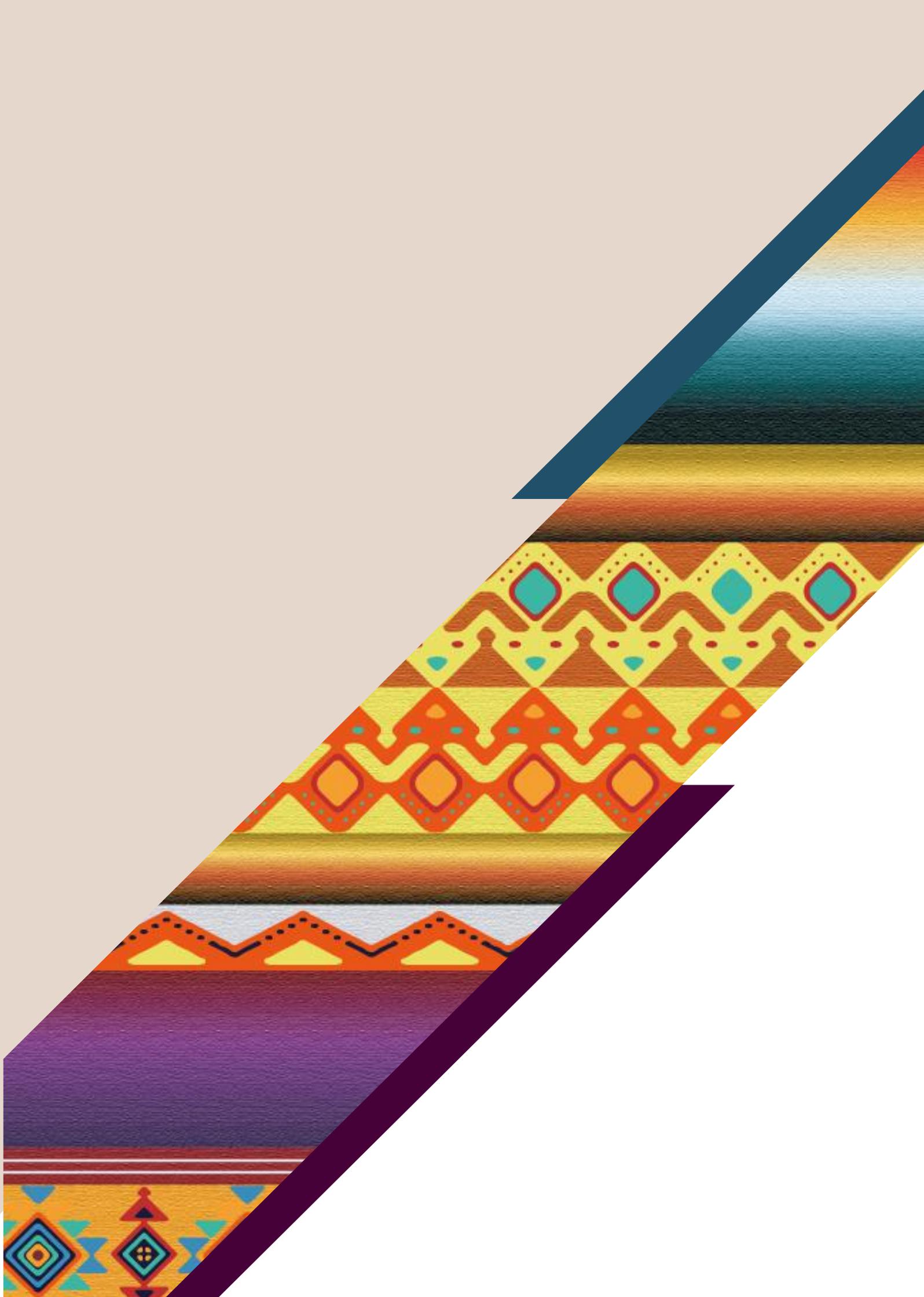




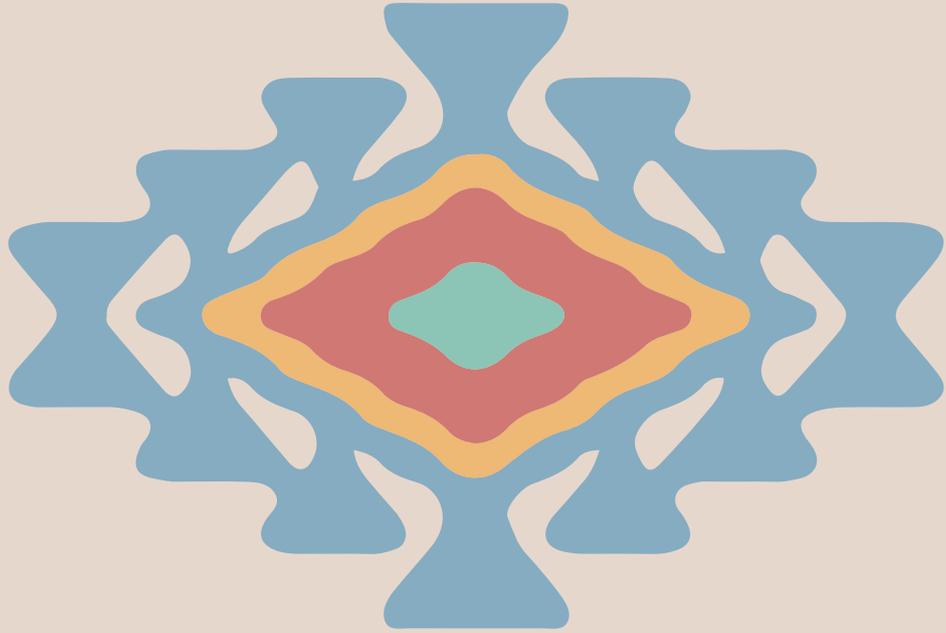
**LAWA**  
latin american  
women's aid

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2018 - 2019**





**“Latin American and other Black and Minoritised  
women and their children working together to end  
violence and achieve self – determination”**



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# Trustees Report

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2018 marked eight years since the introduction of austerity in the UK and six years since the announcement of the hostile environment policy. These years have not been easy for the Latin American population in the UK or for the Black and Minoritised women's sector. Half of all the UK's Black and Minoritised refuges have closed since 2005. Racist violence and violence against LGBTQ-people is increasing, something that we see happening in our home countries as well.

