

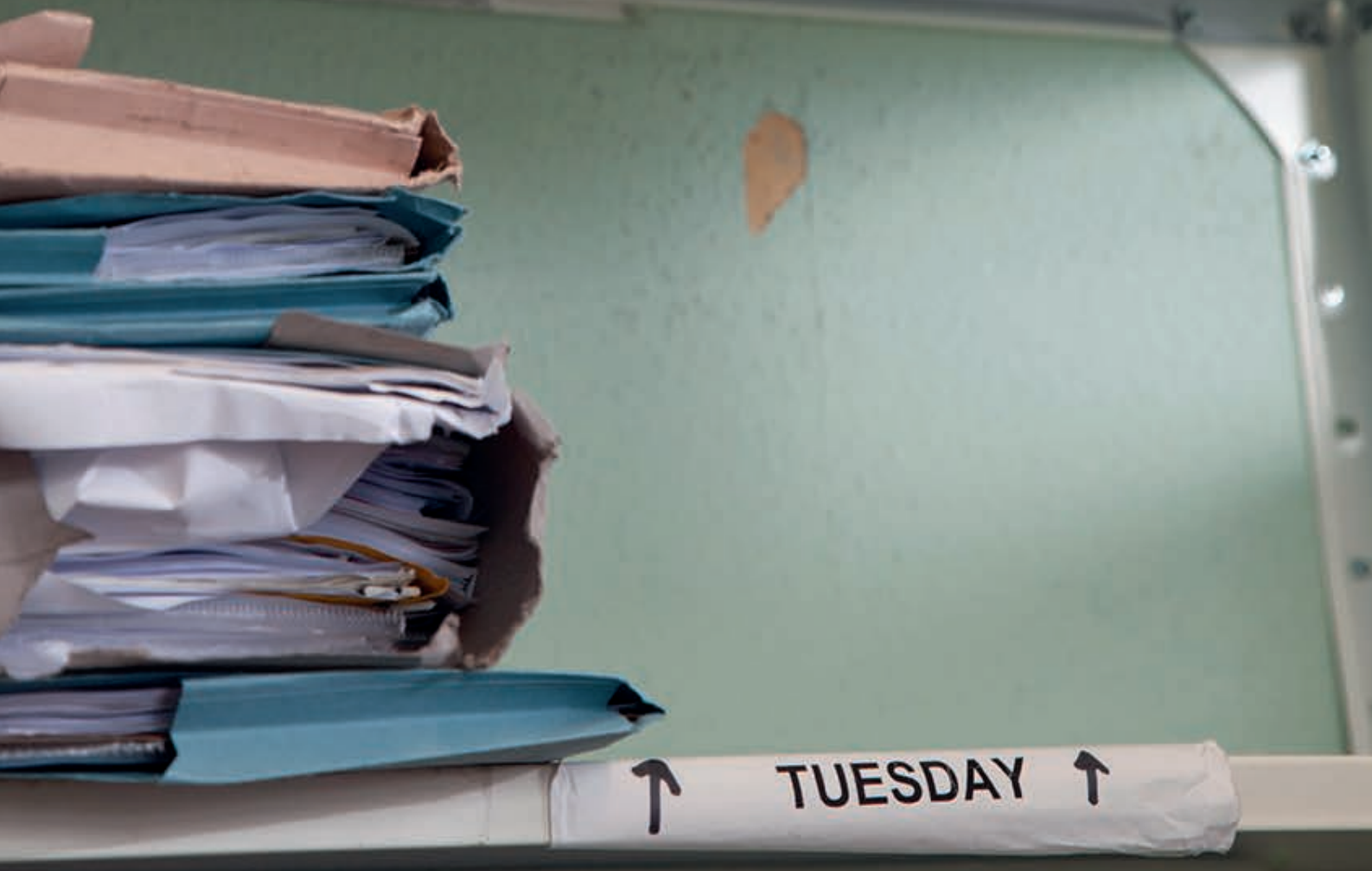


Greater Manchester
IMMIGRATION AID UNIT

Impact Report 2018



Artwork by All4One group – a space for young people to meet and develop new friendships and networks



About Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit – GMIAU

GMIAU was established in 1989 following a community-led movement to support people affected by immigration control. This year we will be celebrating our 30th anniversary. We are one of the few organisations that has been able to survive the changes of the last thirty years: this experience has shaped us into a resilient, diverse, and sustainable organisation.

