



Charity no. 1120185

Patrons:

Clio Barnard, Film Maker

Anthony Anaxagorou, Poet and Publisher

# Annual Report 2020-2021



**Kent Refugee Help** is a small user-led charity, now in its fourteenth year. Our main focus is working with foreign national prisoners in London and Kent prison establishments. Some of our clients are in prison under immigration laws, being deemed too high-risk to be placed in a removal centre. Others may be refugees, former unaccompanied minors, EU migrants, those with long residence who came to the UK fleeing human rights violations with their parents when very young, people who are undocumented or stateless. All are trying to navigate the complex legal system they are caught up in, with very little help or advice available. Many of them are facing deportation at the end of their sentence without legal representation. We are there to listen and take forward in whatever way is appropriate for each client.

During the year 2020-2021, it was no longer safe to go to prisons because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so we continued to support FNP and people who had been released remotely. We supported people in various prisons, which included HMPs Pentonville, Elmley, Maidstone, Littlehey and Rochester. In order to continue our support during these difficult times, we applied for and secured emergency funding from the ARM Trust and Community Justice Fund. With the cooperation of the Diversity and Equalities Officer at Pentonville, we obtained a list of names of vulnerable people who we contacted by letter in order to offer support.

During the year we also received individual referrals from HMPs Wormwood Scrubs, Rochester, Elmley, Swaleside, Huntercombe, Maidstone, and Stoke Heath. There is complex ongoing work with several former detainees from the DIRC (Dover Immigration Removal centre), which closed in 2015. This work is done by the previous case worker on a voluntary basis. Men on bail, waiting for their asylum case to be resolved, are forbidden to work, must conform to reporting restrictions, and are frequently tagged. This is akin to 'prison in the community'. This situation continues. KRH believes that indefinite detention of any person for administrative purpose is discriminatory and should be challenged.

This year our caseworker and volunteers became involved in providing support and campaigning against the unjust situation at the former Napier Barracks in Folkstone, which were reopened to accommodate asylum seekers. They participated in meetings between NGOs, the Home Office and the local council to discuss the situation. Together with the previous caseworker we composed and circulated a position statement against the use of this accommodation for asylum seekers. This year we organised our first online event entitled Migrant Lives Matter



We would like to thank all our funders and organisations who have helped us to continue our work. We would like to thank the speakers – Don Flynn, Aliya Yule, Arianne Shahvisi, Sandra Anderson, and our former clients – who participated in our successful zoom event.



## **KRH Personnel**

**Trustees:** Bahriye Kemal, Andrew Jordan, Chris Perks, Antti de Ruano (until October 2020), Chelcie Henry-Robertson

**Legal Advisers:** Antti de Ruano, Fatima Kadić

**Caseworkers:** Kate Adams, Raga Gibreel, Pete Keenan

**Admin. support:** Lesley Grove of Accuracy Accounts, Caroline Gipson VA.

**Website:** Nick Tompsett (volunteer)

**Volunteers:** Hakki Aganoglu, Catherine Carpenter, Pete Keenan, Maria Ruano, Liza Seed, Rupert Bowers

Although we no longer find Sureties for bail, we acknowledge that some of our former Sureties are still in touch with and support the people they stood bail for, some of whom have to wait many years for the resolution of their case.

We continue to work with the **The Prisoners' Advice Service** and **Kent Law Clinic** and **BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees)**

## **Finance and Funding**

Our prison works this year has been funded by the **ARM Trust, The Allen Lane Foundation, Community Justice Fund, DOJ, and the Vulnerable Persons Fund** administered through the **Kent Community Foundation**.

Donations from individuals and church groups have continued to be generous. We see this as proof of a strong public desire to see more positive action to welcome and support refugees in the UK. Donations are treated as 'unrestricted' funds, which we use for the many individual needs of our clients. Because of this money we have been able to support a former client who returned voluntarily to Jamaica. In addition to small amounts to cover emergency food, travel and phone top-ups, we have paid for gym membership, clothing and footwear. The amounts are small, but each one makes a positive contribution to the lives of our clients.



