



LAWA
latin american
women's aid

Annual Report 2019–2020



Director's Message

Latin American Women's Aid has been operating for 33 years, and in spite of many systemic challenges (including most recently a global pandemic), we have been resilient and adaptable. We've managed not only to maintain our services, but to expand our programmes of work and to deepen our collaborative approach to ensure that women and children are free from violence and oppression and can achieve their right to self-determination.

Our organization is led by and for Latin American and other Black and minoritised women, which means that we are able to offer specialist and culturally sensitive services based on our unique expertise and understanding of the realities faced by the women from our communities. Some of LAWA's most salient achievements over the past year include:

- We maintained and strengthened our main crisis response programme (Refugee services provision) by completing the first full cycle of operations in our second house, Chia House. We have expanded our refugee provision in response to the sustained increase in demand that we have observed over the last year. Referral requests between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 increased by 50% in comparison to the previous year, a situation that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis from mid-March 2020 onwards.
- We maintained and expanded our VAWG Advice Centre services by incorporating additional services such as the LBTQ specialist DV adviser and specialist housing support. These additional services allowed us to reach more women; this year saw an increase of 25% in referral numbers compared to last year.

- Emotional support is a key to the journey of healing for women and children, and it is a pivotal service within our programmes of work. Over the last year, our average waiting list time was five months which demonstrates the high demand for our Counselling service. We are seeking pathways to develop this service and increase our capacity.

This is only a snapshot of the realities, successes and achievements of our work, and I invite you to read and be inspired by the different voices that you will see reflected in this report: the voices of our exceptionally talented and committed team of staff and volunteers, the voices of the powerful women who have survived and thrived after facing violence, the voices of the community groups we have helped to develop, the voices of our partners, allies and supporters, without whom many of the efforts reflected in this report could not have come to fruition.

As we write these lines, we are still in the middle of a global pandemic, the full consequences of which are still unclear. This of course poses many challenges, but we are hopeful, and determined to overcome the obstacles ahead, reliant as we are, on our collective strength and the achievements we have built over the last five years.

Gabriela Quevedo
Director

Letter from the Board of Trustees

In April 2019 – the start of the period that this report covers – it would have been impossible to imagine how March and April 2020 have turned out, and there would be a global pandemic. LAWA has had to change very quickly, and lockdown, unemployment and a lack of childcare are all making it harder for women to leave abusive situations – and making it harder to reach those women. The hostile environment and austerity have not gone away either.

Before the pandemic, LAWA was building on the progress of the year before with a bigger team than ever. This wasn't always easy. Thanks to LAWA workers, the second refuge has provided safety to many women and children fleeing violence this year, including those without recourse to public funds.

As part of the WAHA project, LAWA released its first policy paper, *A Roof Not a Home*, in October 2019. This paper highlighted the double violence faced by Latin American and other Black and minoritised women fleeing violence in the UK: by their abusers and then by the failure of the state to support them find safety. It has been powerful and important for LAWA to produce this evidence-based research and present it to policy-makers.

LAWA secured various grants in the 2019-2020 period: City Bridge Trust, Hackney CVS and the GLA, thanks to the work of our fundraising team. In addition to this, the Change Maker programme ran in Portuguese for the first time. And on the board we have welcomed new members too.

As the pandemic continues, the year ahead will be hard. This makes it more important than ever that LAWA continues to practice intersectional, communitarian feminism, build community and provide life-saving services. We hope LAWA will become stronger and keep putting the most marginalised women at its heart: Black and brown women, trans women, lesbian and bisexual women, disabled women, women without recourses to public funds, sex workers, working class women and older women.

Yara Rodrigues Fowler
Chair of the LAWA Board of Trustees

"Thanks to LAWA workers, the second refuge has provided safety to many women and children fleeing violence this year."

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Who we are and our Impact

Latin American Women's Aid is a "led by and for" specialist organisation working to end gender-based violence against Latin American and other Black and minoritised women and girls. We run the only refuges for Latin American women and children in the UK. We also provide advice and advocacy in our Violence Against Women and Girls –VAWG- Advice Centre, with specialist services for LBTQ women and specialist housing advice.

We offer community engagement services like our Change Maker Program and the Growing Together Project and we do research and advocacy on the issue of housing for Black and minoritised VAWG survivors. Our

organisation and community are made up of other Black and minoritised women and we are proud to be trans inclusive. Emotional support is a key aspect of recovery from domestic abuse. LAWA provides a holistic service approach and counselling service is available to all the residents of our refuges. Our services are holistic and intersectional, which means that we provide everything a woman needs to recover and empower themselves, and rather than only offering crisis intervention and sign posting support, we ensure that we provide meaningful, personalised, empowering support throughout a survivor's journey

This year we have carried out a total of **7,819** interventions to **1,400** service users

At LAWA we make it a priority to listen to our service users and check in to see if our interventions are making the positive changes we hope. Through feedback and outcome tracking we can report the following results:



"I feel safe" we saw increase of 85% in response to this statement after LAWA's intervention.



