where I am. I feel at home when I go to AFRIL."

AFRIL member

The Food Bank Programme

Fresh food donated to the food bank

AFRIL's Food Bank Programme consists of the Helping Hands food bank, the Allotment of Refuge and a range of well-being activities including our regular art@home group.

Over the last year, the programme has supported some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of our local community. We are one of the few food banks dedicated to supporting refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants with no recourse to public funds. The majority of families we support reside in Lewisham, Bromley, Greenwich and Southwark. All the families registered with the food bank have experienced forced migration and sought sanctuary in the UK.

The Helping Hands Food Bank

The Helping Hands food bank runs on Saturdays in conjunction with the volunteer team from Good Shepherd St Peter's church, Lee.

Food bank support begins with weekly food parcels including fresh fruit and vegetables and toiletries. Donations come from FELIX Fareshare, Lee Greens, Church donations and individuals, supplemented by core food purchases by AFRIL and St Peter's. AFRIL's Allotment of Refuge also provides a fresh yield in season that goes into our food parcels.

This year we distributed 1,414 food parcels to 207 individuals from 66 families, including 128 children. We believe that the food is essential, but that it is just the beginning; the welcome, consistent concern, and wrap-around service is what clients take away alongside a parcel of healthy food.

"The friendliness, welcoming and making someone to know, you have family and friends somewhere. They are awesome, loving and caring for everyone, well appreciated."

Food bank member

At the beginning of this year, we were still in lockdown, the church building was still closed as the food bank venue, and our wonderful team of volunteer cyclists and drivers were still making doorstep deliveries to over 35 families every week.

A volunteer delivering fresh food parcels.

It has been a long journey to reopening our food bank. In September 2021, as other food banks began to reopen their doors, we also began inviting our members back to making personal collections at the food bank, whilst following COVID safe protocols, such as families staying in the carpark. This allowed the food bank family of staff, clients and volunteers to re-connect in person after 15 months. Several families were unable to collect food themselves due to circumstances associated with their health or disability, so we retained a smaller team of volunteer cyclists and drivers to guarantee a delivery to them.

By November 2021 clients were able to come inside in the warmth of the church hall, to sit (still socially distancing), to wait for their food parcels. [In October 2022 we reopened our drop-in and cafe; such important elements of the food bank concept and wellbeing welcome.]

"AFRIL gives you something to stand on. You are not standing by yourself."

Food bank member

The return to collections in September 2021 coincided with a review of each family's circumstances and conversations about those whose immigration, housing and financial statuses were more secure than before or during the first lockdown and were ready to transition to other community food banks in a managed way.

As part of our response to destitution and financial hardship, the food bank team has continued to partner with GRACE AID charity to provide a dignified referral and appointment service for food bank clients needing clothing and shoes. We also received a variety of 'little extras' as donations from individuals and organisations supportive of AFRIL's work. These have included toiletries, face masks, cot blankets, sim cards, and books. We are very grateful for all these donations as they give that little bit of help to make what little money people have go further and the practicalities of life slightly less stressful.

Allotment harvest for the foodbank

Prior to the cost of living crisis, many of the food bank members were already experiencing marginalisation and poverty, often living on informal networks, casual work and ad hoc meals whilst awaiting Home Office decisions. The rising prices have exacerbated these existing inequalities and increased demand significantly.

This unprecedented increase in demand has resulted in an increased number of enquiries from new families experiencing extreme food poverty, existing families staying for longer, and there being fewer community resources to refer existing families onto. By the end of the year, we were at capacity with a waiting list and were operating at 200% of pre-pandemic levels.

"[The food bank] has been helpful to me and my child, we get lots of food variety and whenever we need support. They are friendly in their manner and make me feel safe."

