MARYHILL INTEGRATION NETWORK

20 Year Anniversary Report

Maryhill Integration Network:

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We would like to thank all our interviewees as well as the many MIN service users and volunteers who have shared their individual testimonies with us.

Additional thanks to all current and former staff and trustees of Maryhill Integration Network whose energy, passion and commitment have brought MIN to where it is today.

This report is dedicated to Remzije Sherifi, who retired as MIN's Director in 2021, after 18 years with the organisation. Rema's vision brought pioneering approaches into the field of refugee integration, we celebrate many of her achievements throughout, and recognise her legacy in the ways we move forward.



From left: Rose Filippi, Remzije Sherifi, Liane Coia

Scotland has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers and refugees from all over the world. We maintain that they should be integrated from day one, and not just when leave to remain has been granted and I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone at Maryhill Integration Network for all of the important work you are doing to help make this happen.

Shona Robison MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government



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Introduction

In 2021, Maryhill Integration Network celebrates a significant milestone, reaching 20 years as a charity, working at the heart of Glasgow's welcome to asylum seekers and refugees.

Since 2001, MIN has grown from a small community support group, swiftly established in the Maryhill area of Glasgow to respond to the sudden implementation of the UK Government Dispersal Scheme, into an organisation which offers a rich and varied programme of support and advocacy. MIN champions an approach that is embedded in the views, experiences and expertise of our community, and which offers solidarity with similar organisations in Scotland and beyond.

During this time, we have become known for our innovative approach and the outstanding work produced as part of creative projects. Equally important have been our contributions to campaigns, most recently, one which saw refugees gaining the right to vote in Scotland, and also, the ongoing Lift the Ban campaign, which seeks to give asylum seekers the right to work whilst waiting for their claim to processed. These activities represent a breadth and depth of creative energy, community building, organising and learning.

Marking 20 years of MIN

In our twentieth year, we wanted to pause and take stock of this work, celebrate our achievements, consider what we have learned, what has worked, and what has been challenging, and to produce a report offering insights into our experiences.

To do this, we have undertaken a piece of research to gather the views of some of the collaborators, community members and colleagues we have worked with over the last 20 years. Working with a team from MIN staff, Board of Trustees and the University of Edinburgh[1], we have interviewed people who have been involved in the lifespan of MIN and asked for their memories, insights and opinions. We have also compiled a selection of material from projects we have been involved with developing between 2001 and 2021. This material, and the input of our interviewees has informed and shaped this report.

Looking back over the years, contributors have highlighted the extent to which Glasgow and MIN have changed in the last 20 years. They emphasise the importance of our community-led, grassroots approach, the hard-won successes of our campaigns and the strengths of the community networks of which we are part. They emphasise the importance of our welcome, of working beyond language or immigration status, and of building capacity for asylum seeker and refugee-led interventions into Scotland's future. These are all things MIN values and will continue to develop, and on which we reflect further in this report.

[1] Rose Filippi, Development Manager, Maryhill Integration Network, Dr Emma Hill, Oyku Hazal Tural, and Professor Nasar Meer, Sociology, University of Edinburgh and Dr Timothy Peace, University of Glasgow. This research was given administrative support by Liane Coia, Operations Manager, Maryhill Integration Network, and Michaelagh Broadbent, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Edinburgh. Dr Hill is also a member of MIN's Board of Trustees.

Taking stock, looking forward

The process of looking back over the last two decades also highlights that our work has developed over a period of intensive change, both in Glasgow and in Scotland, and this is also something we intend this report to reflect.



Just as MIN has changed significantly from where it began, the 'integration' landscape appears very different to how it looked in the early 2000s. In the 20 years since MIN was established, the devolution of the Scottish Parliament has created new terrains of engagement and challenge, and opportunities to champion a distinctive approach to integration. Meanwhile, in Glasgow, there is now an extensive network of support and solidarity, as well as the experience and expertise that has been built over 20 years of responding to challenging immigration environments. MIN's development as an organisation has been shaped by these landscapes, we want this report to also acknowledge and document this.

We also want to highlight that our twentieth anniversary occurs in a context of significant social challenge. The global COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our community and our work in ways that are unprecedented. Our work across 2020/21 has been characterised by emergency response activities, supporting asylum seeking and refugee community members, who have been disproportionately made vulnerable by the pandemic. By necessity, many of our groups and services have been brought online, bringing with them the difficulties of remote connection, alongside possibilities for future working. This time is therefore a period in which we at MIN are regrouping and thinking about how our work can best support our community in safe and creative ways as we move forward.

This report



We have written this report for a broad audience. We feel that it is a document that should be of interest to policymakers working on social justice and against the hostile environment, as it provides examples of best practice for how long-term, equitable community 'integration' can be built. It is our hope that it will also be of interest and utility for colleagues working with migrant communities across Scotland and beyond, including those who, like us, are regrouping after a challenging year, as well as those who are newly established. We hope that this report provides ideas and highlights potential points of connection, and invites future conversations with people and groups undertaking similar work. Finally, for the vast array of MIN community members, colleagues and collaborators, we hope that this report reflects the MIN that you have known and lays out an ambitious vision for the MIN of the future.