Our work is a practical commitment to social justice; we work to protect and support people who are subject to immigration control. We are one of the largest not-for-profit immigration legal advice services in the UK: in the last year we provided free immigration legal advice, representation, and support to over 6000 people. GMIAU is the leading immigration advice agency in the North West and we have a national reputation for our professionalism, knowledge and commitment to fighting for justice. We are committed as ever to offering an effective, impactful service which keeps people at its heart.

GMIAU's roots as a community-led, values-driven organisation remain central to our work today. We have a strong set of beliefs which run through all our work.

1

We take on difficult cases and we don't give up easily.

2

We make sure we have the knowledge and expertise we need to succeed.

3

We work with people to maximise the talents, humanity and value of our immigrant communities

4

We campaign for improvements in immigration law and policy

5

We are not silent when we see injustice.

GMIAU enables people to access their rights and become part of their community, whether that means entering employment or going on to university. Through our additional support services,

we help people build their confidence and networks, and support them in navigating new systems and services. GMIAU's work is a key part of many people's journeys to building safe, successful futures.

Grace's story: the impact of GMIAU in practice

Each person has their own, complex experience which is too often reduced into stereotypes or disguised by legal jargon.

The importance of GMIAU's work is best understood through the eyes of the people we work with: we include Grace's story, in her own words, here.

"When I was about 14 I was brought to the UK by a relative. We had visitor's visas and I thought we were going on holiday. Instead I was left with a large Ghanaian family I'd never met and ended up cleaning, cooking and looking after their children. I wasn't paid, slept in the same beds as the children and just got on with it. I had no idea then I was a subject of trafficking.

About two years later, and after being passed to two other families, I worked out

this wasn't right and I left, moving in with a friend I had met. From there I made my way to Manchester and eventually met the father of my daughter through the local church. That relationship was cut short when he was deported back to Ghana. I have no contact with him now.

By my early 20s I was a single mum with no immigration status living off the generosity of friends and acquaintances. An 'illegal immigrant' I suppose, with no prospects. I felt like an outsider who didn't belong.

When I first went to the Immigration Aid Unit I didn't get there early enough. By 7.30 in the morning there was already a lot of people waiting outside. They took my number and called me back in for an appointment.

I was advised to wait until my daughter was seven and then apply for her status under the European Human Rights Act. We did that but she was refused and we made an appeal. Nadia was so helpful. She has a big smile which assures you she is going to do her best for you. I was happy to put my trust in her but then, I had no option.

The appeal went to court, to the tribunal. Nadia won legal aid for me and appointed a barrister to take my case. The first time in court was a bit scary. I thought I would be put in a box and have to swear on the bible but it's not like that at all.

There were more than ten hearings that lasted over a year, and I went to every one. The Immigration Aid



2018 in review

Over the last year, we have continued to provide legal advice and representation, alongside additional services and advocacy. 2018 brought exciting new developments for GMIAU.

We got our first Public Law legal aid contract, enabling us to challenge age assessment cases for children in the region. In 2018 we also started two new pilot programmes which are looking at innovative ways to ensure children and people who are homeless can access their rights and demonstrate fundamental role legal advice has in preventing homelessness and destitution.

Demand for our support continues to rise, as does the complexity of people's lives (and cases). We outline here some of the key areas of work GMIAU has delivered over the last year – and the significant outcomes of that work in ensuring people access justice and services in order to build stable lives in the UK.

Unit supported me the whole way, it was like having an ally. Eventually it was recommended that my daughter and I be given leave to remain.

