About the ACAA

The Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) was founded by Dr Nooralhaq Nasimi in 2001, 14 months after he arrived in the United Kingdom as a refugee.

As the Refugee Council assisted Dr Nasimi when he arrived, the ACAA works to help refugees in Lewisham with integration into British society through the provision of services such as language courses, mentoring schemes and legal assistance. Since the organisation was set up in 2001 we have employed eight full time staff and over 900 volunteers. The growth of our workforce has enabled us to expand our mission.

In the UK, the ACAA endeavours to complement borough, city and national policies regarding the assimilation of refugees and asylum seekers into local communities. This agenda is met by working in collaboration with local authorities and organisations to aid and enhance the services offered at the ACAA.

The ACAA strives to empower, educate and unite Afghans and Central Asians living away from their homeland; provide them the skills and knowledge required to exercise their rights and achieve success and prosperity within the UK.

We hope to reduce social isolation by empowering individuals to become more confident about integrating into the local community. We offer practical support and advice throughout their journey in the UK. We have been helping refugees for more than 13 years and have a thorough understanding of the difficulties facing people arriving in the UK, having fled war, rape, torture and with unimaginable stories to tell. Many refugees have lost everything and their lives will never return to normal. We offer a helping hand to support and empower them to rebuild their lives.

In Afghanistan we work to promote human rights and democracy, focusing our efforts on some of the country’s most vulnerable people, including: women, children, internally displaced people, disabled people and returnees.

Our mission

“To promote community cohesion and seek to provide assistance to the needs of Afghans and Central Asians living in London.”
Chair’s report

Welcome to all of you on behalf of the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association. I am delighted to introduce our annual report for 2016, which highlights some of the key achievements of the last year.

Before we carry on I would like to thank Dagi Dagiev for his work as Chair until June 2016 when he was unable to continue on the Board of Trustees. Dagi Dagiev was an important leader for the organisation and Board of Trustees.

The plight of refugees from across the world is high on the global and national political agenda and over the last year the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association has seen an increase in people coming to access services from a broader range of countries. Under the wing of Dr Noorulhaq Nasimi the organisation has been responding to national and international challenges.

We strive to bring communities together, seeking to empower and enable refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the wider community, recognising that this is more than the provision of ESOL classes and advice. You will be able to read about our services later in this report.

We have been building on relationships that have been developed over the years including those with Lewisham Council, Street Vibes, Tidemill Academy and many others to strengthen our services in Deptford, Lewisham and across South East London. We hope to continue working in this way and expand our reach out to other areas across London.

An area that ACAA excels in is the involvement of beneficiaries in setting the priorities of the organisation. Dr Nasimi and his team carry out regular evaluation and monitoring in order to properly understand the needs of those that we work with, ensuring that we serve the people who come through our doors.

The organisation has a strong staff team and volunteers who bring skills and energy to our activities. However, the Trustees recognise the need to look beyond delivery. We are becoming more strategic: improving policies; planning fundraising; the Trustees, staff and volunteers are provided with regular training and development and we plan to work towards achieving accreditation. This will improve the quality of our offer to refugees and asylum seekers both in the UK and Afghanistan.

The ACAA has been proactive in identifying new trustees, with skills and experience that meet the ever-changing needs of charitable organisations. This has included a robust recruitment process which we hope will strengthen the organisation for future years, ensuring sustainability for many years to come.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Noorulhaq Nasimi, the Director and Founder of the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association. Dr Nasimi works tirelessly to help those most in need, never thinking of himself. He is a shining example of integrity and honesty, and teaches us all to value others.
This year the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) has been able to continue the success of previous years by expanding our projects and services. In doing so, we are able to continue our mission of empowering, educating and uniting Afghans and Central Asians living away from their homeland.

We believe that the ACAA plays an important role in its local community. The services that we provide, such as English language classes, a supplementary school, mentoring schemes, volunteering placements, employment and business training, trips, and social events, all offer a function that we believe will help the Afghan and Central Asian diaspora to better assimilate into British society.

Our services not only improve integration, but also support counter-extremism by providing a safe environment for sharing and discussion. Through the provision of services we hope to equip refugees and asylum seekers with the necessary tools to build a brighter future in the UK.