Contextualising the past 20 years



Today, Glasgow is the recipient of the largest asylum-seeking population in the UK and is the only local authority area in Scotland to participate in the Dispersal Scheme. Since the so-called 'Mediterranean Crisis' of 2015 (Bhambra 2017), and alongside all 32 local authorities in Scotland, Glasgow has also hosted refugees through a range of refugee resettlement programmes (Meer, Hill and Peace 2019). The city is particularly well-known for the activism of its communities, and the extensive networks of third sector and community organisations which support asylum seekers, migrants and refugees. The history of MIN is tied to these changes, and they have shaped our work and development. In this chapter, we look back at the origins of MIN, and give some context to its development.

Glasgow: a changing city



Though there is a history of asylum seekers and refugees settling in Glasgow throughout the twentieth century (Piacentini 2012), the first coordinated system of asylum seeker accommodation was established in the late 1990s. Developments in UK Government immigration legislation (the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999) made provision for what is known as the 'Dispersal Scheme' – a system through which asylum seekers are allocated accommodation on a 'no-choice' basis in participating local authority areas (Schuster 2005). Through a series of different contracts and housing providers, Glasgow City has been involved in Dispersal since April 2000 (Wren 2004, p.17), and currently accommodates up to 2000 asylum seekers a year (McAllister 2015, p.244).



The early years of dispersal in Glasgow were characterised by challenging living conditions and the clear need for a better-developed response. Asylum seekers were accommodated in parts of Glasgow with little experience of providing services for displaced migrants, and few existing social support networks. Key services such as interpreting support, social care and healthcare were often limited, and new residents were often isolated, and subjected to racist abuse and violence, and unable to access advice, amenities, or advocacy (Kelly 2000).

Over time, and responding to this environment, community, faith and third sector organisations across Glasgow began to provide services, facilities, and support for asylum seekers local to their areas. Community groups also began to organise, such as the 2005/2006 Glasgow Girls campaign against dawn raids and child detention, which highlighted the potential of community organising to enact social and political change.

The ensuing decade has been a period of gradual but fundamental change, and has forced Glasgow to re-examine old narratives about belonging and identity. This is a process which has necessarily been

shaped by the city's colonial history, its role in the British Empire, and the impact of colonialism in Scotland, as well as other histories of inequality and change. As one of our contributors noted, this environment is fraught with challenge:

> **When you become a city that has to give hospitality to the experiences of trauma and torture, and become a world city – not one that has sent people out as traumatised bodies as happened from the clearances and the poverty of the 1930's in Glasgow – but actually starts to receive that back in the early 20th Century, then your narrative as a city has to change, and change is always a really tricky process.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**



> **Over the last 2 decades, Glasgow became a more cosmopolitan city. A city where so many different languages are spoken, so many cultures, but no matter where people are coming from, they have greatness in them, and they have a lot to offer.**
>
> **(MIN Staff)**

For the community groups and organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow, the past decade has also posed challenges, initially in establishing long-term survival and sustainability, but more enduringly in anticipating the impact of shifting social and political environments and responding to the changing needs of the people with whom we work. The sector now benefits from its own maturity, and the expertise of colleagues and community members with two decades of experience. It also benefits from the partnerships and networks we have developed over years of collaboration and mutual support, and it is this aspect which our contributors identified as key to our work in Glasgow today.



> **I think partnership working is no longer a choice, it's a necessity. We need to do it. It's not like, it's good to do it because it just looks good on us, but for almost every organisation [...] if you look at the strategy and plan and vision for the future, partnership working and collaboration, sharing learning and everything is a specific objective where everyone wants to work together.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

For many of our contributors, the events of the Kenmure Street protests on 13th May 2021, in which community action prevented the detention of two men held by immigration enforcement officers, demonstrated both the extent of the change in Glasgow, and the ways in which community organising has, and will always, remain central to our work.



> **The events that happened in Glasgow with the [dawn] raid shows ordinary people have more awareness [...] and solidarity comes through their actions. [And it shows] so much has changed [...] from local based organisations to [those with] power.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