Food bank member

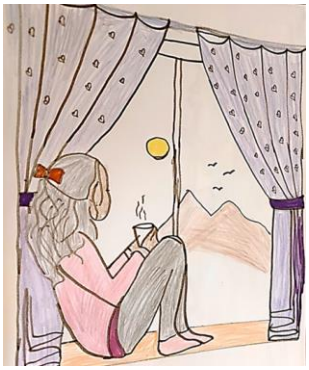
Despite these challenges the food bank team remains hopeful and positive. The food bank staff and volunteers are resilient, innovative, and passionate and the team is well-networked locally through the Lewisham Food Group Network and nationally as a member of the Independent Food Agency Network (IFAN) and FELIX.

The art@home group

Art@home is AFRIL's fortnightly art group, developed as our first online well-being activity at the request of clients, to connect families with other families during Covid-19 lockdowns. We have an average of 10 participants per session, including 6 children. This class enables parents and children to spend quality time together. This is important as, for the rest of the week, the parents have to focus on practical head of household work.

This year, we held 25 sessions including 3 trips to art galleries. We have observed that mutual peer support has developed and during discussions about art, children and parents have had opportunities to share more about their lives, experiences and tools for resilience in a mutually supportive environment. This year we have developed our programme to include 1 trip per term to a local gallery. So far, we have visited Dulwich Picture Gallery and the Gerald Moore Gallery and have plans to visit the Horniman Museum. We are excited that we have been invited to hold a public exhibition of the group's artwork at the Gerald Moore Gallery in February 2023.

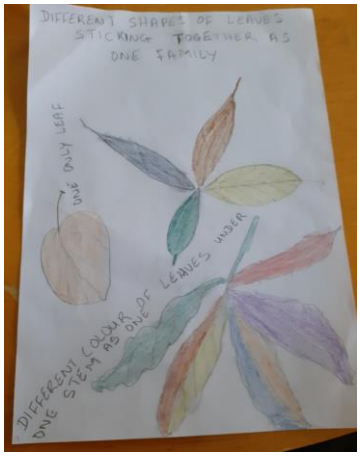
Many thanks to Elaine, our Art Group leader who has led this group since February 2020. She holds a special place in the hearts of the parents and children because of her care and kindness. Through this group, members have shared joy, concern, and sadness. We have laughed and learned together, surprised ourselves and shared tools of resilience, and personal belief.

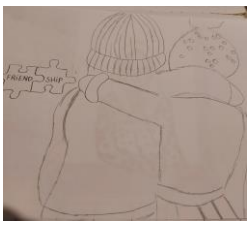


"Art takes you off from things going on in your life."

"My Friday art group is my time. My children know it, … great family time for me and my children. It helped us during the covid-19 and up till date."

Art@home member





"We are able to make anything and feel part of a big group, valued. Any time there is support, even those who don't know how to draw."

Art@home member

Allotment of Refuge

Our Allotment of Refuge at One Tree Hill in Honor Oak Park is an established project. In 2020, we turned a derelict plot into a re-loved, established, and integrated community of gardening, calm, and welcome for refugee and migrant families, local people, volunteers, plot holders and their families.

Rose joined our staff team in March 2022 as our Allotment Gardener. Her knowledge of growing crops and experience of working with people has helped her establish our Tuesday gardening group and Friday harvest sessions. She has grown the allotment volunteer team and worked with them to increase the yield from our plot. Following a survey with food bank members about their favourite fruit and vegetables, the team have grown culturally appropriate foods. The allotment currently provides a regular harvest and contribution of salad, vegetables, and herbs to the AFRIL food bank.

In May 2022 we began a conversation with a journalist which led to a feature about the wellbeing aspects of the allotment and the impact of regular gardening on the lives of some of AFRIL's food bank clients in the October '22 edition of Saga magazine. You can read the article here: Growing together: the AFRIL allotment - Saga

The allotment is also a great outdoor classroom and workshop space; we held 14 art, nature and food growing workshops for 127 children and in addition hosted our AFRIL summer celebration during Refugee Week at the allotment.

A huge thanks to the plot holders and members of One Tree Hill Allotment Society for making AFRIL part of their family, widening their gates, continuing to welcome AFRIL families and children to their events, and supporting all our plans.