Throughout 2015 and 2016 we have seen many successes within the ACAA. The Zanan Women’s Sessions are rapidly growing in popularity, with the number of Afghan and other Muslim women participants increasing in the weekly workshops.

We have seen an increase in demand for our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. While our services are aimed at the Afghan and Central Asian diaspora we have a non-exclusion policy and have, as a result, attracted many people from different cultures that are now enrolled with us.

Our volunteer placements and mentoring sessions support a high number of people to improve their confidence and skills, with the hope they will ultimately secure employment.

By ensuring that the ACAA is a stable, purposeful and high performing charity, rooted in an empathetic understanding of the immense challenges facing refugees in the UK and conscious of our reach and influence as a credible and authoritative voice on refugee matters, we were able to fulfil our mission in 2015/16. We were also able to make significant progress towards achieving our vision of the UK as a welcoming place of safety for people seeking refuge here from persecution and human rights abuses abroad.

We were able to take advantage of the palpable, positive and, to date, sustained shift in public attitudes to refugees, thanks to the dedication, persistence and tenacity of our staff members and volunteers, the generosity of our many charitable, individual and statutory funders and supporters, and to the direction, guidance and encouragement provided to the organisation by our doughty Board of Trustees.
Supplementary school

What we do

The supplementary school programme is the longest-running programme at the ACAA, providing supplementary education to children from Afghanistan and Central Asia who are currently living in South London.

The majority of children that we work with are refugees, and often have poor English language skills. With this limitation, children can very easily fall behind in school and feel excluded from the community. We have continued to provide extracurricular support for children aged 6-16 from both the Afghan diaspora and wider community. Our schools aim to help children perform better at their mainstream school, narrow the gap between the attainment levels of refugee children and those born in the UK, and help children maintain their cultural identity.

With the help of volunteer teachers our supplementary school enables us to provide support on core academic subjects. Across a three-year period, over 178 children benefited from the supplementary school programme. In addition to facilitating the learning of traditional core subjects, we also run ‘native tongue’ tuition in Farsi and Pashto, allowing young people to maintain a connection with their heritage.

Participant origins

When reviewing participants across a three-year period we found that they came from a diverse array of nationalities as outlined in Figure 1.
This year we have worked to build partnerships with local schools to promote the supplementary school programme and engage with as many young people in the community as possible. Currently, we run three supplementary school classes a week and support students at all stages of their education.

Our aims
1. We aim to create a personalised and relaxed learning environment that is specific to each student’s needs.
2. We aim to provide students with educational support that complements the education they receive at school, in order to help them adapt to the British school system.
3. We aim to provide children with the skills and confidence they need to allow them to take an active role in both their school life and the local community.

Achievements
This year we have enrolled over 60 students in the supplementary school programme, including 20 unaccompanied minors who had been referred to the ACAA as a result of partnerships with the local council and organisations.

The supplementary school also allows young people the opportunity to engage with others from the same cultural background, and build social networks with other refugees and asylum seekers.

Teacher evaluations

Figure 2 Average teacher evaluations of key indicators before and after the supplementary school course

Areas of improvement

- Reading
- Conversation
- Writing
- Numeracy
- Confidence
- Social skills
ULYSSA, VOLUNTEER

“The first thing you notice is the students’ joy and enthusiasm.”

ZAHED, SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT

“Saturdays here are fun because I make lots of new friends and the teachers are helpful.”

Case study
Hiba is a six-year-old, year 1 student at a primary school in Lewisham. She has been attending the ACAA Supplementary School for almost a year now. Initially, her parents signed her up for Farsi classes only, but when they found out about the Maths and English support the school offered, they let the teachers know about the difficulty that their daughter was having in school in both these subjects. With one-to-one assistance, she is able to complete her homework with ease. Her parents still want her to learn Farsi and the school accommodates this by allowing her to spend the first half of the class in Farsi and the second in Maths and English support. But the support classes are not just about completing homework from school, they help close the gap in Hiba’s knowledge so that she can keep up with the curriculum in school. This is why she is given key stage-appropriate worksheets in both subjects, so that she can get the extra practice she needs to succeed.

Achievements
We have been able to track the progress of students using teacher evaluation forms conducted at the beginning and end of the course across six key areas: reading, conversation, writing, numeracy, confidence and social skills. Through these evaluations we have found that there has been significant improvement across all areas as seen in figure 2. However, it must be noted that there may be other contributing factors to this improvement other than the supplementary school programme.

