Since May 2022

- The caseworker supported 22 vulnerable women from ethnic minorities backgrounds from 11 countries and made 4 safeguarding referrals.
- Delivered 9 sessions of the Cost of Living Programme. Supported 119 women and their families through the cost of living crisis.
- Worked collaboratively with Sussex Mindfulness Centre and secured 2 free mindfulness courses for our women.
- Generated income of £25,150 through successful funding applications.

Context:

The Casework Service at the Network of International Women provides essential support to women from ethnic minority communities in Brighton and Hove. The demographic landscape of the area is diverse, with over a quarter of the residents being non-White UK/British. Despite a small overall population increase, the number of BME residents has significantly risen.

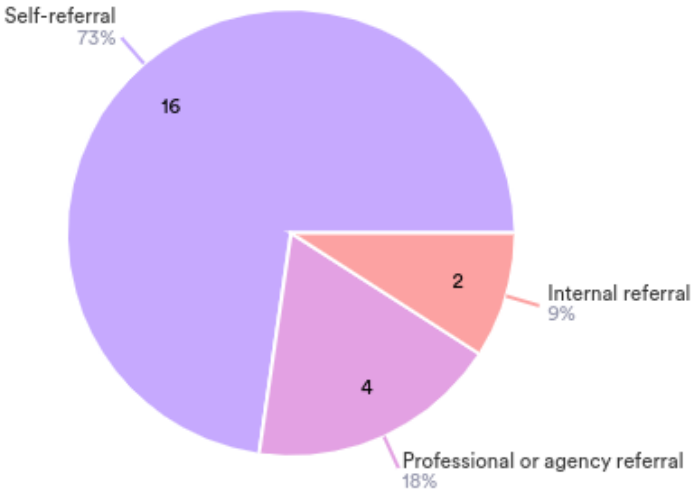
According to Census 2021, only 54% of residents in Brighton & Hove feel a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, which is 4% lower than the national average. This highlights the need for interventions and support systems to enhance community integration and foster a greater sense of belonging.

The Casework Service aims to protect women from risks and harm, help them access necessary support, improve integration within the community, and enhance their overall well-being. It serves as a lifeline for these women, offering tailored assistance and addressing their specific needs.

Casework Service Overview:

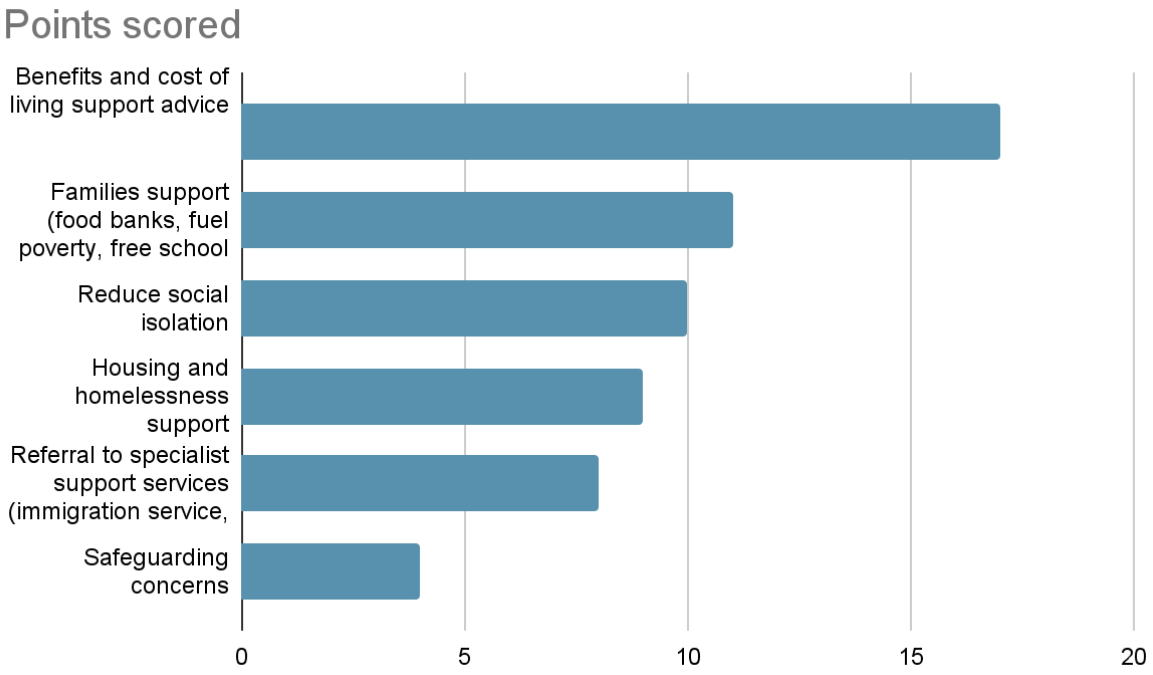
During the period of May 2022 to 2023, the Casework Service provided 1:1 support to 22 vulnerable women with multiple needs from a total of 11 countries.

In the last 12 months, we have seen a significant increase in the number of self-referrals to our casework service from 38% to 70%. Since the Cost of Living Programme, there has been a 25% rise of self-referrals into the Casework Service.