On 17 October 2020 at Napier Barracks in Folkestone 300+ people demonstrated against injustice and showed that they welcome refugees who were placed there. Together, we spoke out against the harassment the refugees were subject to by the far right.

**Kent Refugee Help statement regarding Napier Barracks (Jan-March)**  
**KRH would like to make it clear that, in our view, Napier Barracks should close. KRH does not endorse more asylum seekers being placed there. The conditions in Napier Barracks fall below the minimum standard of guaranteed rights of those detained. Notwithstanding the same, we do support the plan for a ‘drop in’ centre for the community of men held at Napier Barracks, providing it is Covid compliant.**  
**#CloseTheBarracks**

In January 2021, Kent Refugee Help wrote this statement against the conditions in the Barracks.

## Casework and Volunteer Reports

This year has been a difficult and troubled one with the safety of everyone under threat of the Covid 19 virus and most particularly for us in Kent Refugee Help has been the concern for our clients, either prisoners constrained by increased lockdown in cells and lack of personal liberty or struggling in the community without recourse to public funds. The Pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of black and ethnic minority people to Covid due to poverty, deprivation and structural racism. Our awareness has been raised by the tragic deaths of people of colour, key workers on the front line who have died in service without adequate protection or recognition. The campaign to shut down Napier and Penally Barracks exposed the iniquity of a political decision to place vulnerable refugees in military sites that were neither hygienic nor Covid compliant. This shone a light on the unsafe and unacceptable conditions for all migrants forced to live precariously without support and without agency. The Government's stated intention in their *New Plan for Immigration*, March 24 2021 to criminalise asylum seekers who come by irregular routes, restrict legal options and cut support, confirms the extension of a cruel and merciless regime. NGOs, lawyers, activists and other progressive individuals and groups are gathering to contest this. Kent Refugee Help has submitted our response to the Government consultation and will be part of the resistance.

### **Casework Statistics**

This year I have assisted 40 people from the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Czechoslovakia, Congo, Eritrea, Guinea, Iran, Nigeria, Spain, Romania, Syria, Somalia, Turkey, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The Covid Pandemic resulted in a drop in referrals as our advice surgeries and visits have been suspended. Prisoners found it difficult to contact us as the lockdown denied them the opportunity to work and fund telephone calls. Letters were often delayed or not sent through lack of postage. Those we spoke to expressed fear, anxiety and an extreme sense of isolation. They were not able to access health care quickly and had no opportunity to speak to an immigration officer.

### **Covid and Destitution**

In May we obtained an emergency grant of £3,000 to help clients during the Pandemic. The Equalities officer at HMP Pentonville identified 39 prisoners who would benefit from payments that would allow them to call their families overseas. We additionally helped 28 individuals and families already known to us with grants for food, clothing and mobile top ups. Our clients reported that the closure of foodbanks and churches they depended upon increased deprivation. The majority were No Recourse to Public Funds, already living below the poverty line before Covid Struck. Thankfully we received a further grant and were able to make payments over Christmas and New Year, a time when crucial services shut down.

### **Legal Advice Project**

In September Kent Refugee Help successfully applied for a grant of £20,000 from the Community Justice Fund to provide access to legal advice over a 6-month period. We have used this funding to set up an exciting new project which includes an immigration advice line staffed by two legal advisors and the option of a legal conference via video link for our clients. We have also used the money to help clients fund telephone calls. Many of the people who contact us are facing deportation without access to legal advice and representation because legal aid has been cut and there is no provision for this within the prisons. As a small charity we are not able to represent clients for deportation appeals but through the advice sessions we can help them build their case so it is easier to place them with a solicitor.



Catherine Carpenter, an experienced volunteer and former longstanding member of the Kent Law Clinic has produced a leaflet which is a guide to completing the complex application form to appeal. This is an essential tool for people without legal representation as claimants have only 14 days to respond and late appeals are not automatically accepted. We plan to launch this when we can resume surgeries in prisons and circulate through Equalities and Offender management teams in prisons. HMPs Pentonville and Maidstone have been helpful in distributing publicity for the advice service within the wings and we are building up a base for referrals again. In other prisons it has been harder to reach people. The lack of legal advice for migrants in prison was ruled “discriminatory” by the High Court (2021) EWHC 418. The charity Bail for Immigration Detainees intervened in this case which ruled that the obstacles faced by immigration detainees to accessing immigration advice breached their Article 14 Human Rights. Kent Refugee Help believes that foreign national prisoners should receive comprehensive immigration advice at the beginning of their sentence and this should be provided under legal aid.