Stated they would not consider going back to their previous relationship.



Stated that it made a big difference that this service was provided by a Latin American / Black and minority ethnic led women's organisation.



Stated that LAWA's services had made them feel more positive about the future.

User Profile & Intersecting Violence

The general profile of LAWA's users reflects the diversity of the Latin American and Black and minoritised population in the UK, as well as the challenges encountered by migrant women.

At LAWA we support 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. This means that LAWA survivors of violence are often presented with more complex and intersecting needs arising from their identities and experiences.

Our Service Users

The majority of women accessing our services this year were Brazilians (30%), followed by Colombians (22%). Many countries of origin represented less than 1% of service users each; taken together these total to 26 counties and 13% of our service users. This represents the diverse reach of LAWA's services. Age ranges 31–40 and 41–50 combined make up 53% of our service users.

23% of our service users identify themselves as Latin American (LA). However, 55% of our users consist of diverse Latin American identities, which include LA white (19%), LA Black (5%) to LA Indigenous (3.5%).

This reflects not only the rich ethnic diversity that makes up Central and South America but also demonstrates the many ways Latin Americans perceive themselves. Although, the broad term Latin American can be an inclusive label which many identify with, it can also be a blanket term that can invisibilise ethnic identities.

The rest of the ethnicities comprise of a variety of identities under Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British as you can see in the chart. Our 'White Other' (4%) service users comprise of minoritised white women such as Romani.

"Violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequalities and intersects with other forms of oppressions."

Abuse Experienced

In terms of our service user's experiences with abuse, 17% reported surviving emotional and psychological abuse, 16% reported experiencing verbal abuse and 13% reported experiencing financial abuse.

Unsurprisingly, with these types of violent incidences 75% of our service users also report having mental health symptoms as a result of their abuse. In addition, our data shows that 52% our service users experienced abuse a few days every week, with the next highest percentage in frequency at 26% of abuse experienced every day. This highlights how commonplace these abuses were for our survivors in their everyday lives.

Constraints on independence

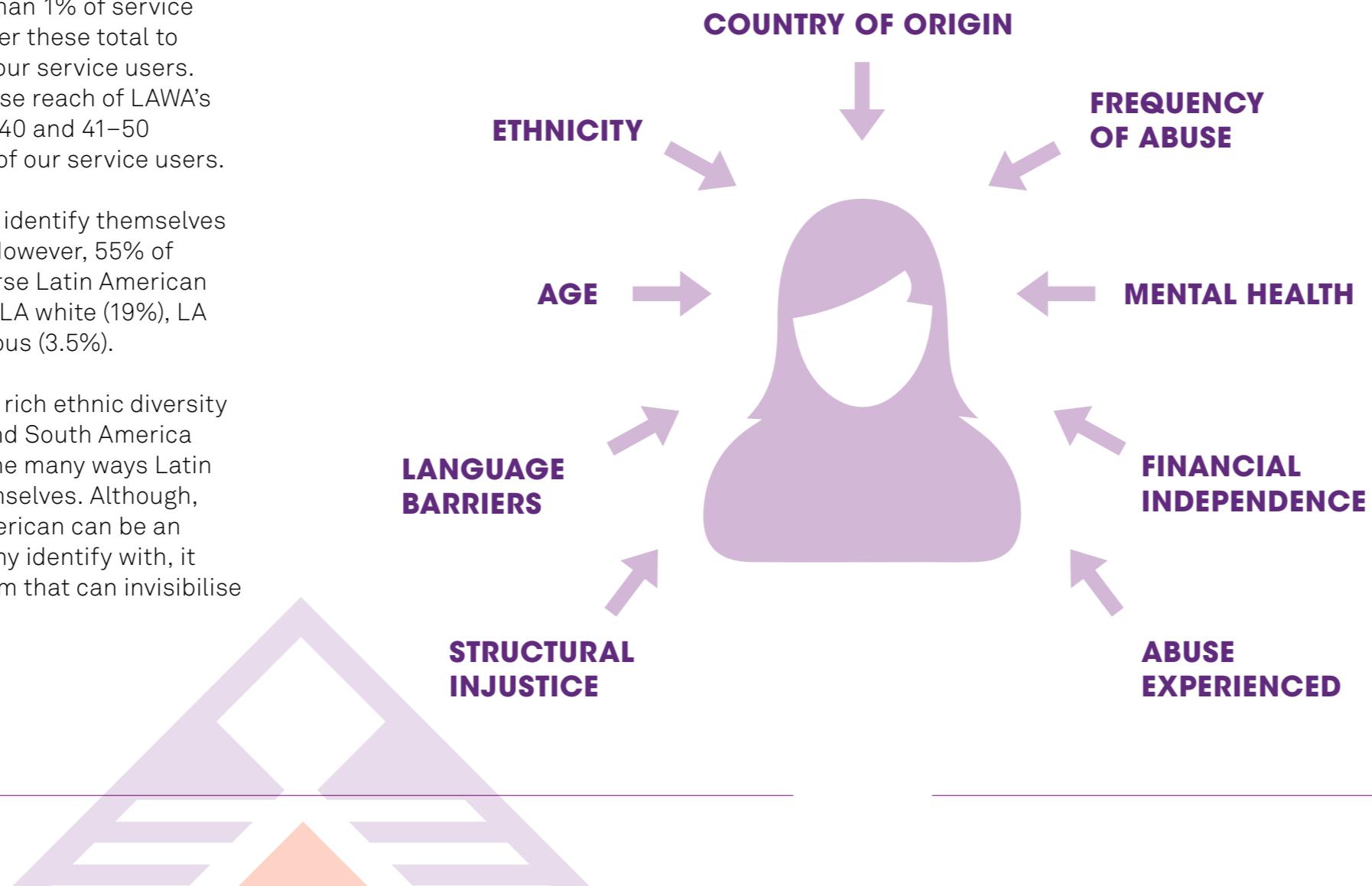
A key barrier to accessing rights and services is the language skills of our service users. Our data reveals that at least 25% are not comfortable with English at all, and over half (52%) of service users stated that they required the support of an interpreter.