It felt more of a relief when I eventually heard the news, I wasn't excited like I'd imagined. But now I can work and I can study to be a special needs teaching assistant which is what I've dreamed of doing. My 'leave' is only temporary so I have to save up to pay for the next application fee in two years, which is a worry.

If it wasn't for the Immigration Aid Unit I can't imagine what I'd have done. I'd recommend them to anyone in a similar situation to mine. Now I feel part of this country. I can plan my future and I can start to contribute".

“Now I feel part of this country. I can plan my future and I can start to contribute.”



We **provided one-off advice to 700** people through our drop-ins



We represented people of **70 different nationalities**



353 cases were resolved: **272** cases were granted some form of leave to remain in the UK, and a further **122** were progressed to a further stage, often appeal

September 2017 – September 2018

Legal advice and representation

GMIAU is the only regional specialist immigration legal advice service in the North West, with a team of 13 legal advisors.

We have an outstanding reputation regionally and nationally; we take on cases which may be seen as too complex or unpopular. We fight each case to win, and we don't give up.

The environment in which we work is constantly changing: the immigration system has become

increasingly complicated. As a specialist agency we can respond quickly and effectively to changes in immigration law and practice. Our expert support is always free to people who need it, and we are able to access legal aid for a large number of cases. We represent at all stages of appeals and Judicial Review in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber, Administrative Court and Court of Appeal. Our solicitors and caseworkers have developed specialist knowledge of the situation in many countries, and draw on interpreters and experts to develop the best possible case for each person.

Many of the families we advise and represent have "no recourse to public funds" and are accommodated by the local authority. By resolving

the immigration issue, GMIAU is able to support families to move on from accommodation funded by social services and alleviate this pressure on local authority budgets.

Around 66% of people seeking asylum in the UK have their initial application refused. Once someone is "appeal rights exhausted" they will lose access to support and can quickly become homeless and destitute. In our Liverpool office we have been running a project both to help people with initial asylum claims and also to submit "fresh claims" for asylum. "Fresh claims" are difficult and time consuming and rely on significant new evidence and carefully constructed legal arguments. We have taken on some of the most difficult cases and been successful. ■

Trafficking and 'modern slavery'

The concept of 'trafficking' and 'modern slavery' is highly complex, but has an increasing public profile since the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015.

These terms are typically applied to people who have been forced into sexual exploitation, drug production, domestic servitude, forced labour, criminal activity, and exploitation by gangs for criminal activity. Young people and women are particularly at risk.

We represent men, women, and children who have been trafficked and are living in the North West. In the last 12 months we have represented over 150 adults and children who are the victims of trafficking. ■

"[GMIAU's support] has given me a new life."

Client granted refugee status



Windrush

2018 was the year that the problems for the 'Windrush' generation of men and women who came to the UK in the middle of the last century were exposed as part of the government's hostile environment.

We represented several people whose lives were devastated by the impact of the policy.



We took on
188 new cases
for **children**
under 18, of
21 different
nationalities

84 of these cases were resolved:
77 were successfully granted
some form of leave to remain
and a further **12** were taken on
to appeal

September 2017 – September 2018

The majority of these **children**
were originally from



129 of these children were
unaccompanied asylum
seeking children



Legal advice for children and young people

We have seen a
significant increase
in the number of
children and young
people (aged 5-18)
needing legal
immigration advice
and representation.

‘Unaccompanied asylum
seeking children’ are young
people who are alone in the
UK, generally in the care system,
and who may have had very
traumatic experiences on
the journey to Britain. Access

to sensitive and experienced
immigration advisors is essential
in ensuring all relevant evidence
and arguments are put forward
and the child or young person
receives the legal status to
which they are entitled.

In the North West, Manchester
has the largest number of
children and young people who
are in Care or are Care Leavers
without settled immigration
status. The numbers are set to
increase with further transfers
of unaccompanied asylum
seeking children due shortly.
We are receiving 5-10 referrals
per week to take on children’s
cases across the North West.