LAWA's staff and volunteers have been fighting back. LAWA continues to support the Latin American community in the UK more fully every year. LAWA continues to deepen its intersectional, communitarian feminist practice, to honour the women who came before us and carve a new feminist path in London. We are proud to be trans inclusive: trans women are our sisters.

This year, we opened our second refuge. As the Latin American population in the UK has grown, demand for our services has grown also. Our second refuge increases our capacity to provide emergency accommodation to women and children feeling gender-based violence. We are especially proud that the second refuge helps us support women with no recourse to public funds.

This year we continued to collect data about who is using our services and the intersecting violences that they face, which you can read in this report. This documentation is a radical act: it makes different intersections visible, arms us to fight them at LAWA and make more informed policy suggestions to law-makers.

LAWA's Change Maker programme also continued this year as did the Empowering Fund. This year has also seen our brilliant Director Yenny Tovar take maternity leave and hand over to Gabriela Quevedo, in whom the board has every confidence. It has been humbling to see the expertise and knowledge in the LAWA staff grow over the last twelve months.

To paraphrase Audre Lorde, the women of LAWA are powerful and dangerous!



# Management Report

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The importance of services like LAWA to our communities cannot be emphasized enough. In spite of an extremely challenging context, in this period LAWA achieved important milestones crucial to our long term sustainability:

- Through our partnership with Peabody housing association, and with the support of BLF and other donors, LAWA have opened up a second refuge, which is now fully operational. This has meant we can support more women and children in need of accommodation.

- Ongoing funding from Henry Smith, BBC Children in Need, Islington council, has helped us to continue sustaining and diversifying a variety of services

- We have joined a consortium of BME women's organisations (The OYA consortium), strengthening our relationships within the sector. This has proved successful in:

- o Providing critical support to establish the Women against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) project, in partnership with London Black Women's Project, Asha, Ashiana and Claudia Jones (supported by Trust for London)

- o Enabling the setup of a new North-South partnership alongside London Black Women's Project and the Angelou Centre to provide casework support to BME women and girls subjected to sexual harassment across the North and South of England (supported by the Justice and Equality (ROSA) fund.

- We have widened our income base through securing new funding from trusts and foundations (e.g. Lloyds Bank Foundation, City Bridge Trust) and through the launch of a private giving scheme called the 'Empowering Fund', to grow our community of donors.

- Over the last two years LAWA's advice project alone has maintain the work with 85 statutory and 53 voluntary organisations, the majority of which had no previous knowledge on how to work with women from our community. This includes: the 'chavitas' programme with young women in schools and our 'change-makers' programme, an intersectional, intergenerational feminist space for Latin Americans and BME women to learn and grow together.

All these achievements are, undoubtedly, the result of an extremely committed, professional and compassionate team of women that is at once humbling and rewarding to be part of. To them, my deepest respect and admiration.

In the next few pages you will see only snapshots of what happened at LAWA this last year. We hope these examples will allow you to engage with our work, leaving you enthused to find out more about us and the stories of the women that keep surviving, thriving, soaring against terrible odds. Violence Against Women and Girls is complex, deeply personal but also deeply political and collective. It will not end until we can all see what role we can play to make it stop, and to rebuild ourselves and our communities. We strongly believe, like Cherrie Moraga, that "sometimes a breakdown can be the beginning of a kind of breakthrough, a way of living in advance through a trauma that prepares you for a future of radical transformation"

This is the conviction that drives us, and the path we hope will encourage you to be involved and join our community of allies and supporters.

**Gabriela Quevedo**  
Director

# Who we are and our impact



Latin American Women's Aid is a specialist organisation working to end gender-based violence against Black and Minoritised women and girls. We run the only two refuges by and for Latin American women and children in the UK. Our organisation and community is made up of other Black and Minoritised women and we are proud to be trans-inclusive.

Our service is holistic and intersectional, which means that we provide everything a woman needs to recover and empower themselves. What we offer goes beyond refuge emergency accommodation, and includes advice and practical support, counselling, English classes and our change-maker empowerment program.

This year we have carried out a total of **2663 interventions** with women and children in the different areas of our work.



Women we supported said they felt more confident



Women we supported said they had increased their knowledge of domestic violence, the justice system and their legal options



Women we supported said it made a difference that support was available from a Latin American, Black and minority ethnic led women's organisation



Women we supported said they increased their knowledge of their rights, options and services in the UK

"I was desperate, and I did not know what to do and now I have hope. Thank you"

"LAWA siempre esta alli para ayudarme cuando mas lo necesito"

"LAWA's support has been really helpful and informative regarding my rights as a survivor of domestic violence. Thank you so much for your support."



# Highlights of LAWA's Year

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## New Sexual Harassment Advisor

We are happy to announce that since the beginning of 2019 LAWA has had a new Sexual Harassment (SH) advisor. They offer weekly specialist advice on SH, focusing on Latin American and other racially and ethnically minoritised women. The service helps them to overcome sexual harassment behaviours that affect women in various ways, including impacting their mental health, finances and opportunities to progress with their careers. According to the report published by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee 'Sexual harassment of women and girls in public places'(2018) **Sexual harassment is the most common type of violence against women and girls.**