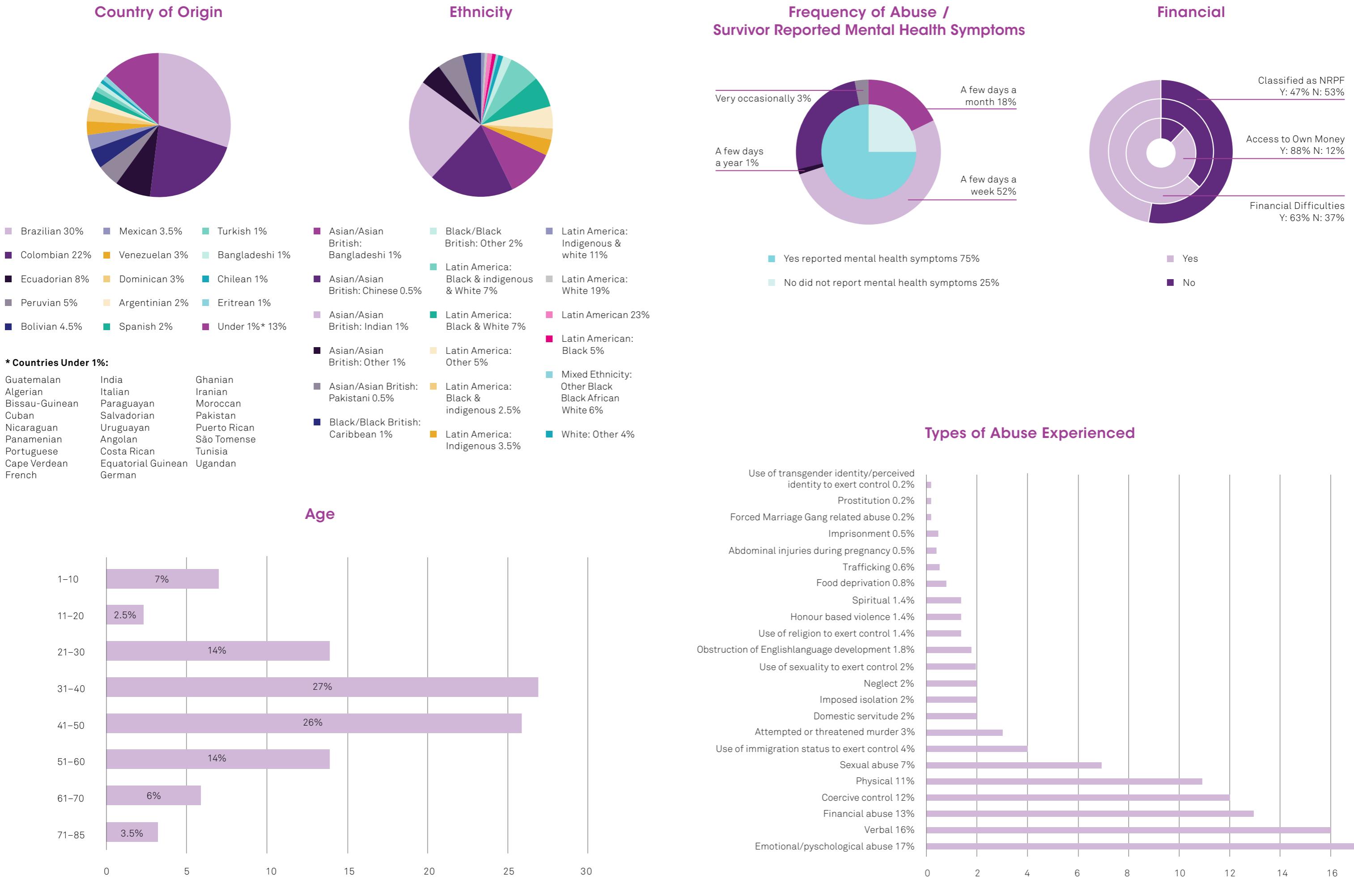
This would account for the fact that 26% of our service users had come to LAWA after engaging with a generic refuge and advice service. As all our services are available in Spanish or Portuguese, we are better able to help these women navigate the services and support available to them. We also offer English Language lessons to improve our service user's self-empowerment.