Often, children arriving in the
UK without any identification
are wrongly deemed to be
over 18 and are housed in
adult accommodation. This
assessment of age can be

made by either Home Office
officials or Social Workers and
is fraught with controversy and
difficulty. During the past year
we have been able to challenge
age assessments within the
Unit. We have represented
12 young people, 9 of whom
were either offered new age
assessments or had their ages
accepted and support provided
by social services. ■

*“Now I feel safe. I can
concentrate on my
studies at college
and moving my life
forward.”*

**Client granted 5 years
leave to remain**

“When I came to the UK I had one friend. He was busy working and I was really lonely...when I started to go to All4one group I made lots of new friends, some from my own country. They showed me around Manchester and helped me settle in.”

**All4One service user
(July 2018)**



Asli and Wendy working on Refugee Family Reunion

Ali's Story: Finding safety

“I grew up in a small village in Sudan. My dad had been taken from home to fight for the opposition when I was about 10. I never saw him again. I lived at home with my mum, brothers and sisters until I was arrested and detained because the police said my father was an opposition fighter. I was 15. I was badly beaten and interrogated in prison along with many others. I managed to escape with help from a village elder. I made it to Libya but there I was made to work on farms and captured by a

gang who sexually assaulted me and beat me until my family sent money.

I left Libya on a wooden boat at night. The boat was very full and I was frightened but I felt like I didn't have anything to lose anymore. After 2 days at sea we were taken on a big boat to Sicily. We were kept in a camp but there was no one to help and I was cold and hungry all the time.

I left and travelled to Italy and then France. I stayed in makeshift camps under bridges with other Sudanese people. There were some charities helping but it was no life, it was hopeless. I kept moving and travelled to the UK. I hid in a lorry that stopped in Manchester. It had been 2 years since I left home, I was 17 years old.

I told my story to a policeman who stopped me. Then it was all ok, I talked to a Social Worker who got me a place in a house with other people my age.

They got me a solicitor at GMIAU, Isobel. She told me about claiming asylum and helped me do this. I didn't want to talk at first but she listened and was really kind. I told my whole story. I got a lot of help from Kathleen at GMIAU too. She helped me get a place at college and she got me to go to the All4One group. We meet up every couple of weeks. I've got loads of friends now. Last week we visited Manchester United football ground. It was amazing. I feel like I've finally been able to rest and I feel safe here. I have got hope for the future again.” ■

Homelessness, destitution, no recourse to public funds

We recognise that people face financial hardship and homelessness at many points throughout the asylum and immigration system.

GMIAU provides specialist support services and assists people throughout; protecting their rights to food, shelter and finance. We support people to navigate complex systems of benefit entitlements and statutory support services depending on their immigration status and family circumstances.

In particular, it is often the case that someone's immigration status means that they are excluded from mainstream services and support. More frequently, we are seeing people being granted leave to remain with 'no recourse to public funds' and therefore at risk of homelessness and destitution. We support families and individuals not able to work to access support, while we apply to

the Home Office for the "NRPF" status to be removed from the conditions of their stay.

We provide specialist one to one support for women with insecure immigration status and who are at risk of, or experiencing, violence, danger and/or exploitation. We also work with agencies that support women at risk and other individuals facing destitution to raise awareness of the support that can be provided and the legal route out of the risky situation.

Across our support services we work with volunteers, many of whom have lived experience of the immigration system. In the last year we have supported 20 volunteers and two social work students. ■

"It makes a significant differences in our lives, it alleviates the difficulties in which the family fell, and has turned our life around for the good."



Refugee Family Reunion

Having to leave your home country and your family to find protection is something that most people can't imagine.