03 — SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL
CHARITY NUMBER 1096908
AFGHANISTAN & CENTRAL ASIAN ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL REPORT 2015 — 2016
Mentoring programme

What we do

The ACAA’s mentoring project provides the opportunity for individuals to receive one-to-one support and guidance which is tailored to their specific needs. This programme allows the mentees to maximise their potential by developing skills that will help them integrate more successfully into British society, with mentors offering assistance on matters regarding employment, education and personal assistance.

Our diverse range of mentors allows us to match mentors and mentees based on suitability, where the needs of service users meet the specific knowledge and skill sets of the expert. This ensures both parties get the most out of participating in the programme.

Achievements

In the period January to June 2016 a total of 30 mentees were matched with mentors. Meetings took place at times of mutual convenience and proved to be successful in engaging both the mentors and the Afghan and Central Asian diaspora in the local community.

Success was also demonstrated with regard to service users seeking employability advice. Following participation in the mentoring programme, two of our mentees who were eligible to work in the UK found employment. They attributed it to the patient guidance of the mentors and the personalised one-on-one attention.

As a result of our thriving volunteer programme the mentoring programme was able to be established as a firmly embedded activity at the ACAA.

Our aims

The mentoring scheme aims to facilitate the assimilation of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Central Asian countries into British society. It attempts to do so by addressing individual needs of the mentees and providing advice and guidance on any issues that they are facing.

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In the period January to June 2016 a total of 30 mentees were matched with mentors.
Case study

ULYSSA, VOLUNTEER

“As an Iranian Farsi speaker, I decided to get involved in the Afghanistan and Central Asian Association (ACAA) to increase my awareness of non-Iranian Farsi speakers.

Whilst mentoring, I have drawn on my own experiences and my Farsi to provide reassurance and guidance. I have been presented with challenges adjusting to the different dialect and learning about and dealing with difficult issues within the diaspora, such as dislocation caused by conflict.

However, I have also been welcomed with open arms by the community despite my different national origin and have learnt as much, if not more, from my discussions with others than guidance I have given myself – a testament to the commitment and resilience of the staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.”
ESOL

What we do

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses cater for learners who are settled, or soon to be settled in the UK. We ran an ESOL entry level 1&2 class every Saturday at the Albany Centre for women, with an average of 20 participants in each session, and every Thursday evening for all adults.

In addition to the classes, students were invited to participate in cultural events, training workshops, conferences and activities offered by ACAA. These events provided an opportunity for students to use their language skills in a practical setting. Students were also encouraged to make frequent visits to Deptford library to familiarise themselves with English books and media.

Our aims
We aim to facilitate integration and community building by improving students’ English language skills and increasing their confidence.

In order to cater for the learners registering with the ACAA, the service simultaneously develops and maintains partnerships with a range of ESOL providers across the borough, in order to increase the number of options available to learners, as well as to reduce the number of providers they must approach individually to find a suitable ESOL class. These reciprocal relationships between the Hackney EAS and ESOL providers in Hackney have increased since the service’s inception, and many are now firmly established.

Achievements
Realising the value of the classes for the community, when funding for the programme expired in March 2015 ACAA managed to continue to provide one class per week. Feedback from students consistently indicated that they felt their language skills were improving, and demand for classes remained high, with the ESOL team continuously registering new students throughout the year.

ESOL

A total of 140 learners were registered on the ACAA database in 2015–16. 98% of these learners were identified as having ESOL needs, ie they were assessed at ESOL E1 to L2.

ELIF, ESOL STUDENT

"Every Saturday I learn different words. That makes me very happy and I feel more freedom."

The remaining learners either spoke fluent, or near fluent English, and needed to improve their reading and writing skills, or were fluent speakers who would benefit from mentoring, volunteering or employment advice.

Learners attending the ESOL classes originated from 12 different countries and spoke eight different first languages between them. The majority of learners originated from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Algeria, Kosovo, Turkey, Somalia and other South Asian countries.
Attendees

12

Different countries

8

Different first languages

Afghanistan
Somalia
Iran
Syria
Algeria
Kosovo
Turkey
South Asian countries

Case study

MARIAM FAZLY, IRANIAN LEARNER

“After I studied English, my speaking and listening improved. It helped me become confident to speak English and made me feel free to live my life in the UK.