63% of our service users report having financial difficulties, 12% reported they had no access to their own money, and 47% classified as No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). LAWA's services understand the nature of financial abuse and how it is used by perpetrators.

Being financially independent is a key foundation to starting a new life away from domestic abuse. Through the advice centre's pathways to employment skills and benefits advice our service users are better equipped to begin a life with financial independence.

LAWA also challenges classifications of NRPF when appropriate. As reported last year, and highlighted in the WAHA report (see page 19), women with EU nationalities who are entitled to receive state support are being erroneously classified as NRPF by local authorities due to the Brexit situation. This further obstruction to financial independence, leaves women in high risk of becoming homeless after escaping their perpetrator, or worse, further compels them to stay as they cannot receive the support they need to escape their abusive situations.





VAWG Advice Centre

Our advice and support centre offers culturally specific support that operates in Spanish, Portuguese and English. We provide information, advocacy and support to all Latin American and Black and minoritised women survivors of gendered-based violence. The Advice Centre offers advice and support through: one-to-one appointments, drop-in days, telephone advice, in-house surgeries and outreach points. Our remit 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.

Direct increase in demand for our services continues and we receive a variety of complex and high-risk domestic violence cases being referred to us by external services.



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 have engaged with LAWA before. 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).



Trends in 2019–2020

Throughout the year we have identified policy trends that have negatively impacted on our service users. Women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and women with European Economic Area (EEA) passports, or EEA family dependant visas, were presented with more difficulties to access to welfare benefits such Universal Credit and housing support. Which in turn has made it more difficult for survivors of domestic and other type of abuse to be able to recover effectively and empower themselves independently.

Further to this, the Universal Credit application process does not take into account how widespread financial abuse and coercive control manifests itself in cases of domestic violence. Meaning that often the victim is unlikely to have their own identification documents or bank accounts, making access to Universal Credit is made more difficult.

During lockdown, LAWA's Advice Centre had to work remotely and online, whilst coping with the increase in demand. From the beginning, it was clear that women from our communities are within the most vulnerable members of our society and self-isolation posed serious and significant risks to women and their children in abusive households.



The Impact of Lockdown (March to April 2020)

We observed that during the lockdown period the emotional, coercive control and financial abuse increased, and women were afraid to go out to report the incidents for fear of getting infected. Others did not make contact in that time due to language barriers and because the perpetrator was always present. Many of our service users were also abused by their children and other family members living in the same household.

We also observed that older women had more difficulty seeking support. Physical dependence on other household members, mobility issues, as well as barriers to accessing information using new technologies, such as the internet, affected their ability to reach out. They were forced to stay in quarantine much longer because of their higher risk of infection, which in turn prolonged their social isolation, increased their exposure to abuse, and reduced their opportunities to seek help.

Nonetheless, a great number of women and girls continued contacting or being referred for advice and support to our service, we continue to update and innovate methods of contact to ensure our services are available to all women and children in our community that need them.

The Advice Centre helped **305** women over the course of the year and provided them with **3,176** interventions

90%

Stated they had improved awareness of their own rights.

80%

Stated that advice given to them increased their knowledge about how to enter paid work or access welfare benefits and manage debts.

80%

Stated that advice given to them increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and legal options.

85%

Stated they were "Highly satisfied" with the intervention provided by the Advice Centre.

Our Refuges



This year LAWA delivered the first full year of provision in our second house, maintaining increased capacity to provide emergency refuge accommodation for women escaping gender-based violence. Thanks to the second refuge, we were able to provide safe accommodation to more vulnerable women during this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are happy to share that, thanks to the many years of experience in refuge accommodation management, we have been offered a third property to use as a refuge. The initial plan was to open the house at the end of March, but this was also affected by the pandemic. Given the mobility restrictions, we had to make the hard decision of postponing for the following fiscal year, and it is expected to be open by October 2020.

This year women and children at our refuges were supported by the following services: benefits support, sessions of support work regarding Children's Services and Social Services, sessions of employment support, housing benefit support sessions, immigration support, sessions of legal advice and family law support, among others.

Additionally, our Family Support Worker provided support directly to children and young people (CYP) living in the refuges. Personal sessions were provided directly to mothers, as well as sessions provided to family units.

Our Refuge staff provide comprehensive resettlement support to all refuge residents who are moving on. This entails help with administrative details, local mapping of

community services, and further interventions if necessary.