- The majority of women who sought help from the network speak Arabic. 74% of them indicate that they need interpreting assistance.
- Up to 64% of the women have precarious immigration status; asylum seeker, refugee or short-term visas. Some of them have chosen not to disclose their immigration status.
- 32% of the women reported receiving No Recourse to Public Funds but the number could be higher as it was difficult to ascertain such information at the time of the survey.
- 50% of the women told us that they have dependents under 18s who rely on their care.
- 54% of the women reported suffering from mental health issues.

Positive Impact on Women:



- It becomes clear that the highest area of need was Benefits and Entitlements as well as Cost of Living Support, with approximately 78% of the women seeking assistance in managing their financial stability, accessing necessary resources, and receiving guidance on cost-effective living strategies.

- The next essential support needed by the women who received assistance from the Casework Service was Families Support, with approximately 50% seeking help in areas such as accessing food banks, addressing fuel poverty, securing free school meals, obtaining school uniforms, and receiving assistance for children with learning difficulties or disabilities.

- Around 45% of the women who received support from the Casework Service expressed concerns about social isolation, highlighting the significant impact on their well-being. The Casework Service plays a vital role in connecting these women with local support groups and activities, addressing social isolation and promoting a sense of belonging.

- Housing and Homelessness Support, as well as referrals to specialist support services (immigration service, domestic violence, trafficking, mental health), were equally sought after, with approximately 41% of the women seeking assistance in these areas.

- 18% of the women have safeguarding concerns.

The statistics highlight the importance of the Casework Service in supporting women from ethnic minority communities, empowering them to navigate complex benefit systems and improve their financial well-being. They also underscore the significant challenges these women face in providing for their families and the crucial role played by the Casework Service in addressing their needs, including identifying and addressing situations of abuse and ensuring their safety and well-being. Overall, the findings emphasise the vital impact of the Casework Service in empowering and safeguarding women from ethnic minority backgrounds in Brighton and Hove.

Collaboration

Through Cost of Living Programme, Casework Service has established fruitful collaborations and partnerships with key organisations such as

- Citizen Advice Bureau
- Brighton and Hove. Faith in Action (BHFA)
- Brighton and Hove Energy Services Co-operative (BHESCO)
- Southern Water, National Energy Action
- Brighton & Hove City Council's Welfare Rights team
- JobCentre Plus
- Sussex Interpreting Services

These collaborations have enabled the Casework Service to provide comprehensive support and access to resources, enhancing the effectiveness of their assistance to women from ethnic minority communities in Brighton and Hove.

The caseworker was invited to attend Partnership Strategy day at Citizen Advice Bureau and has been offered temporary workspace there until July 2023.

Furthermore, the caseworker collaborated with Sussex Mindfulness Centre to provide valuable resources for the women. Through this partnership, approximately 40 women were able to benefit from free mindfulness courses, which helped them gain a better understanding of their emotions, cope with difficult thoughts, experience increased calmness, enhance attention and concentration, and improve their relationships. This initiative has played a significant role in supporting the well-being and personal development of the women involved.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

The Caseworker overcame challenges such as language barriers and inadequate meeting spaces by seeking support from Sussex Interpreting Services, securing funding from SGN, and forming partnerships with Citizen Advice Bureau. This resulted in a temporary workspace at Hove Town Hall, with ongoing efforts to secure funding for dedicated room hire. Despite the strain of overburdened statutory services and limited specialist capacity, the caseworker collaborated with partners and successfully applied for funding, bringing in a total income of £25,150. She also sought long-term funding, including a three-year grant of

£60,000 from Smallwood Trust and a Resilience Fund grant of £10,000, with outcomes expected later this year. These efforts address the need for sustainable financial support for the Casework Service's vital work.

Recommendations:

- To improve the Casework Service and sustain its success, it is essential to continue with a holistic and trauma-sensitive approach. This involves providing tailored support that addresses the unique needs and circumstances of women from ethnic minority backgrounds, while creating a safe and nurturing space. By empowering them to make informed choices and respecting their individual needs, the Casework Service can foster trust and facilitate their personal growth and empowerment.

- Proactively plan and seek funding to meet the rising demand for the Casework Service. As the Network of International Women continues to expand, anticipate an increase in referrals from various agencies such as Social Prescribing teams, RISE, BHT, Mental Health Service, and other NHS Services in Brighton and Hove. By securing adequate funding and resources, the Casework Service will be better equipped to meet the needs of these referrals and ensure continued support for women from ethnic minority communities in the area.

- Approximately 54% of the women who received support from our Casework Service reported experiencing mental health issues resulting from various factors, including domestic abuse (past and ongoing), trauma, losses, and daily stress. It is important to note that the actual number could be higher, as some women may not have disclosed their problems. These findings highlight the urgent need for our organisation to address and prioritise support for women facing mental health challenges. This calls for an investment in funding and the development of a comprehensive strategy to provide effective support and interventions specifically tailored to address mental health issues among the women we serve.

Summary:

In the last 12 months, the Casework Service at the Network of International Women serves as a vital support system for women from ethnic minority communities in Brighton and Hove. It addresses the unique challenges faced by these women, improves their well-being, and promotes greater integration within the community.

Despite the numerous challenges faced, we have worked tirelessly to transform and uplift the lives of the women and their families. In certain instances, we have even been able to save lives. We take immense pride in the positive impact we have had and remain committed to continuing our crucial work of providing support, empowerment, and hope to those in need.