Thank you very much to our thoughtful, supportive, and resourceful volunteers in the food bank and allotment teams for another year of care, kindness, innovation, and resilience. We could not do what we do without you.

"My children experience and know how the food we eat are grown and how to prepare some of them."

Allotment member

"Close feel to nature, destressing helps my situation. I feel a part of a community."

Allotment member

"New environment for my children to enjoy time with their friends."

Allotment member

Rainbow Club

The Rainbow Club Saturday Supplementary school supports children from asylum seeking, refugee, and vulnerable migrant families. The school runs every Saturday morning during term time and children receive English, Maths, Music, Art and Sport lessons. The school is split into 3 classes, spanning multiple year groups: Passion Fruit class (ages 4-6), Starfruit class (ages 6-8), and Mango class (ages 8-11).

Over the 2021-22 academic year, Rainbow Club was attended by 111 children from 66 families, and from 17 different countries. Our class teachers were supported by 29 volunteer teaching assistants and 9 youth alumni volunteers. This year we were delighted to welcome our new art teacher, Sadegh, and sport teacher, Daniel, to our teaching term, both bringing great enthusiasm and creativity, making the sessions both fun and educational in equal measure.

This year was our first full year of in-person teaching since the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020. Covid-19 restrictions impacted child education and development and it was noticeable that many Rainbow Club students had regressed academically. Returning to regular and consistent learning has helped to return children to their expected academic levels. This year, we provided 150 hours of English and Maths lessons, 60 hours of music lessons, 30 hours of art lessons, and 20 hours of sport lessons.

In addition to lessons, extra-curricular activities form an important part of our provision, especially as 87% of our students this year had never or rarely visited museums before coming to Rainbow Club. Further lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions allowed us to run school trips to the National Maritime Museum and Horniman Museum. The children were also able to attend several holiday workshops at AFRIL's allotment, an entertaining performance by the Flying Seagull Project, a drama workshop with Lewisham Youth Theatre, and a 3-day song-writing workshop with Fairbeats. During the song-writing workshops, the children wrote and performed a song called 'Hold Your Head Up High' which you can listen to here.

Differences in English language abilities can create challenges for children at school, both socially and academically. For example, this year 52% of the parents spoke little/no English, making supporting their children with schoolwork a challenge. Rainbow Club provides a space for these children to receive this support. In addition to this, 39% of children spoke English as an additional language (EAL), and so received more one-to-one and small group support from teaching assistants and focused on English acquisition.

We saw an increase in pupils with SEN (Special Educational Needs), both statemented and those awaiting assessments. Additional SEN training was provided for our teachers and teaching assistants by Drumbeat Outreach and Autism Education Trust, to improve awareness and understanding of how best to support each pupil.

Sports day at Rainbow Club

Drama workshop with Lewisham Youth Theatre

Rainbow Club continues to be an enriching place for children to grow, not only academically, but also socially. In our end of year pupil questionnaires, 93% of children said they felt happy at Rainbow Club, 80% felt their confidence had improved, and 90% felt their social skills had improved and they had made new friends. Furthermore, in our annual survey, 100% of Rainbow Club parents said that their child benefited from and enjoyed Rainbow Club.

"the best thing in my life"
Rainbow Club student

Our parent forums, run by Creating Ground, returned to in-person meetings in September. The forums are held once a month and provide a space for us to further engage with parents. This year, they included workshops on wellbeing, creative activities, and child behaviour. The forums are a space for parents to meet other parents, safely discuss the issues they are currently facing and give feedback on Rainbow Club and AFRIL.

In June 2021, our parent project, Discovery Stories, came to an end. This project was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and explored themes of culture, childhood, identity, and tradition. It resulted in the parents working with Creative Ground to publish a book titled 'Remember the Child of Whom You Are', a reference to an old Yoruba proverb. The book includes stories, reflections, recipes, games, songs, poems, and traditions from the parents' childhoods that they would like to pass on to their children. It was printed and shared out to partner organisations, museums, libraries, and AFRIL families. The book is available to read here.