Trends in 2019–2020

We continue to observe an increased trend of interventions per service user in the refuges, and whilst we have accommodated more service users, the number of interventions per person continues to increase. This year we report 27 interventions per person as opposed to last year where we observed 24 interventions per person. This is due to the depletion of social services available which has been a consequence of the economic cuts on Local Authorities. Additional interventions required by service users holding EEU passports has been needed as access to services are increasingly frustrated due to the governments "hostile environment". Both the economic cuts to the Local Authorities and the "hostile environment" policies are centralised government policies that have been politically driven and can change given the political will to do so.

Findings from our WAHA report (page 19) show an increase in complications arising from local authorities denying the rights of service users holding EU passports. The report demonstrates how erroneous information and decisions in this regard have heavily impacted on our service users accessing their right to services. This has created more demanding workloads for our refuge staff as extra advocacy is required in these cases. Further to this, the COVID 19 situation has demanded more provision in the refuges in order to maintain safety and support during lockdown.

Impact of Lockdown (March to April 2020)

The logistics for our service delivery within the refuges during the lockdown was affected. Another challenge was that most of the women lost their jobs and found themselves with no income to cover their basic needs. We had to quickly mobilise to ensure both houses had enough food for all 14 families. Given the unprecedented times, we opened an online crowdfunding campaign to raise £6k, to be able to support women with their additional day to day expenses.

53

85%

80%

The number of Women and Children have accessed emergency housing through LAWAs refuges and benefited from 1376 interventions.

Of women reported to have improved their ability to recognise abusive behaviour after living in a LAWA Refuge.

Of women who left our Refuges stated that they had moved onto safe accommodation.



HOW DID YOUR STAY IN THE REFUGE IMPACT ON YOUR LIFE?

"Me ha dado mucha fuerza. Aprendí mucho, me dio más seguridad que antes no tenía. Con dos bebés me ayudaron en salir adelante con lo que necesito hacer". It gave me a lot of confidence. I learnt a lot, it gave me security that I did not have before. I was able to learn and do what was necessary in moving forward in my life with my children."

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF YOUR TIME IN THE REFUGE?

"I had to understand that the staff around me were there to help me, which they did very much. But overall my time at the refuge was not difficult. I learnt how to move forward."

Online Services

Despite the lack of financial resources and skills within our team, some years ago we recognised the importance of increasing our efforts in the digital world. Over the past 6 years we have slowly expanded our experience and presence in this arena.

Today, we are proud to not only have recently updated our website, but we have also become more active on social media through our accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and now also Instagram. These channels have grown to be an important form of communication with different audiences that include our service users, as well as other members from the community including: women interested in volunteering or working at LAWA, donors, and anyone interested in reaching out to us.

We foresaw the safety challenges that women experiencing domestic violence were going to encounter when trying to make a call for support while in lockdown with their perpetrators 24/7. We increased our digital activity and our capacity to respond through online channels, like our webchat and WhatsApp.

As part of our online response to the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, we developed online resources such as '**10 steps to do at home**', which we shared on all our social platforms and can be accessed here:

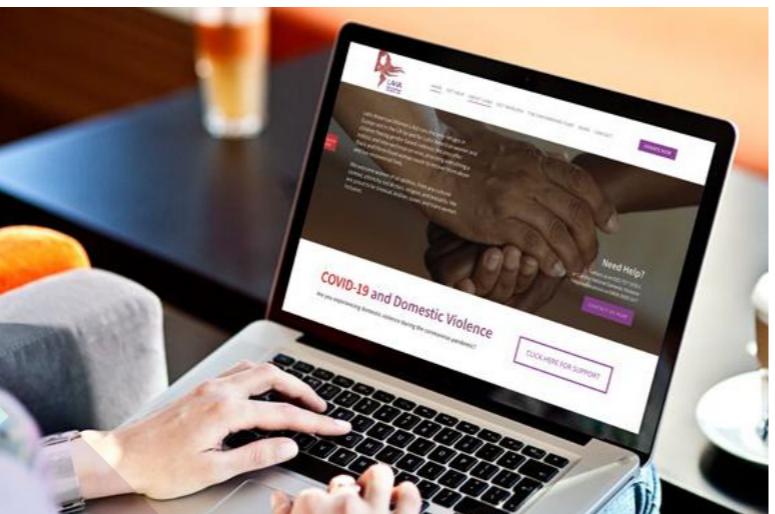
<http://lawadv.org.uk/en/get-help-coronavirus/lawadv.org.uk/en/10-steps-to-do-at-home/>

Or scan our QR Code to access the briefing:



Finally, we are happy to report that **9,300** users visited our website **13,000** times during this year, and our Facebook page now has **3,253** followers, an increase of **20%** since March 2019

During this year, we had **67** online chat conversations of which **30%** occurred in March



Family Support

When families enter the refuge, we assess both mum and children (when age is appropriate) to create a mutual action plan for both. It is often the case that the domestic violence they've experienced has had an impact on their relationship, and part of our work is to support them so they can heal this damage.