The possibility of never seeing your family again is unbearable. This is the reason why we set up the refugee family reunion project. We help people with refugee status to make applications to bring close family members to the UK so that they can be reunited. In 2018 we began working in partnership with the British Red Cross so that we can expand the service to refugees throughout the North West. We expect to reunite over 100 families per year. ■

Over
600 people
and their families
accessed the **Asylum
Support Housing Advice
(ASHA) service**



334
new
users

**2077 face to face
advice sessions** held
at our drop in centre
in Moss Side



136
applications for
accommodation
were approved,
housing
166 people

We made **45 appeals** to the Asylum Support
Tribunal **to prevent homelessness.**
96% were successful.

We supported
77 families
(with 111 children)
and **34 individuals** who
were **facing homelessness**
at the point of being granted
leave to remain



We helped
83 women and
their children who
were **living in abusive**
or exploitative
situations



All4One group – a space for young people to meet and develop new friendships and networks

Children and young people

We offer additional support to children and young people who are unaccompanied in the UK, helping them navigate new systems and institutions, from social services to education.

We make sure that they are safe and are able to build a network of support.

Children and young people who are unaccompanied may find themselves isolated and confused, faced with a complex legal system,

without any family support, and in an environment which is strange and new. Most speak very little, if any, English when they arrive in the UK. However, many of these young people are incredibly resilient and have so much to offer – we always work to build on these strengths to help them develop their skills and networks so that they can thrive.

Our key worker on this project supports each young person to help them understand the situation they are in and to help advocate for them with professionals and agencies. This year we provided this one to one support to 48 young people (age 14-20), with issues such as accessing legal advice, education, finance and accommodation.

We also offered regular activities to young people through our All4One group which meets once a month, providing a space

for young people to meet and develop new friendships and networks. Turnout is high to the group and feedback is always positive. We have also established a group for young women at risk of trafficking, supporting them in developing their confidence and skills, accessing services and articulating themselves.

Based on our expertise of supporting children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum in the UK, we have developed a new project to improve their experiences of the care system in Manchester – including standards for the reception, care and support of children with no settled immigration status in the care system. Young people will work alongside us, as experts in their own experience, aiming to ensure that Manchester offers outstanding care to all young people. ■

Policy, advocacy and training

The current political climate and government policies have led in recent years to cuts in funding for legal advice for people subject to immigration control, alongside retrograde steps in the processes to apply for asylum.

Many people are being penalised by the stringent rules on legal aid and a reduction in the provision of free, independent, high-quality advice and representation in the area.

The hostile environment has created a climate of fear, while the asylum system is frequently a terrible experience for many, exacerbating the often traumatic difficulties they faced in coming to the UK. GMIAU works actively to tackle the system, to positively change immigration policy, systems and practice and to bring about better treatment of people subject to immigration control including people who are claiming asylum and refugees.

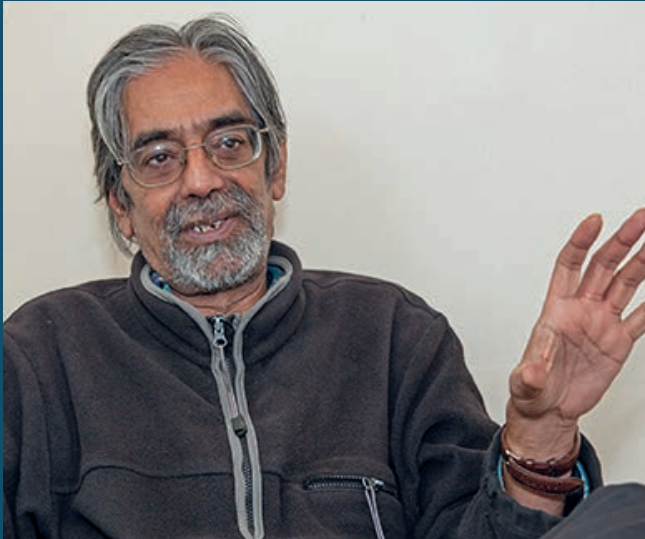
We actively contribute to policy development in both central and local government,

focusing on refugee family reunion, asylum support, and children, including those who are on their own and stranded in Europe.