Clients have also sought legal advice on a wide variety of issues including housing, unlawful detention claims, criminal appeals, medical negligence, care and disability rights, assaults, and family matters such as contesting divorce and contact with children. We have made referrals accordingly. The Law firm Bhatia Best made two successful challenges to prolonged delays by the Home Office in providing accommodation. One client had been left with a refugee host family for a year without any move on address in sight. The other was held in prison under immigration powers for 18 months despite bail being granted and the Home Office agreeing in writing to provide a bail address. This has affected his mental health and now released, he is seeking compensation.

We have recently encountered asylum seekers in prison who have been prosecuted and convicted as traffickers for crossing the channel in small boats. The criminalization of asylum seekers proposed in the New Plan for Immigration already exists but is now being stepped up.

The diversity of these often-desperate requests reflects the high level of need within prison and after release for foreign nationals struggling with the effects of poverty and racism in a hostile environment.

## **Campaigning**

### **Detention Forum**

Catherine Carpenter, Pete Keenan and I have been attending meetings of the Detention Forum, a coalition of NGOs, including people with lived experience, who are campaigning to end immigration detention. Catherine and I have joined others in working on a paper calling for rights for foreign national prisoners and an end to the double punishment of deportation. We are grateful to the Director Jonathon Ellis for his hard work in facilitating this work and so highlighting the demonization and unjust treatment of FNPS.



### **Osime must stay!**

In this spirit I contacted Joan Martin, the mother of Osime Brown who faces deportation to Jamaica, a country he left when he was 4 years old. Osime is severely autistic and relies absolutely on his family. He has no one in Jamaica and his mother who is campaigning to stop the deportation is clear he will not survive. Osime was convicted under the discredited Joint Enterprise scheme which has resulted in many unjust convictions of young black men. In prison he acquired a heart problem due to the drugs he was forced to take. He was released on immigration bail to his parents last year. I invited Joan to speak at a meeting in Kent and featured the campaign petition which has attracted over 400,000 signatures on our Facebook page. An immigration Judge has ruled that the Home Office must review their decision to deport Osime. A victory for Osime will help to shift the current negative perception of foreign national prisoners and achieve justice for everyone. Please sign the petition at <https://www.facebook.com/freesimebrown/>

### **Shut down Napier Barracks!**

The Detention Forum has also supported the important campaign to close down Napier and Penally Barracks. Our representative is Peter Keenan who has attended meetings with Kent County Council and the Home Office. In February 2021, 200 residents at Napier Barracks went on hunger strike in freezing weather in protest at their appalling conditions which defied Covid compliance. I sought a meeting with our MP Rosie Duffield and briefed her so she could ask a question in Parliament. Ms Duffield also press released a letter to the Home Secretary Priti Patel demanding that Napier Barracks should be closed with immediate effect and asylum seekers housed within their communities. I also made contact with Folkestone



Trades Council with the result that a local councillor successfully called for a Council inquiry into the use of Napier Barracks which was classified seven years ago in an independent report as not fit for purpose.

### **Status Now**

The majority of our clients are without secure immigration status because a criminal conviction has resulted in their leave being revoked or they are an asylum seeker waiting for a response to their claim. Kent Refugee Help therefore supports the campaigning work of Status Now 4 All, which calls for indefinite leave to remain for everyone in during the Covid Pandemic because until “Everyone is safe, no one is safe” I attended their recent Summit and consequently invited Fay Ngcobo, a migrant activist herself, to speak at the AGM.

### **Conclusion**

I extend my solidarity and respect to our clients who struggle for justice in an unjust environment that thrives on the suppression of the rights of minorities and the vulnerable. If this were not so Kent Refugee Help would not exist but while we are still needed it is a pleasure to stand with you and support your demands for legal rights, human rights and a better world for all.