The tailored action plan encompasses both emotional and practical support. For instance: registering the family at the local GP, contacting the Health Visiting team, when applicable, and contacting school admissions team or children's officer of the council to place children as soon as possible, and also creating a safe and warm space for children to be.

Meanwhile, we also make applications for Child Benefit and Child Maintenance, and our Family Support Worker provides weekly key one to one sessions. Individual sessions in the playroom make children comfortable to open up about how they felt during the direct or indirect domestic violence experience, along with how they are reacting about living in our refuge.



"The most helpful thing I obtained from the refuge was the help I received with the children, they have found peace that they did not have before, they have learned to love each other more and this made me happy as a mother."



We also arrange group sessions with age appropriate activities for children and young people to interact with each other, as well as activities for mothers only. The Family Support Worker enables children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.

Impact of Lockdown (March to April 2020)

Due to lockdown and quarantine procedures it was not possible for the Family Support Worker to meet face to face as often with families, however they did continue communications on a daily basis over the phone and plan activities to do online. During this time a lot of interventions were caused by trying to register extremely vulnerable children with a school that would receive them in the lockdown period.

"I was supported both administratively and emotionally. My time there really helped me gain confidence and independence by building my confidence and recognition in my own self power. The Family Support Worker provided excellent activities."

Counselling



LAWA's in house Counselling Service provides psychotherapy support in Portuguese, Spanish and English. We adopt a culturally sensitive, trauma focused approach that supports Latin American and Black and minoritised survivors of different forms of gendered-based violence to recover their mental and emotional health.

Juana's Journey

In Ecuador, Juana was trafficked and forced into prostitution by her ex-boyfriend. She was locked up with other women for around a year and they were not allowed to leave the house on their own. During this time, Juana experienced repeated sexual, physical and verbal abuse.

One day Juana's perpetrator took her out, and Juana had the courage to escape. She did not report the incident to the police fearing

Our counselling package of 16 one-to-one free sessions 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.

The name has been changed and the story has been adapted to protect the client's confidentiality.

retaliation against her family, as the perpetrator had links with a dangerous gang and drug traffickers in Ecuador.

After Juana escaped, she decided to leave her country and come to the UK as she was afraid of being tracked down by her perpetrator. The severity of the abuse had deeply traumatised Juana. She became extremely anxious and experienced regular nightmares, flashbacks, sleeping problems, difficulty concentrating,

irritability and hypervigilance. She was further traumatised by not having been granted asylum by the Home Office.

Juana felt very let down by the system by the time she approached LAWA. Here, the Advice Centre was able to support her in re-applying for asylum and the refuge offered her a safe place to live whilst more long-term housing could be secured for her by the refuge team and her right to stay was secured by the Advice Centre. Once at the refuge, Juana connected with other women who were survivors of domestic violence and, little by little, she was able to create a sense of physical safety and a sense of community.

Since living in the refuge and after her engagement with the Advice Centre, Juana

felt supported and not alone anymore. She was able to start engaging with LAWA's Counselling Service, which was Juana's first engagement with emotional support. After several sessions Juana was able to start working with the healing process, encompassing safety, and restoring control.

By the end of the 16 sessions, Juana was able to talk about her experience and her feelings without feeling ashamed or guilty. Her engagement and the effort she put into the counselling process has helped her to progress, and to move on with her life. With LAWA support, Juana's has been enrolled to ESOL classes and childcare training to get a professional qualification.

Creating Perspectives

This year, LAWA volunteer counsellors took the initiative to develop a project to provide an option for women waiting for their counselling therapy with LAWA. Unfortunately, given the limited resources available, the waiting list can go up to 5 months.

Our volunteers were concerned for the women placed on the waiting list as they would not have any mental health support while they waited for their sessions to begin. So, they designed a pilot project named 'Creando Perspectivas' (Creating Perspectives), codeveloped with the Counselling coordinator. The project involved a weekly group therapy session that was offered to women who have already completed their 15 sessions of therapy

and women referred to the group by their assigned caseworker. The logic of this was to provide a safe space of guided group therapy for women before and after their individual counselling sessions. The service users freely decided when they would start, interrupt and/or resume participation in the group.

The 'Creando Perspectivas' project is another example of LAWA implementing empowering models. Through our practice of encouragement and support to volunteers, they were able to propose an engagement space with service users on the counselling waiting list.

We were proud of our volunteers for creating this new service.

"The logic of this was to provide a safe space of guided group therapy for women before and after their individual counselling sessions."

Change Makers

Change Makers in Portuguese

The need to connect to the Brazilian community was identified last year and the Change Maker programme adjusted accordingly. From June to September 2019, we focused on outreach activities with the Brazilian community.

Our Brazilian Change Maker trainer attended various meetings with community leaders in key locations, such as the Brazilian embassy and the consulate. She also used targeted social media adverts to reach out for a wider number of community members. The workshops started in September 2020 and delivered 35 sessions.