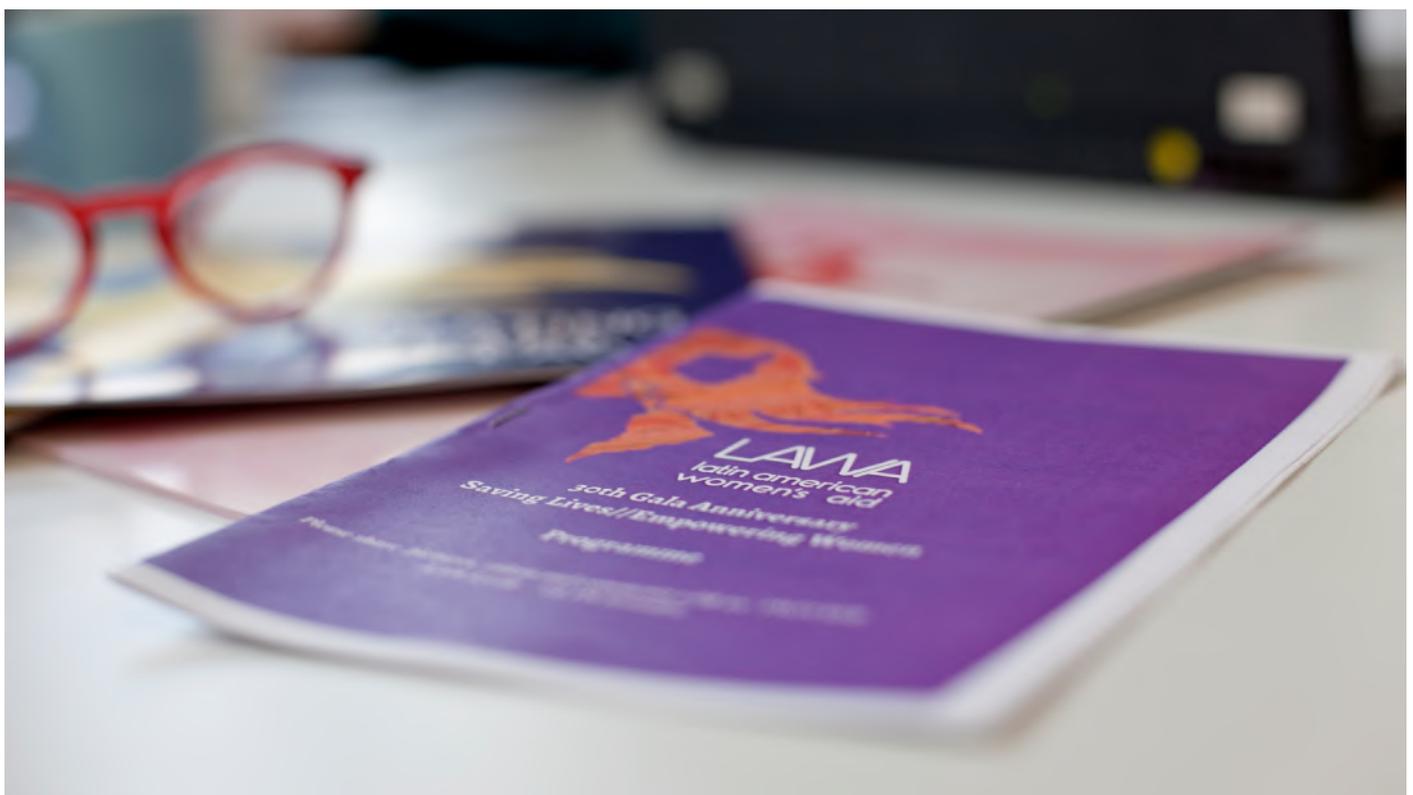
The project provides advice and legal information to encourage, empower and accompany women that have gone through sexual harassment experiences.

This is a national project that will be operating in partnership between Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA), London Black Women's Project (LBWP) and Angelou Centre to provide specialist advice.

## WAHA Initiative

Women against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) is an initiative for Black and Minority Ethnic women jointly run by the Latin American Women's Aid and London Black Women's Project under the OYA consortium of BME refuges. WAHA aims to address Black and minority ethnic women's intersecting pressures of poverty, homelessness and gender violence through promoting changes in housing policy and practice in the UK using a rights-based approach. It is a policy but also a frontline project advising, representing and supporting survivors to make appeals and secure safe and appropriate accommodation, in an environment free from violence and intimidation.

Our ultimate goal is to work with policy makers and practitioners to affect change to ensure the housing needs of BME survivors are met. We envisage a world where no woman will be forced to endure abuse for fear of becoming homeless, where women fleeing violence are able to access their rights to safe accommodation without that process furthering the cycle of abuse.