**Kate Adams, Caseworker**

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### **Legal Project Report**

Since November 2019, Kent Refugee Help has been regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to provide legal advice and representation in immigration law. This began mainly with one-off advice to individual prisoners. It has expanded to full representation of a small number of clients (20 so far) and a regular telephone advice on two half-days per week since January 2021, mainly used by prisoners to call for one-off advice as well as more long-term support. While the phone advice line has been slightly slow to pick up, it has enabled prisoner to speak direct to our legal advisers. This is helpful considering that it is not possible to telephone a prisoner and legal visits in person have not been happening since the pandemic. In addition to this, we have arranged legal visits through video conferencing that last 1-2 hours at a time, which has enabled us to discuss legal issues better than over the phone. These initial discussions with our legal advisers have made it easier to refer prisoners for full legal representation with mainly legally aided solicitors. It remains that there is little coordinated provision of legal aid in prisons for immigration matters, unlike immigration detention centres with legal aid advice surgeries with potential for full representation. KRH has been seeking to fill this void. We have found that even one-off advice seems to be of considerable help to prisoners who seem to have little other access to even that limited advice which helps them to be better informed and to better consider their options. KRH remains a member of ILPA (Immigration Law Practitioners Association) with an interest and perspective on wider issues of policy affecting this area. We now have two legal advisers who work regularly on the advice line and a small number of individual clients.

**Antti de Ruano, Legal Adviser**

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## **Prison Casework, Former Client, and Napier Barracks**

This year I have worked with clients from different parts of the world who are experiencing various health struggles. Here are some examples:

1. M, Algeria, had outstanding asylum case. Client released from HMP Maidstone and currently at IRC Brook house. Client speaks very poor English.
2. Z, Albania, suffers from bipolar disorder. He has children and a British wife in the UK struggling with Huntington disease. He is desperate to stay in touch with his family. His efforts to be transferred to an open prison didn't work. We were not able to see him on our latest visit due to a lockdown, where they were all confined to their cells, unable to have a visitor, no outside recreation, church, library, school, or work. People like him will be very vulnerable at this time and a phone call or a letter could serve as a lifeline but his name was on the list.
3. W, China, very isolated and has various health issues, he is having cancer treatment. He keeps in touch with his elderly mother in China by phone. We support him by writing letters, provide him with Chinese literature, and money for phone top-ups.
4. Ra, Algerian suffers with bipolar and has difficulty accessing medicine. We couldn't find him a rep. but sorted his medicine with the help of IMO officer.
5. AA, Nigeria. He has a hard-working mother and siblings in the UK and lost his father, which has traumatised him. He became distanced from his mother while targeted by drug gangs at school. He has a good attitude and seems able with little assistance to pursue his appeal. He is in education in prison and seems to be positive. We assisted him to keep in touch with the court and his solicitor, money for phone calls to keep in touch with his family and support links.
6. D, mother passed away while whilst he was in prison and I referred him to counselling and bereavement support at his request.
7. S, India, suffers from depression, he is isolated from his family, and does not have friends. Our intention is to support him during his recovery and check his welfare.
8. G, Bangladesh. He suffers from severe mental health issues so should be released. BID is on his case. He will benefit from a welfare check.
9. Unaccompanied minor, poor English and cannot read and write. A prison caseworker referred him to us because he feels isolated and unwell and could benefit from visits. I have not visited him yet due to Coronavirus regulations but wrote to the prison to see if they will allow video or regular phone calls.

Most of our clients at HMP Pentonville were transferred to other prisons and it was difficult to maintain communication with them. We had a list of clients who benefited from support, however, 90% of letters we sent out in February and March were returned because the person had been transferred.

## **Update Sandra Anderson's Experience**

As part of the Migrant Lives Matter event in 2020, Sandra shared her experiences of being caught between the Windrush scandal where her husband was forced to leave the UK. Here we share her story with an update:

Sandra is a Jamaican and came to the UK on a sponsored visa. Her husband, a KRH client, was deported in 2020, and as a consequence Sandra and her daughter lost their appeal rights to remain in the UK. During this period Sandra and her daughter worked as key workers and they contracted Covid 19. At the time we tried to assist them to get legal support but there

was no route for them to remain. In light of the struggles Sandra and her daughter wanted to leave the UK. This decision was very traumatising for the family, especially the daughter who was struggling with mental health issues.