Based on the methodology created during its first years, the Change Maker programme proposes a non-hierarchical feminist approach where women are encouraged to co-create activities, learn and grow together.

In 2019, LAWA became Tate Exchange Associate and with this new partnership we

wanted our Change Maker community to feel that a museum is not a space of privilege, but rather an environment to promote cultural exchange. We took a community led, educational and multidisciplinary approach to bring visibility to our community and generate social change.

Through the Change Maker programme, we engaged Brazilian women working at the Tate in the security and catering sector. Tate staff joined our programme and reported 'never before been in a space where women are encouraged to discuss gender equality 'and 'never seen Tate Exchange space so full of people like it was in our performance day'.

Change makers cohort attended Olafur Eliason Exhibition at the Tate, event in the Brazilian Embassy about violence against women and girls, event at Kings College London about violence against migrant women, and an event promoted by 'Grupo Mulheres do Brasil' about sexual harassment at workplace and Million women rise in March 2020.



'The power of our ancestors' performance at Tate Exchange

The power of our ancestors: an immersive performance by Latin American women to celebrate the lives and contributions of women who came before us.

On the 14th March 2020, 50 Latin American and other Black and minoritised women shared their stories of migration and womanhood and celebrated their ancestors through traditional singing, dancing and autobiographical poetry.

The theatrical performance 'The power of our ancestors' was a partnership between Latin American Women's Aid, Migrants in Action (MinA) and Tate Exchange. Based on decolonial aesthetics and practices, and following communitarian and intersectional feminists' perspectives, women of all ages from Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, El Salvador, Peru, Benin, Jamaica and more, performers and non-performers, had equal time slot and the freedom to respond to the theme in the form and language they wished to.

Languages spoken varied from Spanish, Portuguese, English, Quechua and Yoruba. The performance started with a Yoruba song, going through Quechua dance and singing, Afro-Brazilian rituals, Andean ritual practices in agriculture, Colombian poem by mother and daughter, Mexican immigration struggles, a

fashion Knitwear show by 15 elderly women from the LAWA Growing Together project, and much more.

At the end of each act, participants placed a candle on the alter in memory of their ancestors. After three hours immersed in the ritualistic performance, audience feedback stated that watching the sounds, colours and movements of Latin America, made them feel closer to the homeland and proud of own culture, increasing a sense of community in London. Around 200 people attended the event on that day and a documentary video was created.

100%

Of participants in this year's Change Maker programme stated they had increased their knowledge about Gender Based Violence and Intersectionality

97.8%

Of participants felt they had strengthened their community integration and network

Scan the QR Code to watch our Change Makers documentary at the Tate.



Growing Together

The “Growing Together” project is our landmark community group engaging elderly women (50+) with the objective of combatting isolation and creating opportunities for integration. In line with our “by and for” approach, the project lead of this group is also a Latin American 50+ woman.

This group has its home in Hackney, where our main offices are based, and since day one it has created many opportunities for women to come together and share experiences: from weekly meet-ups where women shared skills such as knitting, to weekly Zumba lessons, to outings to places such as the Southbank, the Buddhapadipa Temple near Wimbledon and many more.

Women benefitted in a holistic sense from the knitting activities. The act itself of starting and finishing products, and then exhibit them to the community of the Print House, as well as a ‘fashion show’ at LAWA’s Tate exchange performance in March 2020, boosted their sense of belonging, wellbeing and self-esteem.

“Since day one it has created many opportunities for women to come together and share experiences.”

The group is also supported in the practical sense through LAWA’s advice and accompaniment that enables them to access services and engage with community life in the local area. We always promote an empowering approach, however we have also been able to successfully support the women when they needed it.

At times it was hard for them to overcome the lack of confidence and ability to navigate day to day activities due to the language barrier. That said, the group has grown from strength to strength, being able to withstand these challenges and also those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced them to adjust their activities to be fully online as the lockdown was established in the UK in mid-March 2020.



“The group has grown from strength to strength, being able to withstand these challenges and also those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA)

In 2019, LAWA invested considerable time strengthening partnerships and deepening our engagement with key stakeholders at local and national level. This has proved essential to facilitate effective advocacy on behalf of our service users to secure positive outcomes for them.

A substantial part of this work was carried out through the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) initiative. The WAHA initiative made visible the largely hidden and under-reported social problem of women's homelessness, and the intricate connection of this problem with that of violence against women, which in turn is a leading cause of women's homelessness in the UK and worldwide. Whilst the intertwined realities of abuse and risk of homelessness may affect all women, Black and minoritised women are made particularly vulnerable by intersecting and structural inequalities.

The WAHA project enabled collaborative research within the OYA consortium (a network of Black and minoritized women refuge organisations) and in October 2019 we published our first piece of comprehensive research aimed for policy and influencing work. The report, entitled 'A Roof, not a Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London', presents findings and provides policy recommendations to address

gaps and failures in housing policy and practice in relation to BME survivors experiences of homelessness.