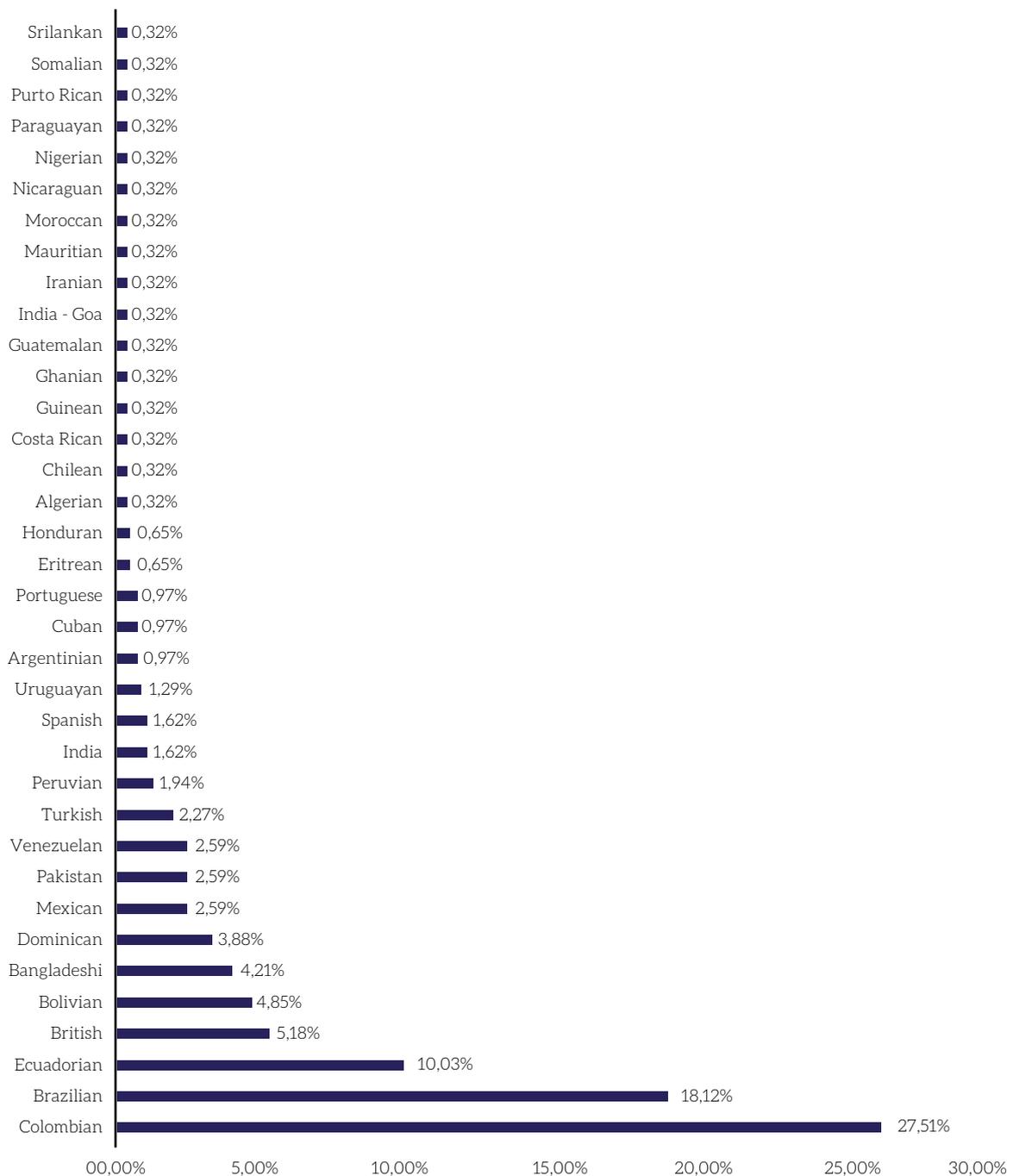


# LAWA's Service Users' Profile

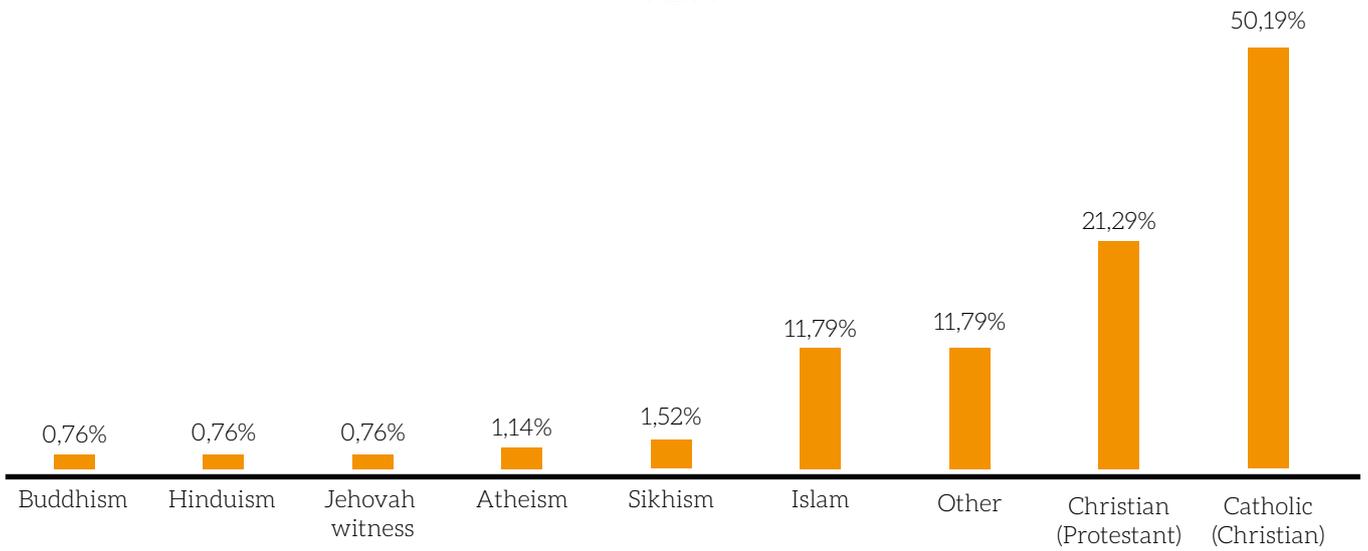
The general profile of LAWA's users reflects the diversity of the Latin American and Black Minoritised population in the UK as well as the challenges encountered by migrant women. This year, we have noticed that the majority of women accessing our services were Colombians (24.71%), followed by Brazilians (18.12%) and Ecuadorians (10.03%).

Women accessing LAWA were mostly Christians, Catholic (50.19%) or Protestant (21.29%); a few were disabled (8.3%); and some did not have access to public funds due to their immigration status (23.4%). The most common age range of our users was 35-49 years (35.44%) but we also worked with younger women (18-24 year olds made up 29.73%), whilst children and young people made up 12.31% of our users.