I can communicate with my friends, contact GP, discuss more topics with my husband, more social life, understand and enjoy watching films or listening to the radio. I found that my life is easier than before. I would like to thank the ACAA for giving me the opportunity to learn English.”
What we do

The ACAA reached its third year of funding by the Home Office (through the London Borough of Lewisham) to continue the work for the Muslim Women’s Outreach Project.

The programme was aimed at Muslim women in the community, with the purpose of preventing individuals from being drawn into terrorism by facilitating regular discussions and educational workshops to aid their integration into British society.

The project ran from October 2015 to March 2016. Throughout this period, we held a series of workshops/debates which addressed issues surrounding radicalism and extremism in the UK.

The following workshops were held throughout this period:

- Social Media and its Impact on Radicalisation November 28 2015
- Women’s Empowerment and Islam December 10 2015
- The Causes of Radicalisation January 16 2016
- The Role of Women in Extremist Movements January 30 2016
- Islam and British Values February 13 2016
- Youth and Radical Ideologies March 18 2016

The speakers that attended these sessions were all experts in their given subject, influential women and positive Muslim role models.
Our aims
1. To empower Muslim women within British society
2. To increase knowledge and understanding of radicalisation and extremism within the female Muslim community and their families
3. To prevent vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism
4. To raise awareness of Prevent in Lewisham by working with both the community and charity sector

Achievements
Over 60 women participated in the project throughout its six month duration. The majority of our beneficiaries came from an Afghan background (53%), 23% from a White European background, and 7% from an African background. Amongst them 60% were Muslim, 24% were not religious and 7% were Christian. This project has:
• Helped to raise awareness of the government’s Prevent and counter-terrorism strategies
• Helped women understand the role they can play in preventing children and youth from being drawn into terrorism
• Served to promote citizenship and shared values, whilst sharing the burden of building good relationships across all communities in the UK
• Raised the profile of the role that women can play in contributing to and tackling radicalisation and extremism
• Encouraged community cohesion through the knowledge and understanding of diversity and mutual respect, thus challenging the division between ‘us and them’ that is often used by extremist groups
• Allowed women to gain a greater understanding of their rights within Islam

Workshops’ effectiveness
After each workshop we conducted a questionnaire amongst the participants to measure the progress being made throughout the project and to allow us to evaluate its efficacy.
The responses suggested that the more people talk about extremism and radicalisation and the more they are exposed to these concepts, the better their knowledge will be. As a result, we affirm that there is a clear need to continue a programme such as this in order to keep the counter-terrorism dialogue active within society.

Recommend programme to others

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Learned more about the topic

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The topic of the workshop is useful

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The workshop fulfilled expectations

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<th>Agree</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
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“Do you know what my answer is when I’m asked what my response to effectively tackle extremism is? I wish there were more safe spaces like this for women where they can freely talk and discuss about Islam and challenge radicalisation and extremisms, like we did today.”

“I think for me the workshop was a real myth buster. Rania very articulately discussed the prevailing misconceptions about women in Islam that disempower them. She also engaged the participants in a dialogue on how, as individuals, we can play a role in empowering Muslim women in our communities.”
“Through attending this workshop I’ve come to realise that the majority of our practices are cultural, rather than religious.”
Development and bringing communities together

What we do

The funding awarded to the ACAA by the Deptford Challenge Trust has enabled the development officer to expand relationships between the organisation and prospective partners and local charities.

Information was gathered from drop-in sessions, focus groups and telephone consultations to establish what services people in the community would benefit most from and the main problems that refugees have faced after arriving in the UK. The findings showed that: ‘improving English skills’, ‘gaining experience in the UK work environment’ and ‘gaining access to paid employment’ were the key areas of concern.

Achievements

The development of local and regional partnerships allowed the ACAA to increase the efficacy of projects by learning from organisations who we collaborate with.

The ACAA has worked alongside schools and organisations in the local area to increase awareness of the organisation and the services that we offer. The ACAA has opened dialogue, and set foundations for partnership with the Lewisham Social Worker Referral Network. This partnership has resulted in referrals being made to the ACAA, which has allowed unaccompanied minors to attend our supplementary school, English language classes and mentoring scheme.