A particular focus of our policy work in 2019 is around care leavers whose immigration status is unresolved, including children affected by the UK decision to leave the EU.

GMIAU also delivers training, guidance, advice and advocacy for a wide range of agencies to increase understanding of immigration law and procedures and how to assist the people they work with including children, people with no recourse, people who are homeless and destitute. This includes work with charities and statutory agencies across Greater Manchester, building people's knowledge and skills. ■





“Yes, there is the government’s hostile environment policy to make it as difficult as possible for migrants but that’s just part of the story. Austerity has meant the Home Office has suffered huge cuts leading to poor staffing levels and insufficient training. It’s been reported that new staff are making life-changing decisions on asylum cases after just two weeks’ training.”

Sukhdeep, GMIAU case worker

“For the past 20 years the political climate around migrants has been harsh but recently it’s become a lot harsher. I don’t want to sound too negative but, from my perspective, it’s becoming unbearable.

As legal professionals it feels like we’re being vilified for doing our jobs. We attract disparaging political attention and are perceived by some as overstepping the mark. What we’re actually doing is standing up for our clients’ needs.”

Isobel, GMIAU case worker

The long term impact of our work

Many people who come to GMIAU have faced huge challenges, or fled horrendous issues such as torture, poverty and political repression; and once they arrive in the UK, the immigration system can leave some particularly vulnerable to homelessness, abuse, and exploitation.

“What can I say about the outcome of my case? I cannot say anything. It was amazing! It was very quick and on time.”

The impact of our work goes beyond the leave to remain that people may be granted. Resolving people's immigration status unlocks people's ability to live in the safety and security they desperately need; it enables families to build their lives together; and it allows people to use their skills and fulfil their potential here in the UK. Communities across Greater Manchester benefit from people who are able to finally settle, work, study and become recognised and valued members of society.

We believe that GMIAU's work contributes to the fight for the UK to fulfil its commitment to upholding human rights and the international right to protection; and continues Manchester's proud history of development based on the experiences and skills of people from around the country and around the world.

Some themes emerge when we look at the impact of our work. People who access our services, either in legal advice or our support work, report improvements across six key areas:

Connection and support in their community

With their status resolved, people can move into accommodation and communities where they feel safe, and can contribute to a productive, happy society.

Greater freedom and independence

We work with many people who just want the freedom to fulfil their potential, to be able to put down roots, and provide for themselves and their families. For refugees this may mean the security of knowing they have the ability to remain long term in the UK, away from violence or oppression, while for a young person resolving their immigration status it may be the freedom to access higher education in the country where they have grown up.

“First of all, I don't have any more stress, no worry, and I have got more confidence. With all appreciation for that visa what is more important I have got Indefinite Leave to Remain. I am very glad and happy person and now I make plans to have my future here and have a family and a simple life in peace and love.”

Client granted Indefinite Leave to Remain



Supportive family units and relationships

We have worked to enable 100 people with refugee status to reunite with their families over the last year, often after years of separation.

New, positive networks

People may meet others through our support, making new friends, or by building relationships with neighbours or support workers. Our All4One group brings together isolated children and young people who are in the UK on their own.

Access to employment, healthcare and education

Without leave to remain, many people find themselves with the skills but without the right to work. Our work ensures that people are able to work, access education, and have the right to healthcare. We also add our voice to movements including the #LiftTheBan campaign, working to change government policy to allow people seeking asylum to work while their legal claim is ongoing.

Improving positive outlook and mental health

Above all, people tell us that our work enables them to feel positive and hopeful, often after incredible stress and trauma. Home Office decisions may take months, or years, to come and many people report feeling that they are in a state of limbo. Resolving people's status, and just treating people like a human rather than a 'migrant', can have a huge impact on people's mental health. ■

Naomi's story: The long fight for status

"My fight to stay in the UK sometimes felt relentless. Throughout the last 10 years I have faced unexpected challenges and sometimes I worried that I'd never overcome them. But I did.