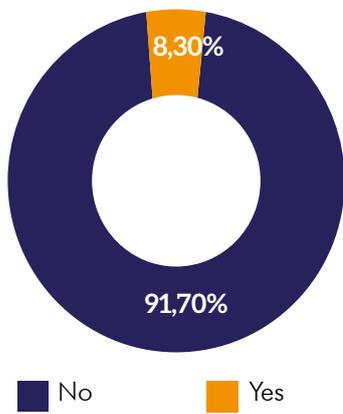
## Nationality



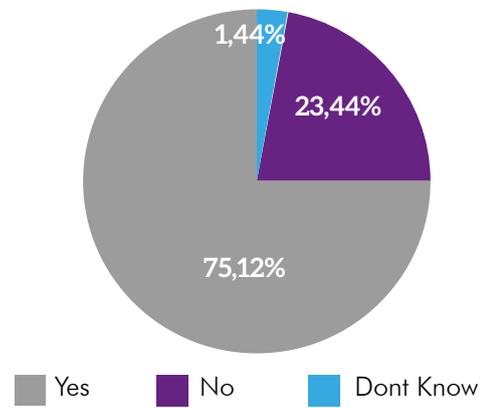
### Faith



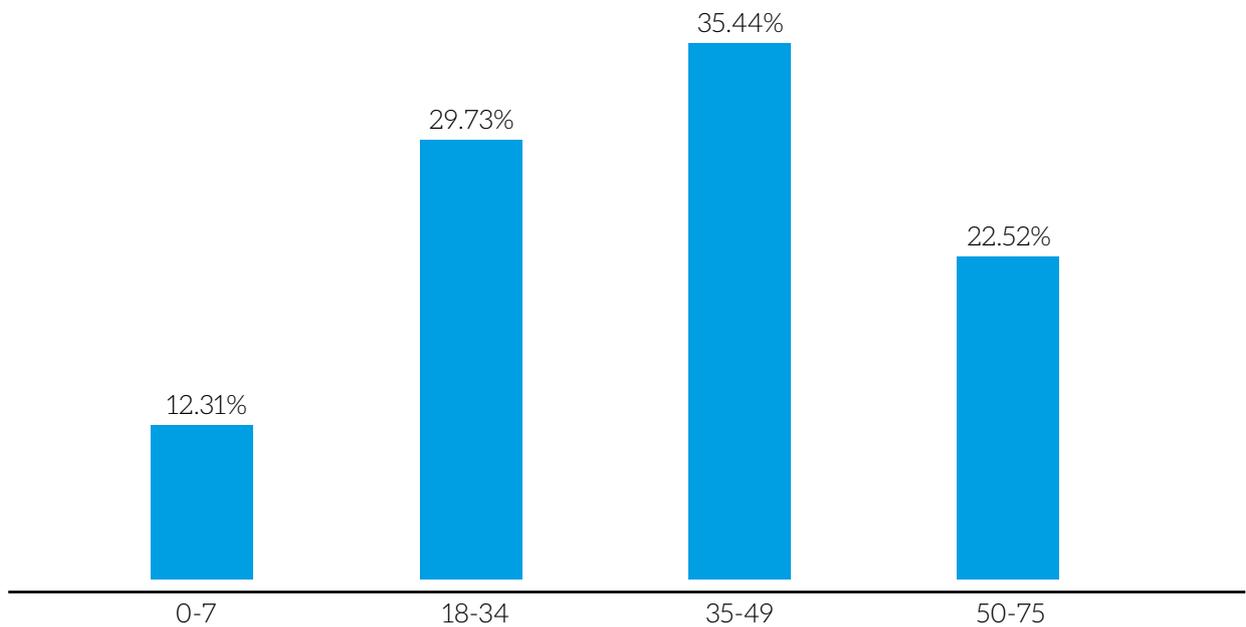
### Disability



### Recourse to Public Funds



### Age



# Intersecting Violences

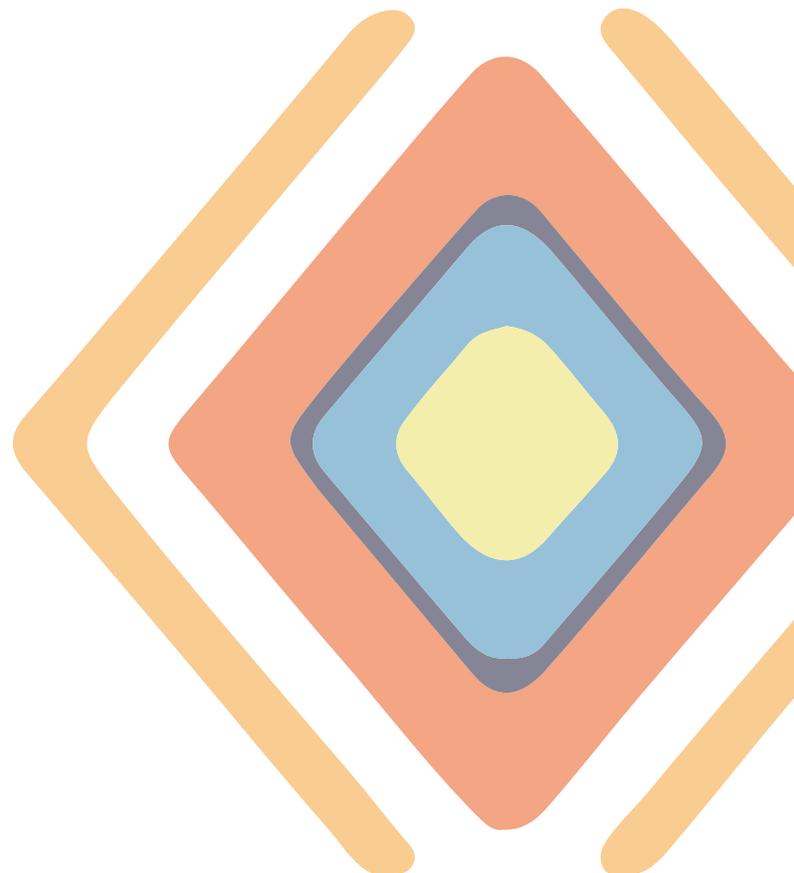
**A**t LAWA we support Latin American and Black and Minoritised women and children who experience gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, forced prostitution and trafficking. Violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequalities and intersects with other forms of oppressions, such as racism, immigration control, ableism, lesbophobia, transphobia or classism. This means that Latin American and other Black and Minoritised survivors of violence are often presented with more complex and intersecting needs arising from their identities and experiences.

This year, in average, **23.44%** of women accessing our services were **No Recourse to Public Funds** due to their immigration status. Whilst this is much less than last year's, complications arising from irregular processes of EEU nationals in the Brexit climate, has unnecessarily complicated such cases. Meaning more time was focused on a smaller pool of such cases. From the women who disclosed surviving violence, **60.80%** reported mental health symptoms, whilst over half of them could not speak English (**55%**) and experienced financial hardships (**49.1%**). We have received a high number of referrals from generic organisations, and from service users directly approaching us after leaving a generic service. This is because generic services lack the expertise needed to deal with such complex needs. These referrals make up **20.86%** of all our users seeking support due to violence.