As a result of collaboration with The Challenge, the ACAA became a delivery partner for their summer programme. The Challenge runs the government-funded National Citizen Service Scheme.

The ACAA hosted a talk led by Imam Asim Haflz, the first Muslim Chaplain of the British armed forces and Islamic religious adviser to the Ministry of Defence. The talk was presented to an interfaith group with the aim of promoting community cohesion and a better understanding of Islam.

Our aims

1. Increase awareness of our services and in turn the number of people accessing them
2. Increase the range of services that we offer whilst simultaneously improving those that are already in place
3. Increase the diversity of people who access our services to allow a greater proportion of the community to engage with the ACAA and the services that it offers
Muslim Youth Outreach Project

What we do

As part of the Muslim Outreach Project, the ACAA hosts forums and discussions to create a dialogue surrounding the priorities and challenges Muslim youth face with regards to integration. Through events, workshops and collaborative partnerships, the organisation attempts to provide them with the necessary tools for integration while creating a safe space for youth of all backgrounds.

Our aims

The objective of the Muslim Youth Outreach Project is to expand the social networks of young people, facilitate their integration into society and subsequently enhance community cohesion. The project also strives to promote positive dialogue between different groups within the community in order to break down cultural barriers.

Achievements

Meetings were held with schools in the area to promote our supplementary school programme. Due to the high Afghan population of the schools, many young Muslims were targeted and referred to our programmes. In April 2016, a partnership was established for Tidemill Academy to run an afterschool programme for children of Afghan/Central Asian/Iranian heritage.

“I have been consistently impressed by the level of enthusiasm and diligence shown by the staff and volunteers at ACAA.

Their willingness to address difficult issues (including radicalisation and violent extremism) with open minds, and to identify a variety of perspectives for innovation and appropriate youth-centred activities, has been particularly commendable.”
In March, ACAA partnered with a local spoken-word artist Tyrone Lee to deliver a poetry and spoken-word workshop to a year 7 class at Deptford Green School. The goal was to explore stereotypes and identity to create stronger dialogue between different groups in the community. Deptford Green School was chosen for the diversity of its students, which affords richer discussion from diverse viewpoints. The Muslim Youth Engagement Officer at ACAA was also invited to participate in a year 10 Personal Social and Health Education class on similar themes: community cohesion/Islamophobia. Although the Muslim Youth Engagement project places emphasis on facilitating the needs of young people from the Afghan and Central Asian community, the programmes offered are inclusive to all to allow a greater range of young people to participate and to generate diverse views.

In January 2016 the ACAA hosted an Afghan student fair at Goldsmiths University which aimed to connect young Afghans with working professionals. The objective of this fair was to raise the aspirations of young people in the Afghan community by providing tailored advice to both pre- and post-university opportunities.

Another successful event was the Muslim Youth Forum in February 2016, which engaged both Muslim and non-Muslim youth in different activities and workshops with the aim of understanding the needs and challenges of Muslim youth and fostering dialogue between youth of various backgrounds. The feedback attained at the end of the forum showed all participants strongly agreed that they felt comfortable and relaxed enough to speak about their ideas and opinions freely.

“An excellent meeting. I felt there was so much to learn and discuss. Thank you!”

**Timeline of Muslim Youth Outreach Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 2015</td>
<td>Brought Afghan youth to a youth event at Moonshot Centre. Event included dance, workshops, prizes, football, open mic, art, music, performances, talks and food</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>Afghan Students Fair at Goldsmiths University</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>Muslim Youth Forum at ACAA</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>Poetry and Spoken Word Workshops with Tyrone Lee at Deptford Green School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Joint event between the ACAA and SLRA where young people from Deptford were able to integrate and build social networks with young people from the SLRA</td>
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Volunteering programme

**What we do**

Volunteers are vital to the work of the ACAA in regard to both the implementation and running of our projects. The volunteering programme covers an array of opportunities for volunteers to support services including ESOL teachers, supplementary school teachers, mentors and drop-in assistants.

We have also expanded the roles to include engagement and outreach volunteers, research and policy volunteers, graphic design and events volunteers. This expansion has allowed us to carry out research into how our services can be sustained and improved whilst also enabling us to host volunteer-led events.

**Our aims**

We aim to further the mission of the ACAA through the enrolment of volunteers on our placement schemes. Our aim is that we will increase employment opportunities, develop volunteers’ skills and develop participation and integration within the local community.