"Helping them with reading and writing, that was the most worrying for me and now I'm so happy that I joined Rainbow Club. Even their behaviour was absolutely changed."

Rainbow Club parent

A huge thank you to all our partners and collaborators who we've worked with over the past year at Rainbow Club…

St Saviours R.C. Primary School,
Fairbeats Music,
Creating Ground,
National Maritime Museum,
Horniman Museum,
Flying Seagull Project,
Lewisham Youth Theatre &
Dulwich College

Summer workshop at the allotment

Elizabeth's story

Elizabeth (not her real name) and her mother arrived at AFRIL in an extremely difficult living situation. They were staying in a spare room owned by an acquaintance but were not allowed to stay in the house unsupervised.

As a first step, we helped them to secure more stable housing, started supporting them through our Helping Hands Food bank, and began helping them to regularise their immigration status through AFRIL's Immigration Project with Southwark Law Centre.

Elizabeth then joined Rainbow Club. She was in Year 2 and was performing significantly below the level expected for her year group, both academically and socially. It was clear she had experienced significant disruption to her education and development. She was therefore kept in the younger class, where we were able to focus on helping her to improve her phonics and reading ability. She received additional one-to-one support from our teachers and teaching assistants, and she worked hard every single week.

Over the past year, Elizabeth has had one of the best attendance records in the school, thanks to her mother's commitment and dedication. By the end of the year, she was reading at a secure level for her year group and has now been moved up to the next class.

The family have recently been granted leave to remain and are now able to access mainstream benefits. They are being transitioned from our food bank and their living situation has vastly improved. Elizabeth continues to attend Rainbow Club and is a joy to teach.

Child pictured is not "Elizabeth".

Advice and Advocacy Service

Our clients face a range of practical difficulties arising from their 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.

The key issues for our clients are access to appropriate income and accommodation. Almost all 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 and Advocacy Service advocates to Social Services to conduct child in need assessments and provide emergency accommodation, provide destitution payments and grant applications for food and essential items, makes referrals for Immigration Advice and support for clients to request 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 housing, employment and training opportunities and access specialised debt and legal advice.

This year, our Advice Service supported 153 individuals from 58 families, including 90 children. We resolved 65 cases, including homeless families securing safe housing and families accessing a regular income and healthcare. 100% of Advice Service clients have made their own decisions, supported by AFRIL, to resolve the practical problems in their own lives. In addition, 9 clients were provided with detailed information to resolve issues themselves.

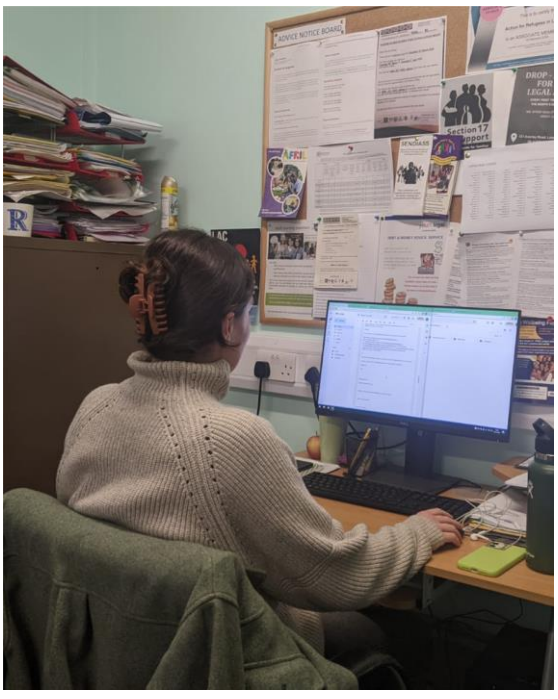
"It help me to know my right[s] and what to do."

Advice service client

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. This means that we support our clients from dependence to independence. Our annual survey results demonstrate the impact of this approach; 76.7% of advice service clients said that the advice service had helped them to understand UK systems and their entitlements, with a further 16.3% saying it had helped partially; 74.4% felt more confident to deal with problems after using the advice service, and 14% felt a little more confident; and 69.8% said the advice service had helped them to plan more for the future, with an additional 18.6% saying it had partially helped.