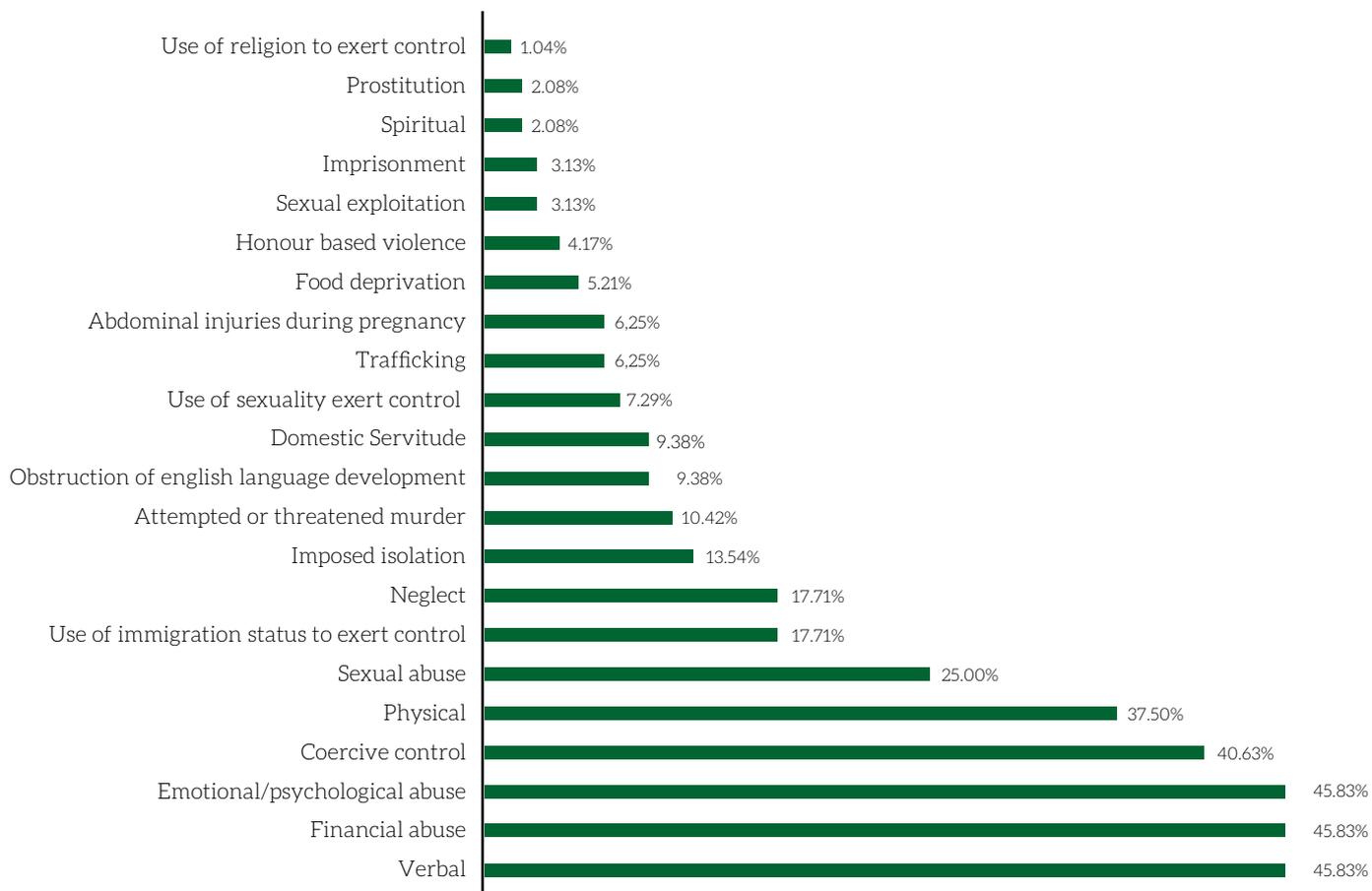
The intersecting nature of violence is evident in the ways in which women accessing our services experience abuse and additional barriers to seeking safety and support. This year **69%** of our users reporting violence have experienced two or more forms of abuse. The most prevalent types of abuse were **Emotional and Psychological abuse** (45.83%); **Verbal** (45.83%); **Financial Abuse** (45.83%); **Coercive control** (40.63%) and **Physical** (37.50%)

Such abuse has often intersected in complex ways with more specific types of violence and oppression experienced by Black and Minoritised women. For example, some users reported that **their immigration status was used by perpetrators to exert control** (17.71%); some were also **obstructed by perpetrators from developing their English language skills** (9.38%); whilst others experienced **imposed isolation** (13.54%); **Honour Base Violence** (4.17%); **use of sexuality to exert control** (7.29%).

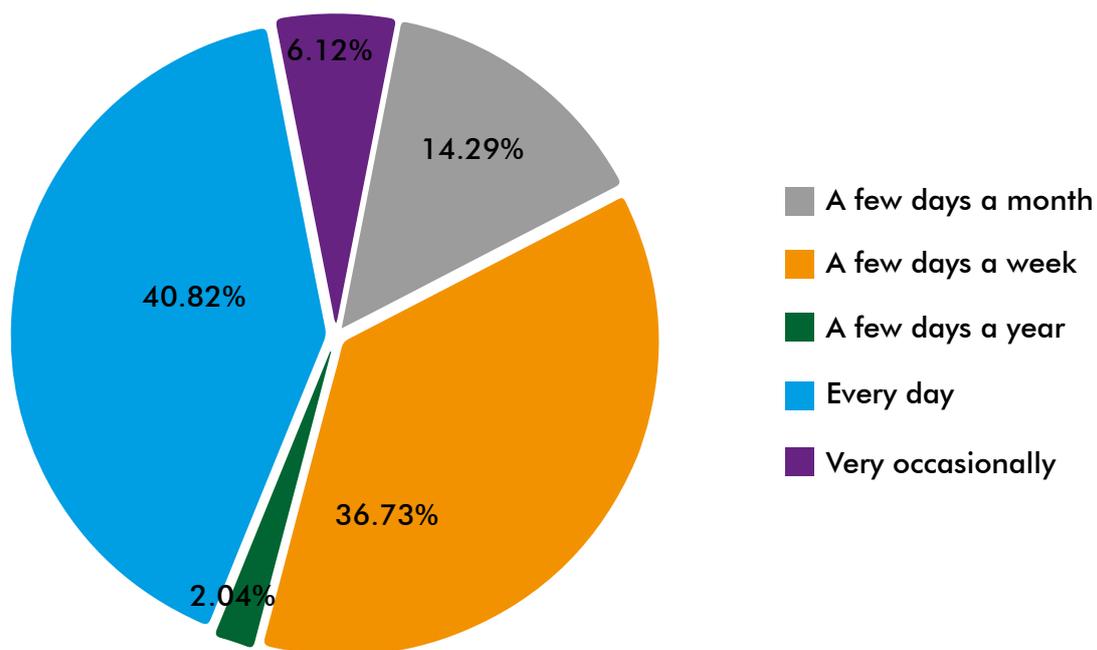
Latin American and Black and Minoritised women tend to experience abuse for lengthy periods of time, and this reality is also reflected among our users, some having experienced violence for decades. This year, we identified that 78.21% of our users who reported violence has experienced it for at more than 2 years. In addition, the frequency of the abuse experienced by our users tended to be very high with the majority of them experiencing abuse **a few days a week** (36.7%) or **every day** (40.82%).



### Prevalence of abuse



### Frequency of abuse





## LAWA's Refuge

### Second Refuge

This year the second refuge was opened and has been functioning, receiving and housing women and those with children fleeing from domestic violence.