**Achievements**

Throughout the period June 2015 to June 2016 we hosted over 120 members on our volunteer programmes. As a result of the outreach and communications tasks undertaken by our volunteers we have seen a demonstrable increase in the profile of the organisation within the local community.

We have worked to increase both the number of volunteers and the number of partnerships to recruit volunteers by re-establishing connections with organisations such as the local volunteer centre and London-based internship agencies. As a result of this, we have been able to increase the number of fundraising activities that we engage with in order to raise unrestricted funds.

Our volunteering programme has provided those involved with the opportunity to engage with events, give back to the local community and gain experience working with refugees. In the period of June 2015 to June 2016 approximately 88% of our volunteers were either unemployed or working part-time, but by volunteering with the ACAA were able to acquire specific skills and experience through their placements.

Integration through sport

**What we do**

In 2015–2016, we held weekly karate sessions for children aged 6–16 from BME backgrounds to develop new skills and confidence. The sessions were held by a qualified Afghan instructor teaching various belt levels to both boys and girls.

**Our aims**

The aim of the karate sessions was to provide a non-intimidating setting for children to exercise, removing cultural and financial barriers by providing five sessions in a familiar environment. The demand for sport activities for children is generally high especially amongst the Afghan and Central Asian community in Lewisham. This is mainly due to the lack of access that children and new arrivals face in a new society.

The project aimed to enhance the self-esteem, sport ability, confidence and determination of children and young people attending.

**Achievements**

Through the recruitment of an Afghan karate instructor we were able to assist someone from a refugee background to gain valuable work experience to support his career development in the UK.

Our karate sessions saw 18 children and young people attend, originating from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Turkey, Somalia, Iraq and Pakistan.

**Case study**

The karate sessions helped students overcome difficulties in life through diligent training. Abdul, a 10-year-old boy, started attending the sessions at the start of the project in December 2015. At that time he had poor self-esteem and lacked confidence. He had co-ordination and concentration difficulties and struggled with learning basic techniques. His parents reported that he also struggled at school. Over time, with encouragement from the instructors, he began to develop a sense of belonging and grew in confidence.
Legal advice

What we do

Upon noticing that many of our drop-in clients were seeking advice on legal issues that were out of our realm of assistance, we approached a law firm to provide free legal advice sessions. Since September we have run two sessions per month with Duncan Lewis Solicitors that have been hugely successful in providing assistance and reassurance to the many who participated. The meetings cover any legal topic, although the majority of issues raised concern housing, immigration and family matters.

Our aims

We hope to facilitate drop-in sessions which provide the expert information or referral that our service users require.

Achievements

While this is a new project we have seen a great level of interest so far. Signposting for this service has attracted locals from various backgrounds to the office who consequently have become aware of the other services we provide. Participants are made aware that the scope of assistance they can receive depends on whether or not they qualify for legal aid. A large number of cases find resolution in the solicitors simply explaining complicated laws and forms.

The solicitors also have a wealth of knowledge when it comes to organisations that deal with housing, immigration and family matters, and often make useful referrals. The sessions are completely confidential and take place in a comfortable and supportive environment.

Duncan Lewis Solicitors has provided positive feedback and shown commitment to continue the monthly sessions. We have had interest from other law firms as well, and hope to start offering twice-monthly sessions in the New Year.

Case study

A 17-year-old asylum seeker attended the clinic needing assistance with finding accommodation. The ACAA were able to contact the local authority concerned and find the individual emergency housing for that evening. This prevented the individual from having to sleep on the street.

Graph assessing community responses

Please explain how you were feeling before you visited the Community Advice Clinic (6 responses)

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<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
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<td>Anxious</td>
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<td>Very anxious</td>
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Please explain how you felt after visiting the Community Advice Clinic (6 responses)

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<tr>
<td>Far less anxious</td>
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<td>Less anxious</td>
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<td>The same</td>
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<td>Worse</td>
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Our work in Afghanistan

Afghanistan Citizens Advice Centres

What we do

The ACAA launched citizens advice centres in Kabul and Pul-e-Khumri in 2013. The initial aim of the centres was to provide free and confidential legal and other advice, opportunities for education, training, and referrals to other services for the most vulnerable groups of the population, including women and children, internally displaced people and returning refugees. The centres also conduct outreach work for locals, focusing on information about rights, and campaigns on health and education.