"Best advice ever help me getting a new [safe] home for my family"

Advice service client



A member of our Advice & Advocacy Team

We launched a busy fortnightly outreach advice surgery in our local initial asylum accommodation, which has been well received by both clients and the accommodation provider. After working in the hotel, we discovered that there had been no new arrivals for some time because of overcrowding [this has since changed in 2022-2023] and the average time that families were in the hotel was 1 year+. However, since the accommodation is not suitable or set up for long term habitation, residents were experiencing a plethora of other, more time intensive issues. We therefore did casework with residents to move their cases on, raising requests to move on grounds of overcrowding or health, and have developed further links with specialised legal representatives. Many residents were still not receiving the small payment for full board asylum seekers and so were not able to access services that were more than a walk away. We supported people to make applications for these payments and shared relevant local resources.

"Feel more motivated, confidence and not alone when talking to advice service team."

Advice service client

In April we launched our Together We Thrive project, thanks to the support of the National Lottery Communities Fund. The project is a recognition of the capability and strength of the women who are members of AFRIL, many of whom are single mothers raising families in very difficult circumstances. It is a women led network, providing opportunities for members to gain new skills, receive and give peer support, and in turn increase their confidence and feelings of connectedness to a community. We are delivering interactive workshops that are co-produced with our members with the aim of increasing understanding of how UK systems work to enabling families to thrive in a new and challenging environment. Sessions include how families can make small budgets go further; understanding the UK immigration system; employment, training and volunteering in the UK; and how to communicate effectively with public bodies.

Mia's story

Mia (not her real name) and her four children had been in the UK for many years and were living with a friend in Lewisham. Mia had limited leave to remain but two of her children did not.

When her young child developed cancer, Mia was forced to stop working as they required constant care and hospital appointments. We supported her to get help to lift the NRPF restriction so that she could access universal credit.

Then Mia and her family were made homeless. We made an application to the local authority and advocated for emergency accommodation. The Council erroneously closed her case twice before providing accommodation one night at a time. Each morning the family were told to leave the accommodation and waited outside until they were eventually told at 8pm that they could return. The children became tired and upset. We supported them every day.

We sought legal advice and were told that a legal challenge would only be possible after a month or if the Council formally refused to house the family. We kept up daily advocacy, supplemented the family's income with food bank donations, and secured a grant to pay for hospital travel and food. After one month, a housing solicitor took the case and the Council provided temporary accommodation.

Our immigration solicitor is now providing free representation to regularise each family member's immigration status. Mia has asked to volunteer in AFRIL's advice service to help others get the same support.

Immigration Project

Our Immigration Project is a partnership with Southwark Law Centre (SLC) and enables AFRIL clients to access free, high quality immigration advice and representation. SLC provides specialist legal advice in Southwark and Lewisham for people who cannot afford to pay. It specialises in discrimination, employment, housing, planning, welfare rights, and immigration/asylum law.

There are four main challenges faced by our clients and other refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants in the UK when seeking immigration advice: (1) the provision of immigration advice does not meet currently meet the demand; (2) many of AFRIL's clients are excluded from receiving legal aid and do not have the income to pay for the advice they need; (3) sometimes individuals exploit asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants seeking immigration advice by charging them high prices for poor advice; and (4) often, our clients find it hard to trust organisations and disclose their immigration status because they fear detention, deportation and family breakup.

These issues are UK-wide and require reform and regulation to be resolved. Our Immigration Project aims to counter them on a local level by enabling AFRIL clients to access free, high quality immigration advice and representation from an experienced, trusted, and qualified immigration solicitor. This enables the people we support to understand and resolve the complex issues that they and their families face relating to their immigration status that are at the root of poverty.

This financial year was the first full year of the project following its launch in January 2021. The project provided legal representation from an experienced solicitor to 31 clients and their 47 dependents and assessment, one-off advice and assistance to more than 10 additional clients.