### What residents said after leaving LAWA's refuge...



Women said they felt safe and secure whilst living there



Women said they would never consider going back with the perpetrator



Women said they felt the accommodation they moved to after LAWA's refuge was safe

Established in 1987 as our first service, LAWA's refuge is a safe home for Latin American, and other Black and Minoritised women and children who are fleeing gender violence, particularly domestic violence.

Through a holistic and person-centered approach, we offer individually tailored emotional and practical support plans according to each woman and child's intersectional needs. Our refuges are spaces for new beginnings, hope and healing. Every refuge resident is provided with a personal risk and needs assessment. During the settling in period every resident is accompanied by refuge staff to all important meetings regarding their housing, legal support and health needs, including registering with a GP.

Our residents also access LAWA's in-house counselling, attend our ESOL classes and Change Makers workshops. Further to the support and advocacy work the refuge provides, the residents also access the specialised service from the Family Support Worker who organises weekly activities to encourage their recovery and the reestablishment of the relationship between mother and child after living or witnessing traumatic violent experiences. This year LAWA further supported residents by providing specialised counselling for children, young people and their mothers.

*"The refuge helped me start a new beginning and a new life. Located in a completely different area to where I was before, I was able to gain confidence and become more independent"*

*"My time at the refuge helped me be able to think about me, in my future and what I will for after leaving the refuge. Also, it helped me to think and to plan my daughter's future"*



## Lidia's Journey to Safety...

Lidia is 22 year's old and originally from Guatemala. She met a British man who she married and then moved with him to the UK. When in the UK, Lidia's husband started verbally abusing her by exerting his control through her migration status.

Geographically she was also in the middle of the countryside, in a foreign country where she had no friends. She felt very isolated and vulnerable.

The husband began raping Lidia regularly and he doped her and allowed his friends to rape her in exchange for money. He also regularly stopped her from leaving the house to go to work by pulling out her car batteries, which left her without a job. He also put a GPS tracker in her car without her knowledge to stalk her. This abuse left her with very low self-esteem, and isolated and scared.

Lidia was supported by the local Domestic Violence Advice Service, after being referred by the Police, but could not understand what was being said to her by the support workers.

Still scared that the perpetrator would come back to the house, and unsure of her future, **Lidia found LAWAs advice centre's telephone number on the internet and called to speak to someone in her native Latin American**

**Spanish. She wanted to understand what help she could get and was immediately referred to the LAWA refuge.**

Arriving at the refuge, Lidia said that she felt like herself again for the first time since she had come to England; she could make herself and her needs be understood. She benefitted from all the mandatory support we offer all our residents including registration with a GP, a robust risk and needs assessment, and a review of what benefits she is entitled to. She has engaged with key work session with a focus to developing her awareness in being able to recognize abusive behaviour in the future. Also, she has been attending weekly counselling sessions in her native Spanish with the in-house psychotherapist who provides in house counselling.

The refuge workers have consistently accompanied her to important meetings with police and lawyers and provided her with emotional support in the criminal court for the prosecution against the perpetrator, as well as making further reports for police investigation. **We have also been able to support her application for the Destitution Domestic Violence Concession with her solicitor at Latin American House, which was successful, and the Home Office granted Lidia Indefinite Leave to Remain.** Lidia is currently working at a new job and is working hard to overcome her trauma and move forward with her life.

# A Family's Journey to Recovery

Leo is 4 years old and he was born in Spain. His mother, Ana, is from Dominican Republic and moved to the UK two years ago. Leo has a younger sister Lara and she is 1 year old. When the family arrived in the refuge, Leo displayed symptoms of a child who had witnessed and experienced a violent environment. Leo's father abandoned him and his mum when he was only a few months old. When Leo's mum moved to the UK, she met Lara's father. During the pregnancy, the abuse started. Leo witnessed his mum being pushed, beaten and yelled at for a lot of months. The only male role model Leo has ever had was his mum's perpetrator who would also yell at Leo and cover Leo's mouth whenever Leo tried to speak or cry. Because of this repeated act, Leo became afraid of speaking and stopped expressing himself with words.

Once in the refuge, he would cry at anything and scream as if it was the first time he was allowed to do so. Leo could not make eye contact, didn't know numbers or colours, in either English or Spanish), didn't like to play or help his sister and he would not stay in a room where he could not see his mother.

We decided to develop sessions around managing his crying and encouraging eye contact and start to bring him into the playroom slowly as symbol of his independence. Progressively, we were able to close the door of the playroom without him bursting into tears. After feeling more settled in the playroom the Family Support Worker started working on his developmental skills, including motor and speech skills. We referred him to Speech and Language therapy in his first language, where he had a couple of sessions; we led activities including learning exercises, music, tactile experiences and self-control.



The 'door closing' was a symbolic act that would help Leo to settle down in the room and engage with any activity. Leo started to talk in his language, he started nursery in English, and he developed trust and care towards others, giving hugs and interacting with the eyes. Leo's body language changed, and we noticed that his bonding with his younger sister and his mother changed as well. **During Leo's process and progress, the advisor and child psychotherapist shared concerns, activities and strategies to help his development.** The psychotherapist focused on the anger and frustration, crying control, while the Family Support Worker worked on giving him practical day to day tools, such as language and social interaction, towards improving his self-esteem.



## LAWA's Advice and Support Centre

Our advice and support centre offers information, advocacy and support to all Latin American and Black and Minoritised women including survivors of gender-based violence. Through one-to-one appointments, drop-in days, telephone advice, in-house surgeries and outreach points we offer advice and support in a wide range of areas. This includes domestic violence and other gendered forms of violence; immigration and family law; welfare benefits advice; housing and emergency accommodation; child support; career and employment advice; skills development and community integration; and ESOL classes.

Apart from running monthly legal surgeries and weekly Drop In sessions to give ad hoc advice and support, we also offer close support plans to a number of women experiencing domestic violence. This year we have continued to feel the impact of a shrinking public and third sector due to the government's austerity agenda. This has meant a direct increase in demand for our services and lengthier periods of support to each individual case. In particular, we received a variety of complex and high-risk domestic violence cases being referred to us by statutory services and generic women's organisations.

The Advice Centre provides advice, support, and referrals for women as a first point of contact, as well as providing these services for women who are or have engaged in LAWA's many service areas.