I first came here in 2004 from Nigeria with my then-husband who was a doctor. We have two children, the youngest was born in the UK. Unfortunately my husband failed his exams to practice in the UK, and when our visa expired we were told by the home office that we had to leave the country. My husband and I began making applications to remain in the UK but every application we made was refused.

Sadly, my husband then started to become abusive.

The abuse was so bad that the police got involved and my marriage started to break

down. When my husband and I separated, he moved back to Nigeria. The home office, who knew about the abuse, said that because he was the main applicant and he had left the UK, the application was invalid and that I had to go back to Nigeria with the children.

This was a very isolating time for me. Struggling with the breakdown of my marriage and coming to terms with the abuse I had suffered, it was a very lonely time.

I decided that if my children were to thrive I must do my best for them and fight for them to stay in the UK. They had been here for as long as they could remember and I wanted them to continue growing roots here.

I got in touch with GMIAU at my lowest point, alone and worried for my kids. GMIAU helped, they did everything they could. We went to court to appeal my refusal and failed that time, but more than anything, at GMIAU I started to feel like I wasn't alone. I found more opportunities to get involved in the community and build my own support networks which

meant I had the strength to keep going no matter what was thrown at me.

Eventually, I got leave to remain for my eldest child and I was then able to make an application for myself and my younger child. After tirelessly pushing, we were granted 2 ½ years leave to remain, and so we began the process to get British Citizenship for my children.

Both of them now have British citizenship, though it was a long fight and we were refused many times. I have leave to remain which I have to renew every 30 months. Now, I can't believe I can talk about it without crying, it was really tough. I had to stay strong for my children, but I was always afraid because the Home Office could come at any time. Whenever we had a car outside we would peek out of the window, worried it was them.

Everyone says my determination has had an impact on my children's character. I'm so proud of them, they're amazing. I can see them fighting for everything, they never give up. They just believe that if you want it enough you can do it." ■



Thanks and acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the organisations and individuals who have stood alongside us in protecting the rights of people affected by immigration control in Greater Manchester and beyond: together we are building a fairer, more welcoming UK.

We have worked with many partners over the last year, from legal firms to refugee support organisations – our work would not be possible without these relationships.

The team at GMIAU continue to inspire hope for the future. Tireless work goes in to every case, without ever losing sight of the person and their experiences.

We are proud to have provided placements for social work students and trainee solicitors, supporting the next generation to have greater understanding and compassion about the needs and experiences of people subject to immigration control.

Thank you also to our supporters, members and friends of GMIAU who have offered so much in making GMIAU what it is today. Volunteers in particular are a vital part of the organisation: whether it's supporting a family who have no recourse to public funds or working with someone who has refugee status and desperately wants to be reunited with the family they left behind, volunteers assist in countless ways to make life more bearable for many of the people we represent.

Above all, thank you to the people we work with, who inspire us with their resilience and optimism. Thank you to Grace, Caitlin, Rivka, Emily and Len who helped tell the stories in this report.

“I can now live my life, I’m not scared about being sent back, I can live my life with my two sons in peace.”

Client granted Indefinite Leave to Remain

We benefit from the generous support of numerous charitable funders:

The Access to Justice Foundation

Awards for All

**Families Together
(through British Red Cross)**

Comic Relief

Estee Lauder MAC Aids Fund

Evan Cornish Foundation

Garfield Weston Foundation

The Henry Smith Charity

The John Grant Davies Trust

Lloyds Bank Foundation

The Legal Education Foundation

Local Sustainability Fund

The Manchester Guardian Society Charitable Trust

The Oglesby Charitable Trust

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Sam and Bella Sebba Charitable Trust

Strategic Legal Fund



Always a friendly welcome from Khurshid



We rely on donations to continue our work in providing expert, caring support for everyone who comes through our door. Your support and donations will help us transform the lives of asylum seekers, refugees, children and vulnerable people who are seeking safety in the UK.

Please consider making a donation
at: www.gmiau.org/donate

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 ImmigrationAidUnit

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