The report was launched on-line on the 10th of October 2019 to mark World Homeless Day. There was significant engagement on our social media platforms, in particular on twitter, with several organisations from the women's and homelessness sector re-tweeting our posts and welcoming our report. Our report also caught the attention of the national media with an exclusive feature piece on the Huffington Post: 'Exclusive: BAME Domestic Abuse Survivors 'Being Failed By Local Housing Authorities', Study Reveals'. Our plan in the coming years is to continue this area of work through ongoing research and targeted campaign efforts.

Read the executive report by visiting:

http://lawadv.org.uk/en/waha_executive_summary/

Or scan the QR Code here:



"Whilst the intertwined realities of abuse and risk of homelessness may affect all women, Black and minoritised women are made particularly vulnerable by intersecting and structural inequalities."

Improving Institutional Practices

This year we also promoted advocacy initiatives as the residential address of one of our refuges was discovered by perpetrators of domestic violence during the family court process. The relevant procedural practices of the Family Court system were deemed counter-productive at best, and harmful, at worst. These practices include: the naming of refuges and refuge workers in family court orders; police serving family court orders on women at residential addresses of refuges causing re-traumatisation.

The consequences of these incidents have included: perpetrators stalking and harassing victims; further forms of domestic violence; child abduction; mothers and children having to move to other refuges, causing further distress and anxiety; mental health concerns and privacy concerns.

This could be avoided by ensuring that refuge addresses are always confidential and that family court orders are served by alternative means, as per the Family Procedure Rules

"We have also sought to introduce a specific amendment in the Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through parliament."



2010. When the incidents involved took place, we sought the support from the Independent Victims' Commissioner for London and the Victims Commissioner for England and Wales about these cases.

Combined with the support of pro-bono legal specialists, our partners and allies in the women's sector (e.g. Women's Aid Federation), and the invaluable input and solidarity from the 'led by and for' sector (especially Imkaan), allowed us to reach out directly to the President of the Family Division, who is now reviewing the two cases involving LAWA's refuges.

Linked to these advocacy efforts, which are closely connected to recent government announcements to overhaul of the family courts system, we have also sought to introduce a specific amendment in the Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through parliament to prevent this from happening again.

Partnerships

During this year, LAWA was part of different partnerships for the provision of VAWG specialist services:

Samira Project

Together with IMECE and Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO), LAWA provides specialist support to women with Kurdish, Turkish and Latin American backgrounds in the borough of Islington. This project improves referrals pathways for women who approach the local authority seeking support.

"This project improves referrals pathways for women who approach the local authority seeking support."

OYA Consortium

OYA is a consortium of BME organisations providing refuge and specialist supporting services to survivors of different forms of VAWG. It is composed of sister organisations; Asha, Ashiana, London Black Women's Project, and Claudia Jones, with the support of Imkaan. Together we provide services in seven London Boroughs with outreach across London. Through this partnership, LAWA leads the WAHA initiative and the report 'A Roof, not a Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London'.

Refuge without Borders

LAWA is the service delivery organisation for specialist 'led by and for' BME refuge provision in this cross-borough partnership. The local authorities joining this project are Lambeth, Southwark, Barnet, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, led by Islington. Through this partnership the listed Local Authorities benefit by being able to create specialist referral pathways to us when a woman of our community presents themselves to them as fleeing from domestic violence.

CASA project

Funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA), LAWA is part of a pan-London partnership providing move-on advice and support to women and families who have recently moved from refuge accommodation to a longer-term housing scheme.

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 21 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.

Join our volunteer programme

We seek skills in different areas for different roles, and we accept different professional profiles. It is preferable that you speak English and at least one Latin American language – Spanish or Portuguese.

We request a minimum commitment of 6 months (8 months for counselling volunteers). These are some of the areas in which you could support us:

Case Work Support / Community Engagement / Translation and Interpreting / Communication & Social Media / Counselling / Graphic Design / Events and Activities

You can download the volunteer application form in the QR code and send it to:
volunteer@lawadv.org.uk



100%

Felt the programme developed their job related skills.

100%

Felt that the work that I performed for LAWA was important and valued by the staff.

"It was an amazingly positive experience"

"It makes me think more about the job I want to do in the future and in working with organizations that helps and gives back"

"Since I wasn't working for a while, I was able to have my confidence back and I felt empowered to learn and help Lawa in communications"

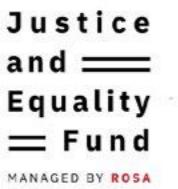
"It was a really good experience in general. I felt really welcomed by the staff and enjoyed the working environment"

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. This year has been particularly challenging and we acknowledge the extra lengths everyone in the organisation has gone through to provide all our services and projects to ensure our service users are safe, empowered and enabled to live full and happy lives.

We would also like to thank Taking Up Space, the designers who have designed this year's Annual Report. Taking Up Space is a not-for-profit network of designers, social leaders and researchers who work together to deliver change for women and girls.

Lastly, we would like to thank all our funders below whose support make all LAWAs work possible.



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