Achievements

This was the final year of a three-year project. The biggest issues our clients faced were domestic violence, divorce, poverty and unemployment. Of our beneficiaries, 66% were illiterate and 88% were unemployed outside of the home. We are pleased to report that 350 individuals received personalised legal advice, of which 72% were women. We also visited 46 women in prisons to provide legal and other advice, 40% of whom had one or more children with them. Around 120 people per month attended our outreach sessions on justice, health, education and employment issues, 55% of which were women and girls. Additionally, we ran Farsi and English lessons, as well as computer, sewing and sports classes for local adults and children. Our sewing classes enabled 23 women to learn to sew and make an income from the garments that they made.

Case studies

Khurshid was married with eight children. Her husband divorced her, leaving her struggling to support her family. When she tried to seek inheritance from her brother she was rejected. An adviser at the citizens advice centre in Kabul told her it is her legal right to seek this inheritance. The case was referred to the legal department and Khurshid now has some hope to have a decent standard of living.

Mahera was to be forcibly married to a man much older than her. We held mediation sessions with her family, and with her mother’s support were able to show this was illegal and prevented the marriage from taking place. After presented our case, it was her father that did not allow the man to marry his daughter.

Diba is a 27-year-old graduate who struggled for years to find employment despite her qualifications. She and her husband were unemployed and unable to feed their family. In 2013 she volunteered at the Kabul citizens advice centre where she was given help with her CV, interview preparation and job search. Now she has stable work in the Afghan government, as a literacy teacher for the department of women’s affairs, which has helped lift her from the poverty of earlier years.

Evaluation

We are proud of the citizens advice centres’ achievements over the past three years and for reaching over 7,500 people in Kabul and Pul-e-Khumri. An independent evaluation praised the project for managing to see 51% more clients than we had originally planned, helping so many women and vulnerable people, and highlighted the role that the diaspora can play in development. The project was scored by UK Aid Direct with an A++ for substantially exceeding expectation.

We would like to thank all our staff and volunteers who made this possible. We are currently working hard to raise funds for a continuation of this pilot as we believe citizens advice centres can contribute a great deal to a stronger, more democratic Afghanistan that works for its people.
The ACAA prides itself in having a diverse board of trustees made up of former service users, members of the Afghan and Central Asian community, entrepreneurs, and senior level business professionals. This diverse range of culture, professions, experience and skills allows ACAA to benefit from a strategic overview that governs its actions and ensures it remains relevant to the needs of those it serves.

2016 was a difficult year for the charity as grants for two of our main programmes finished over the summer. We are proud to have managed that transition through the hard work of staff, volunteers and trustees, and the fact that we managed to increase our unrestricted funding so much at the same time. We look forward to further consolidating our financial position as we go forward.

Moving into 2017 ACAA understands the role the board plays in directing the charity so it may benefit those most in need, make difficult decisions on which services should be strengthened, which are needed less and help the organisation to become more sustainable.

Effective internal partnership between the board of trustees and employees of the ACAA will enhance the charity’s services and allow it to serve those it supports and achieve its ultimate objective of bringing communities together.

Reserves policy

The ACAA aims to maintain reserves sufficient to meet, and exceed where possible, our commitments to existing and envisaged project work for at least the next 12 months. It is our ultimate aim to be in a position whereby we have adequate funding to prolong and develop our activities over a longer period of time.

Our aim in 2015/16 was to maintain our level of reserves around at least £3,000 for the next financial year, meaning that the organisation would be able to cover a short gap in funding should there be one. Through increasing our events and donations we managed a substantial increase in our unrestricted reserves to £118,145. This means in the event of a delay in grant payments or other gap in funding we would be able to continue operations without any substantial change to staffing or activities for one or two months. Our target for 2016–17 is to increase reserves to £20,000.

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Acknowledgements

Here at the ACAA we hope to continue to grow as an organisation to allow us to support an increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees in the community. Our work would not be possible without the generous support of our staff and the number of volunteers that work every day to help us achieve this goal.

The ACAA is grateful for the generous support received from a range of donors and partners. Working together, we can make a difference to Afghan and other minority ethnic refugee and asylum seekers living in the UK.

We would like to express our thanks to our key supporters listed below.