We support clients to submit leave to remain applications to the Home Office. Delays in the Home Office mean that the majority of our clients are still waiting to find out the outcome of their application. At the time of writing, 3 grants of leave to remain had been made and no clients having been refused.

"They helped with my immigration and housing problem when I needed them"

Immigration Project client

The high cost of application fees are a barrier for our clients when regularising their status. Many of our clients and their dependents have Limited Leave to Remain on the human rights based 10-year route to settlement. This means that each family member on this route must apply to extend their leave every 2.5 years for 10 years. If not granted a fee waiver, the cost for each adult application is currently £2,627.20 and for each child application £2,242.20. This year we represented 6 clients to make a fee waiver application to the Home Office alongside the application for extension of leave. To date, 100% of fee waiver applications have been successful.

In our annual survey, 55.2% of respondents said that their housing or income had improved since using the immigration service and all clients with applications submitted to the Home Office were able to maintain their accommodation entitlement as a result. As well as helping to resolve our client's cases, the immigration project supports them to feel empowered through understanding immigration law in the UK and their rights. This helps the people we support to identify if they are receiving poor quality advice from other services and advocate for themselves. All immigration clients confirmed

following the advice provided to them that they understood their own immigration status and the restrictions that this entails. 82.8% of annual survey respondents said that the Immigration Project had helped them to understand the immigration system in the UK more generally, and 17.2% said it had helped a little. Furthermore, 100% said they would recommend the service to a friend.

Another objective in the second half of the project is to develop and deliver second tier advice and capacity building for the wider sector and AFRIL staff and clients. This has resulted in stronger links between AFRIL and SLC, who now conduct AFRIL casework file reviews; significant benefits to clients who are now able to resolve underlying issues that lead to poverty and marginalisation; and increased knowledge on immigration law and policy for AFRIL staff, meaning they are better equipped to identify immigration issues amongst their clients and make appropriate referrals. We have identified mainstream and specialist organisations who are in need of and keen to access capacity building in this area. In the 2022/23 financial year, the Immigration Solicitor will be delivering online training sessions to voluntary organisations, community groups and other local stakeholders. The topics identified so far are an introductory overview of Immigration Law for non-OISC practitioners and the potential implications of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022.

"He made me understand the UK system, rules and regulation"

Immigration Project client

This year was turbulent in terms of changes to immigration law, the most prominent change being the Nationality and Borders Act. The bill was introduced to the House of Commons in July 2021 meaning that, although it did not become law until June 2022, it dominated the headlines regarding immigration law for most of this financial year. We are yet to see the full ramifications of this act but expect that the policies will further erode the ability of people seeking sanctuary to regularise their immigration status and improve their lives sustainably. There is more need than ever for good quality free immigration advice to support people in need.

The AFRIL Team 2021/22

Since the beginning of the 2021/22 financial year our team has expanded in response to increased demand on our services. We have also welcomed new staff members since the end of the financial year who have been involved in preparing this report, with particular thanks to Jessica Hughes.

Director: Sophie Wickham (since 09/2021); Katie Commons (02/2020-09/2021)

Food bank Team

Food bank Director: Helen Mason
Food bank Administrator: Louise Vangheluwe
Allotment Gardener: Rose Cowling (since 03/2021)

Rainbow Club Team

Education Coordinator - Kieran Tang-Wright
Passion Fruit Class Teacher - Ruth Michaels
Starfruit Class Teacher - Vita Baliaj
Mango Class Teacher - Ndaiziyei Murimba
Art Leader - Sadegh Aleahmad (since 09/2021); Melanie Hering (until 07/2021)
Sport Teacher - Daniel Espinosa (since 11/2021); Olu Mason (until 07/2021)

Advice and Advocacy Service Team

Advice and Advocacy Officer: Shahrazad Magrabi (until 08/2021); Chloe White (since 12/2022; Bevlyn Annokye (since 12/2022)

Immigration Project Team

Southwark Law Centre Immigration Advice Partnership Solicitor : Ed O'Driscoll

Office Team:

Administration & Monitoring Officer: Jess Hughes (since April 2021)

Trustees:

Gareth Redmond-King (Chair)
Margaret Ruth Gravelle
Divaughn Burnett
Ron Tran
Kathleen Commons (appointed 01/10/2021)
Lorna Barron (appointed 09/05/2022)
Neil Walker (appointed 09/05/2022)
Kirsty Wildgoose (appointed 09/05/2022)
Karleen Richards (appointed 12/09/2022)

Volunteers

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

Our supporters…

Thank you to all the individuals, community groups, corporates, and trusts and foundations that have supported AFRIL during 2021-2022. Your grants and donations have played an enormous part in enabling us to support over 260 families this year. Thank you to all those listed below, and those who wish to stay anonymous…

AB Charitable Trust

BBC Children in Need

Blackheath Quakers

The Henry Smith Charity

Dulwich College

Lewisham Local

National Lottery Communities Fund

One Tree Hill Allotment Society

Robbins Family Charitable Fund

South East London Humanists

St Peter's & The Good Shepherd Church, Lee.

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust

The Childhood Trust

The Hillcote Trust

The Leathersellers Foundation

The Northwick Trust

The Topinambour Trust

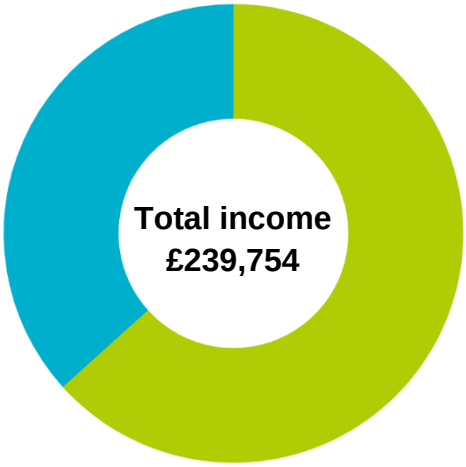
Trust For London

Financial statement

Income

AFRIL's total income for the 2021/22 financial year was £239,754, a 22% increase compared to the 2020/21 financial year. Grants from Trusts and Foundations made up 74% with the remainder from individual donations and community fundraising.

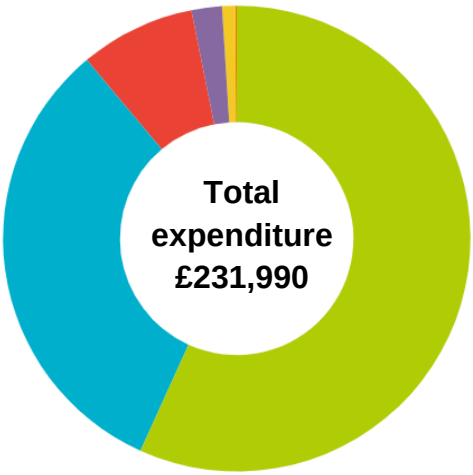
- **Unrestricted:** £87,992
- **Restricted:** £151,762



Expenditure

Our total expenditure for the 2021/22 financial year was £231,990.

- Staff costs - staff salaries incl. NI and pensions (£131,673)
- Programme costs - Rainbow Club, Food Bank, Advice and Advocacy Service, and Immigration Project (£74,586)
- Core costs - includes rent, IT, insurance, print, phones, training and professional fees (£18,507)
- Destitution Fund - emergency payments and client grants (£4,876)
- Governance costs (£2,125)
- Fundraising costs (£223)



Net movement in funds: £7,764

Funds brought forward on 31st May 2022: £148,056 (£35,854 restricted)

This year we appointed a new independent examiner, Warner Wilde Limited, to prepare our accounts. 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 visiting the charity commission website. Alternatively, please contact AFRIL using the contact details below.

Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL)
F3 Leemore Central Community Hub
Bonfield Road
Lewisham
SE13 5ES
Tel: 0208 297 4111 Email: info@afril.org.uk
Charity number: 1116344
Company number: 058195