Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid Hemat Gryffe Women's Aid Response
Destitution, Asylum, and Insecure Immigration Status in Scotland

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid aims to provide culturally sensitive support to women, children and young people primarily from the Asian Black and Minority Ethnic communities who have experienced domestic abuse in any form which can be physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse; including forced marriage, honour based abuse and cultural oppression. We work in partnership with other organisations to ensure appropriate support is provided to all women, children and young people to meet their holistic needs. We aim to increase external agencies’ understanding about domestic abuse in the Asian Black and Minority Ethnic communities and to improve the quality of support provided by external agencies to women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse, forced marriage and honour based abuse through multiagency working. Our services do not discriminate against any woman, child, or young person on the grounds of age, disability, gender re-assignment or gender identity, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief.

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid main activities include:

Refuge support services
HGWA provides safe temporary refuge accommodation to women, children and young people fleeing domestic abuse, honour based abuse and forced marriage. Emotional and practical support is provided based upon the individual needs of service users.

Outreach/crisis support service
Outreach support is available to all women, children and young people within the wider community. Outreach/crisis support services are available to women children and young people who have had experienced domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based abuse or are currently living within an abusive environment. Outreach support is available to women with insecure immigration as the are no costs attached.

Follow on support
Women, children, and young people receive support through our follow-on service upon leaving the refuge and moving to permanent accommodation. This ensures that women, children, and young people have the resources to make the move to their new home and have access to support to settle into the new environment.
Multiagency working and awareness raising
We work with several voluntary and statutory organisations to raise awareness of the specific needs of women children and young people from Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic communities experiencing domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour based abuse and cultural oppression. Adopting a holistic and multiagency approach through early intervention working to meet the needs of service users ensures a positive outcome.

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid Service User Response

Due to an insecure immigration status and having No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), I found myself and my baby destitute, this went on for about 6 months before it was accepted that could receive support and accommodation through the asylum team. During this time my worker at Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid (HGWA) advocated for me with Social Work Services (SWS), they maintained the stance that they had NO duty of care to me. Even when my worker consistently informed SWS that they did have a duty of care to my child they still refused to provide any support other than a bus pass to allow me to attend appointments at their office.

I was provided shelter through Positive Action in Housing (PAIH), a charity in Glasgow which relies on the generosity of volunteers who provide rooms in their homes. I received charitable handouts from Hemat Gryffe and at times from PAIH. Eventually my worker at HGWA was able to convince SWS that under section 22 Children Scotland Act 1995, that the Local Authority had a duty of care to ALL children living in Scotland to provide support, and I received weekly payments of £25 for baby milk and nappies. (I still did not receive anything to support me). Unfortunately, after a few payments my social worker was off work and the payments stopped again I had no money, for 3 weeks. My worker at HGWA and myself tried to contact SWS but eventually had to complain to Social Care Direct, who sent a message to the SWS department. I was then told that they would make one payment but not regular payments as they had no duty of care; again, I had to go to Charities to feed my child. It was lucky that soon after I was granted accommodation and support through the asylum team.

If it had not been for Hemat Gryffe and Positive Action in Housing workers and volunteers, I would not have been able to live and care for my child. They helped me access legal support, shelter, clothes, food and money. I accessed direct support, advocacy and group support to help address my experiences to help me stabilise my immigration status, improve my health and wellbeing and become stronger.

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid Response

As an organisation, we support many women who have experienced Domestic Abuse, Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse which can be further complicated due to their immigration status. Women can enter Scotland on different types of Visa and although for women on Spousal visas there is support available through the Destitute and Domestic Violence Concession if they can evidence that their marriage broke down due to domestic abuse, where they may be granted leave outside the rule while they apply to stay.

However, women on dependent or student visas for example who are experiencing abuse have No Recourse to Public Funds can find themselves destitute. We also support women, children and young people who are claiming asylum, we are only able to provide outreach services in these cases.
Women who are single and have experienced domestic abuse must face the hard option of returning to an abusive partner as there is no recognised support available for single women with NRPF. It is only under extreme situation such as being diagnosed with mental health issues or a risk of harm to themselves do they receive any kind of support under the mental health act or Adult support protection act. Often women do not have any options and may be taken advantage of by other well-meaning community members living a life of extreme poverty and dependence on others for their daily needs. Women fall into modern day slavery due to an insecure or illegal immigration status. It is very difficult for women to return to their country of origin as often her parents or family have disowned her as she has bought dishonour to their name.

The largest barrier is not being able to provide refuge support services when women fleeing abuse who are subject to immigration control and have NRPF. The only way this aspect of support can be provided is for Local Authorities to provide funding to cover rent and subsistence costs, which in our experience in almost impossible.

Local Authorities need to respond appropriately in cases were women with NRPF have children. In our experience the Local Authority do not meet their duty of care to families with NRPF in line with UNCRC, Children Scotland Act 1995 or GIRFEC.

HGWA currently employs 9 qualified and experienced staff members with a wealth of experience in supporting women children and young people from Asian Black and Minority Ethnic communities who have experienced Domestic Abuse, Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse. A high number of the cases we deal with the women are subject to immigration control.

Our office administrator Elaine McLaughlin has recently completed a PhD in Immigration Law & Domestic Abuse & No Recourse to public funds with a specific focus on South Asian Immigrant Women. She would be more than happy to provide an additional response. She unfortunately is on annual leave this week but can be contacted at our offices on her return.

We are happy to contribute further Should you require anything further please do not hesitate to contact myself as detailed below.

Regards

Alexandra McArdle

Hemat Gryffe Women’s Aid
Temporary Outreach and Development Worker

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