Out of work because of Covid and not entitled to public support because of their immigration circumstances, they were struggling and deeply distressed.

KRH tried their best to support Sandra and her daughter during this stressful time, where we handled communication with Home Office, their landlords, and gave them money for food. The Home Office paid for their tickets to return to Jamaica, but did not take into account any of the other costs. They needed to pay local transport to the airport as well as the cost for Covid test/certificate required to enter Jamaica. KRH provided emotional and financial support to help them find their way back to Jamaica. we paid what was not provided by the government to ease their journey, and we continued to offer them support once they returned to Jamaica. We tried our best to create a less hostile environment that would ease the isolation, exclusion and total suffering that they were subjected to.

We supported them to start a small business in Jamaica.

Here I include the last message received from Sandra on 4 April 2021.

We're ok Raga. I'm here working hard, trying to let this little business work. Really putting myself out there. On weekends I do much but slow during the week, only do work if I get definite orders. The past 2 wkend and upcoming one no work because we're on no movement covid lockdown, so everyone has to stay home. Just hoping the cases stop going up so the lockdowns get less. Cause weekends is when I get sales. But I'm continuing to trust God's timing and process, while giving thanks for small mercies. And also, for putting good people in my corner.

### **Support for Residents of Napier Barracks**

KRH has provided assistance and support for the community of vulnerable men held at the Napier Barracks in Folkstone, which has been completed over the phone during lockdown and via a drop-in session every Wednesday, providing it is Covid compliant. The charities Samphire, Care 4 Calais, KRAN and Jesuit Refugee Service are involved in the drop-in, where they provide transportation access for charities to attend, provide support with arts and therapeutics activities, help to access legal support, and health assistance. Given it is Ramadan, the number of people attending the session is low therefore I provide support over the phone and only go to the drop-in if, necessary.

I provide support with interpreting, referrals, and support them to access legal help and communicate with their solicitors. Four of the young people I supported were under 18 and their age had been disputed by the Home Office. Another person I supported attempted suicide numerous times, and is now released to a hotel in London. I have also visited the barracks to provide support and assist with clothing distribution.

Vulnerability is a central issue, and by this, I mean survivors of horrific torture who struggle to prove their case because of lack of papers and language barriers. Currently, there are over 50 pre-action letters made by public solicitors to transfer the vulnerable people elsewhere, many of which are cases of people who have been battered, tortured and with severe mental health issues. The mental health cases are less likely to succeed unless evidence is compelling.

On the 1st May one of the people admitted to the barracks was confirmed Covid positive, which means that the site is very high-risk and may lead to uncontrollable outbreak as before.

Below is a case I recently raised with regard to welfare of a young person who is struggling. He was transferred to a hotel in London and is very confused. When it comes to cases based on trafficked young people, it is very difficult for them to access evidence to prove their age and get appropriate support.

KRH responded to an immediate welfare concern for a minor who left their placement/residence on Tuesday 20th of April, after 10pm. He was supported by both other charities in Folkestone. Raga spoke to the young person over the phone and arranged with other charities to see him at a drop-in centre in Folkestone on Wednesday 21st morning. Raga assisted with the efforts to return him safely back to his placement, which was deemed a priority at the time as a looked after child by Kent. We followed this up with a welfare check visit this week. My biggest concerns for the young person, is he is more likely to run away again. His worries might not be real but, they are so factual to him.

#### **Welfare concerns for unaccompanied asylum-seeking child**

##### **Personal Details:**

Name: DoB: Centre: Nationality: Phone:

Health: No physical health issues or sickness – concerns of PTSD issues.