Staff are comprised of both Latin American Spanish and Portuguese speakers to be able to communicate effectively with all Latin American women who come to the Advice Centre. In consultation with the women, the Advice Centre often refers women to other LAWA services and, when necessary, they will refer high-risk cases to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). Advice centre staff often work besides statutory bodies such as the police and social services as well as other organisation to provide holistic support to our users.



Women we supported said they increased their knowledge about how to enter paid work, access welfare benefits or manage their debts



Women we supported said they increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and legal options



Women say they feel safe thanks to LAWA's Advice Centre intervention

In addition to this, **LAWA offers the Creche space to all service users with children.** With thanks to the Creche staff, we can offer childcare to anyone using any of our services. This allows mothers and child carers to attend meetings with the Advice Centre or for appointments with any of our staff.

# Soroya's Journey of Recovery...

Soroya is a survivor of 10 years of different forms of intimate partner violence, which varied from obsessive psycho-emotional coercive control to verbal and physical abuse. The partner's constant threat that she would be either deported, or killed if she dared to report or leave him, coupled with the high level of physical harm, were powerful constraints to make her 'stay put' in this abusive relationship and try to 'make him happy'.

In this year, due to the ferocity of his outbursts, Soroya finally had the courage to organise her escape and went to the police. The police referred Soroya to one of LAWAW's refuge and, although she was in a secure accommodation, the fear for her personal safety persisted; she was extremely anxious, oscillating between being depressed and very scared, thinking that if he found her, he would kill her.

Once at LAWAW, Soroya was referred to MARAC - a combination of statutory services and third sector organisations that coordinate emergency help for women considered at high risk of domestic violence. LAWAW provided legal support which helped her apply for divorce, and she took part in the in-house LAWAW ESOL classes and pursued computer skills classes. **In therapy she was able to explore the dynamics of violence and the connecting thread from her childhood to the current perpetrator.** However, it was only when an enforceable restriction order was placed upon the perpetrator that Soroya felt empowered to reclaim her life.

Cases like Soroya's are extremely rewarding as we can bear witness of how combined coordinated actions such as law enforcement, community services and counselling support for the victims can change deep-rooted negative beliefs and put them on a path of recovery.



## Counselling

LAWAW's in-house counselling service provides psychotherapy support in Portuguese, Spanish and English. We offer a package of 15 one-to-one free sessions. We adopt a culturally sensitive, trauma-focused approach that supports Latin American and Black and Minoritised women survivors of gender-violence to recover their mental and emotional health. Our counselling provides a safe, confidential, non-judgmental environment for survivors to express and reflect on their traumas, ultimately empowering women to recover their self-confidence and take control over their own lives. This year our counselling has run with increasing demand.

### What LAWAW's users say after completing therapy...

86%

Women we supported said they felt good and 14% said they felt very good

100%

Women we supported said therapy helped them understand their problems and experiences

100%

Women we supported said they always felt listened by their therapists

"I'm better able to rationalise how I'm feeling and can recognise when I am anxious and manage it. I've felt more comfortable talking to people. I also have a clearer picture of what reality is and my boundaries plus how I want to be treated, like what is right and wrong in other's people's behaviour and so not thinking as it is all my fault"



Our Change Maker Programme is an intersectional and intergenerational feminist space for Latin Americans and Black and Minoritised women to meet, learn and grow together.

In March 2018, we kicked off the second cycle of the Change Maker programme to a great start by attending to the Million Women Rise march in London which focusses on an end to violence against women particularly within the Black and Minoritised community.

Change Makers have reported that they were able to learn more about feminism and their identity as Latin American migrant women, created connections between themselves, becoming more confident and stronger and learning to value themselves and explore their gender and sexual identities. They believed that the space allowed them to create a sisterhood where they could speak freely without judgement.

Last year, the second cycle of the Change Maker programme engaged with a total of 67 women. Each workshop was informed by the conversations and suggestions of women who attended the workshops. Through connections made in the second cycle, the Change Maker Program will pursue opportunities with the Tate Exchange for the third cycle by becoming Tate Associates. This will enable the programme to use Tate facilities and develop opportunities to engage with the public and Tate staff and produce workshops and performances.

The programme also showed to have a multiplying effect, participants said they were multiplying their learnings and changes in different ways. For example, many women were part of other groups where they are now disseminating their learnings, some were mothers and are passing on what they learned to their children, some became a volunteer at LAWA and other organisations, whilst others started facilitating similar workshops in other organisations and schools or are planning to do so back in their home countries.

The excellent feedback we get from the service users has proven to us the importance of creating these spaces led by and for the community. This year two change makers who have migrated to other countries have started small pilots (in Colombia and in Spain) based on what they have learnt from our programme. This is a great achievement as many more women will become aware of the issues discussed throughout the sessions.



## What Change Makers said about the programme...



Rated the programme as **excellent**, whilst 11% rated it as **very good**.



Enjoyed **connecting with other women** during sessions.



Said the Change Maker programme **increased** their sense of **confidence and empowerment**.



Strongly agreed and **16%** agreed that they have **strengthened their community integration and networks**.



Said that being part of the Change Maker program **significantly contributed to increase** their **knowledge and awareness about Gender Based Violence and intersectionality**.





## LAWA Volunteer Programme

We are led by and for women of our community, therefore, our volunteer programme is exclusively for Latin American and Black and Minoritised women. This year, our organisation was supported by a team of 13 amazing volunteers who made a huge difference to our work whilst also having the opportunity to gain experience, build a community network and learn about violence against women and our intersectional feminist approach.



**Of LAWA's volunteers said** they became more involved in Latin American community and expanded their network as a result of volunteering with us



**Of LAWA's volunteers said** they agreed that they developed new job-related skills as a result of volunteering with us.

LAWA's volunteers also explained the different ways in which volunteering with us impacted on their lives:

"It has helped me to understand more about intersectional feminism, activism and the situation of minoritised women in the UK."

"LAWA helped me to connect more with my culture/identity and my roots. LAWA make me feel more empowered and confident."

"My best experience was having the pleasure to march alongside LAWA's team in the million women rise march."

"It helped me a lot to have a good understanding of how important is for Latin women having a place like LAWA."





## With thanks to...

We thank the continuous hard-work, commitment and passion of all LAWA's volunteers, staff and members of the Board of Trustees.

We also thank all our funders for believing in and supporting our work:





*Donde no puedas amar, no te demores.*

**-Frida Khalo**



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