Community Care Solicitor – Immigration solicitor - Social worker -

M is a minor who struggles with the heavy burden of survivor's guilt. I also suspect there might be other underlying health issues such as PTSD. But not sure if there is mental health support in place. He told us that he struggles to sleep and finds it very hard to concentrate. He is also feeling a loss of interest to do things such as education, seems to be affected by seeing other friends from the placement moving on while he is stuck with the age assessment. Lack of contact with his family made things worse. I spoke to M on three occasions only and acted as interpreter when his social worker arrived to collect him. I recognised that he was a bit distressed on the first day and was not able to process things easily, so I had to break up the conversation many times to help. About his escape, I understood he was trying to go to Dover and was confused when he found himself suddenly in an area surrounded by woods. He was unable to figure out his way or direction to the port. He contacted a friend who thankfully made others aware of the situation. M discloses to us on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> that, he is not happy at his residence and things are not improving. We did what we could to reassure him and also, shared our concerns with the management at the centre. Attached also, a draft with details of my conversation with him on Tuesday, 27th of April. I have shared my concerns with staff at placement and copied all concerns here.

Raga Gibreel, Caseworker

## Report on Napier Barracks

I have been involved in the negotiation of the political and ethical minefield created by the Government's decision to use condemned former army barracks, in the housing of registered Asylum seekers, from the very earliest days of that decision.

Despite our perception of this being a highly objectionable move and despite the Covid situation, we saw that we might be able to take a legal mentoring project into the barracks. This would be similar to that we had historically done in collaboration with Samphire in the Dover IRC. We saw a potential 'silver lining', in that Asylum seekers normally dispersed around the country, isolated from supportive bodies such as ourselves, could be assisted much more effectively from one locale.

Thus Indre (Samphire) and I (KRH) began to attend SESPM (South East Council Strategic Migration Partnership) Meetings, amiable gatherings involving: KCC reps, Clear Springs, H.O., Migrant Help (Napier Gov. Manag.) and a few other NGO's. We tried to set up/negotiate our respective lines of help within the barracks complex. I introduced Care4Calais to these meetings, as they were really active immediately with residents. Indre and I needed face to face, or zoom type interviewing situations (covid and/or practical/tech), so were not so directly engaged to the same extent initially.

Whilst these collaborative moves were in play and both Raga and myself had visited Napier in different contexts, it became clear that Raga had been exposed to a contact involving another volunteer, who subsequently was proved Covid positive. She was forced to isolate as a result. This incident, radically impacted my thinking and the nature of the situation that had been created apparently callously by Government – a veritable Petri dish for the growth and dispersion of Covid amongst not only the refugees in the camp, but the rest of the community potentially.

I raised this matter strongly in an SESPM meeting – some 6 weeks before the major Covid outbreak and subsequent protest at the camp – and the same kindly benign response came from those responsible for the management of the camp. It became increasingly obvious to me that by continuing to play along with the SESPM, we risked giving validation to what had been an iniquitous breach of human rights for all the refugees sent to the camp; in direct violation of the Pandemic social distancing rules policed so strongly at the time for nearly everyone else in the UK, except for those compulsorily detained.

The iconic aspects of the Barracks media imagery and its interpretation from an electoral perspective hostile to Asylum seekers, had become virtually undeniable by this stage.

In consultation KRH at this point took the decision to distance ourselves from the SESPM meetings. This move in relation to the legal mentoring support we planned to deliver to Napier residents was bolstered by the establishment of the 'Drop-in Centre'; independent of the Napier compound, in a Church building within walking distance and once established via leafletting etc, it would be able to operate independently of H.O. Napier systems. The mentoring KRH role, alongside Indre/Samphire, has now been taken up by Raga, both of whom have supported some Napier residents – and will be shared between them on Indre's return within the Drop-In.

Whilst some other NGO's have adopted the same stance as KRH in relation to the SESPM and focussed in recent months on campaigning against the human rights aspects of the



Barracks; others like the brilliant Care4Calais continue liaising with them, as they have established roles within Napier and have assisted several of those who have been positively represented by some of our best legal reps, in achieving successful J.R. challenges, in relation to their placements in camps like Napier.

A Judicial Review trial based upon the challenges of 6 anonymised Napier residents, relating to the suitability of the camp was allowed to go forward by the Home Secretary; it was heard on the 14/15<sup>th</sup> April and is currently awaiting judgement.

On the court's ruling and in light of the Government's subsequent actions, we will see how far the UK can still be said to be in compliance with both UK and International Human rights legislation, regarding refugees and asylum seekers seeking sanctuary in the UK - let alone its spirit.

**Pete Keenan, Case worker**

## Events



**Migrant Lives Matter:  
Health Struggles Experienced During the Pandemic  
Annual General Meeting Agenda  
Saturday 18 July 2020**



**Business (11:30-11:50)**

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**Speakers: (11:50-13:00)**

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**Migrant Workers & Kent Refugee Help** (Kate Adams, Raga Gibreel, Bahriye Kemal), 'Our Lived Experiences of Working, Windrush Scandal, Hostile Environment, and Testing Covid-19 Positive'

**Don Flynn**, 'Migrant Rights, Race Relations and the Hostile Environment'

**Aliya Yule**, 'Patients Not Passports: End The Hostile Environment in the NHS'

**Arianne Shahvisi**, 'Decolonising the NHS'

Celebrating 13 years of working with detainees and ex-detainees  
[www.kentrefugeehelp.org.uk](http://www.kentrefugeehelp.org.uk) | [info@kentrefugeehelp.org.uk](mailto:info@kentrefugeehelp.org.uk)

In 2020, Bahriye Kemal organised and chaired an event entitled *Migrant Lives Matter*, where migrant workers, charity workers, experts and campaigners spoke on the complex health struggles experienced during the pandemic.

The online event considered the ways Covid-19 has affected migrant lives, focusing on health in relation to a range of issues that include: migrant workers as keyworkers in the high-risk frontline of the caring field, yet defined as low-paid ‘unskilled’ worker; nurses and care workers subject to Windrush scandal and Hostile Environment; worker rights, race relations and the Hostile Environment; NHS, ethics, austerity, xenophobia; medical and mental health of Covid-19 survivors; Art and Disability in the time of Covid 19

These and other issues were considered through a range of perspectives, which included migrant workers, charity workers, experts, academics, campaigners, activists, artists, poets, and more.

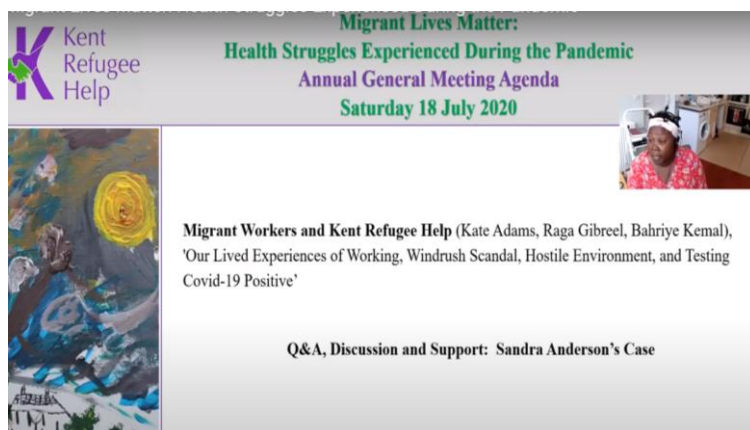
The event kicked off with a session entitled ‘Our Lived Experiences of Working, Windrush Hostile Environment, and Testing Covid-19 Positive’, which was a three part discussion between Kent Refugee Help – caseworker Raga Gibreel and Kate Adams, and trustee Bahriye Kemal – and former clients.



Part one began with the presentation of a powerful project by former client and artist Leroy Letts and Kate Adams, which focused on Art and its relationship to disability in time of Covid. This was in conjunction with “Outside In”. “Outside In” is a catalyst for change. Founded in 2006, it is now an established national charity that aims to provide a platform for artists who face significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance, or isolation. “Outside In” supported Leroy and gave him a website. He was also their Artist of the Month in August 2020.

<https://outsidein.org.uk/galleries/leroy-letts/>

<https://outsidein.org.uk/news/artist-of-the-month/artist-of-the-month-leroy-letts/>



In part two Raga interviewed Sandra Anderson, who shared her experiences of working as a healthcare worker, how she contracted Covid-19 Positive, and how she got caught up in the Windrush scandal with her husband being forcefully deported to Jamaica. Struggling in total destitution with her daughter, Sandra asked us

for help; her wish was to leave the UK and return to Jamaica. In response we discussed ways to help her and collected donations so she could return to her husband in Jamaica.

This section ended with our former client who is now a care worker, sharing his experiences of living and working for NHS during the pandemic.

The event continued with three excellent presentations



The first presentation was by Aliya Yule, the Healthcare for All Migrant Organiser at Migrants Organise, who delivered an illuminating paper on Patients Not Passports: "End The Hostile Environment in the NHS"



The next paper was by Don Flynn who has been active in the field of migrants' rights, both in the UK, Europe and in global networks, for many years. Don delivered an excellent paper on 'Migrant Rights, Race Relations and the Hostile Environment' with practical steps on how to campaign for rights.



The final paper was by Arianne Shahvisi, a Kurdish-British writer and academic philosopher who is Senior Lecturer in Ethics at the Brighton and Sussex Medical School, where she conducts research across a range of topics in applied philosophy, with current projects focussed on reproductive justice, migration and borders, and global health ethics. Arianne delivered an outstanding paper entitled 'Decolonising the NHS', which focused on colonialism in modern NHS, nationalism, neo-colonial resource extraction, charging migrants, and migrant health in the pandemic

The event was recorded and can be watched via this youtube link [Migrant Lives Matter: Health Struggles Experienced During the Pandemic - YouTube](#)

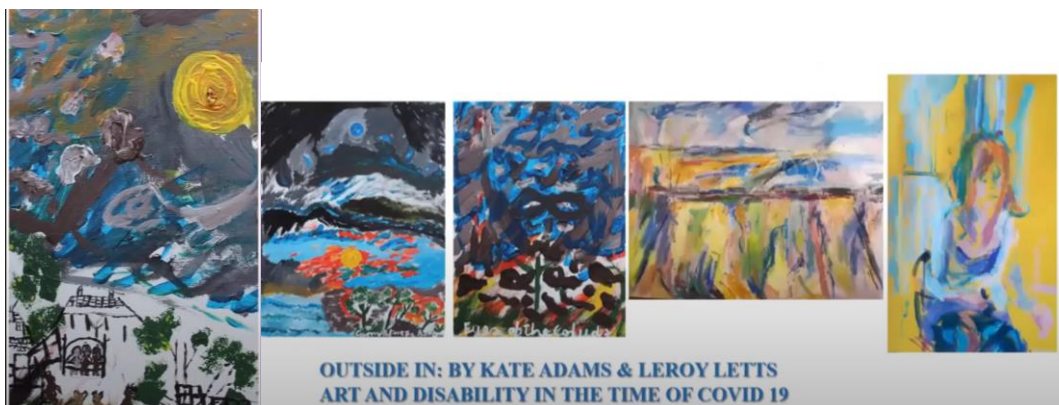
## Training

Kent Refugee Help are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), which means we are authorized to provide legal advice and representation in UK immigration law. We have regulated advisers at level 3 (the highest level) who can represent clients up to hearings at the First-Tier Tribunal and the Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) and the European Court of Human Rights. On registering with the OISC, KRH also joined the well-established Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA), involved with policy work. Our legal advisers have attended mainly online zoom training events arranged by various barristers' chambers and others. One of our caseworkers completed OISC level 1, which has been kindly funded by Refugee Action. Due to Covid, she has unable to take the exam. She will complete the exam and give level 1 advice as soon as she can.



## Looking Forward...

Despite the Covid-19 Pandemic, the state of the world and hostile environment towards people seeking asylum has not changed, indeed it has worsened considerably. The “New Plan for Immigration” is inhumane. It seeks to deny sanctuary rather than offering welcome. The proposals for asylum reform focus on refusing people protection and aims to make life in the asylum system unbearable – it is a reform that will force people to live in anxiety, under the continuous threat of removal, and denied the chance to reunite with family and loved ones. It focuses on penalising and criminalising refugees, turning them into legal and illegal people. Dividing people between “illegals” who took a clandestine entry, including dangerous crossing, and “legals” who took the orderly process of resettlement directly from refugee camps under government programmes.



The need for our work continues to increase all the time. We are very grateful to the support of our volunteers and friends upon whom we depend for so much.

Our work in supporting refugees and migrants is more urgent than ever, and we will do our utmost to make their voices heard.