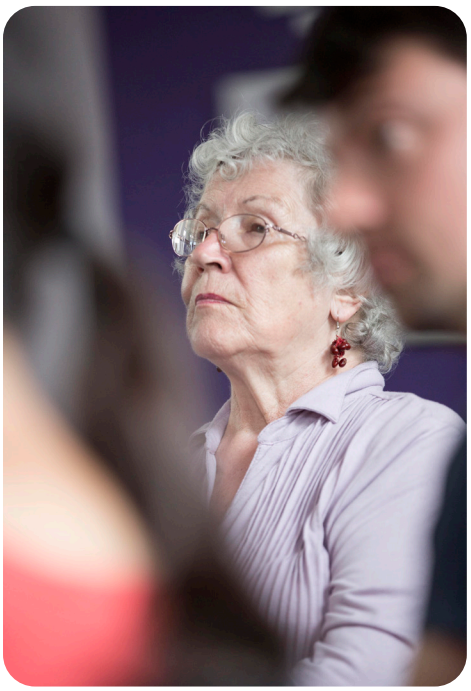
Despite the growth in sector expertise and community solidarity in Glasgow, in recent years, the lives of asylum seekers and refugees have nevertheless continued to be impacted by challenging immigration environments. The privatisation of the Dispersal contract in 2012 caused immediate distress and disruption to asylum seekers under threat of eviction (Hill, Meer and Peace 2021) and has continued to make asylum seekers and refugees vulnerable to housing precarity and unsafe living environments. The most recent usage of hotels as a 'temporary' accommodation option for asylum seekers during the pandemic has had preventable and tragic consequences (Hill 2020). Throughout the 2010s, the development of the 'hostile environment' – a policy through which immigration controls are extended into migrants' everyday lives (Yuval-Davis et al 2018) – also has enduring effects for our communities.



Finally, since 2015, the immigration landscape in Scotland has also been shaped by the UK Government's response to the so-called 'Mediterranean Crisis', to which it committed to resettle 20,000 vulnerable refugees over five years. With all 32 local authorities volunteering to host resettled refugees, and the subsequent creation of new refugee communities across Scotland, resettlement has had a significant impact on our work.

MIN: How it all began

The history of Maryhill Integration Network is directly related to the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow. MIN was first started in 2001 by a collection of church and community groups who were concerned with the treatment of asylum seekers newly dispersed to the Maryhill area of Glasgow. The group pooled the resources of three churches in the area to try and ensure they could reach as many people in Maryhill as possible, as one of MIN's original members of its first board of trustees explains:



> **That's how we started out, three drop-in cafes, one down at St George's Cross, one at Wyndford, which is about the middle of Maryhill, and then Maryhill Parish Church up at the top end of Maryhill. We were very conscious of the fact people had no money, and so it was a case of whether [service users] could walk there, and that was the reason that the three were chosen as they were.**
>
> **(MIN Founding Member)**

The organisation was initially set up informally, offering drop-in sessions, teas and coffees for ten adults. Premises were provided by the churches, and insurance provided by a donation from the Fire Brigade Union. As these drop ins grew, Board members sought out more permanent premises, initially with Ruchill Parish Church, and then Maryhill Community Centre where the organisation is located today.

In 2001, as part of a Glasgow City Council push to respond 'to the need to facilitate coherent involvement of local voluntary and community organisations on a city-wide scale' (Wren 2004, p. 22), and alongside

nine other neighbourhood organisations, the Maryhill community group officially became an 'integration network', funded by Glasgow City Council and with the broad remit of 'service provision'. Having grown out of very localised community responses, the subsequent development of the respective integration networks across Glasgow remained distinctive to the areas in which they operated (Wren 2004, p.24).



As the work of the MIN expanded from drop-ins into language classes and other forms of advocacy and support, the organisation decided to recruit a Development Officer in 2004. Initially employed in that post, Remzije Sherifi later went on to become MIN's Director. Sherifi expanded MIN's work into arts-based activities, events and gatherings. She also began to involve the network in local campaigns, including in the early years, the Glasgow Girls campaign, and sought to focus MIN's work on building connections between long-settled Maryhill residents and newly-arrived asylum seekers and refugees.

MIN's activities and staff team grew steadily, with additional administration and finance support, as well as volunteer coordination, which became a more necessary and prominent aspect of the service delivery. As time passed, and the global issues facing refugees gained more media coverage, MIN's work within the community became recognised as essential and necessary to understanding how communities can show support, offer welcoming and engage with the issues they saw on the news. In some ways, this period became challenging for organisations such as MIN, who had been supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow for well over a decade. It became even more important for us to challenge stereotypical portrayals of refugees in the media and replace them with the stories we already knew; stories which celebrate the resilience, strength, and multiplicity of voices and experiences.



As the staff team grew, MIN focused even more on our approach to community development, increasing our programme of activities, enabling wider participation, and greater opportunities to explore partnership working and the development of outreach projects, which expanded across the city. We also created more roles within the organisation for volunteers, which went alongside a new post within the team which provided greater support to those taking up a voluntary position within the organisation.



Before, we had a lot of volunteers [...] who had been living in Glasgow for some time [...] but we wanted to try and balance that out a bit more, so we created more roles which could be taken up by people in the asylum process and refugees. So that it wasn't just like they were always the ones being helped or being volunteered to [...] the start of that role within the organisation really shifted a lot for us. It gave people much more confidence to be part of our groups and to have an impact on the way they develop and also how they speak as well to the staff, it gave them a lot more contact and connection, and experience too.

(MIN Staff)

More recently, MIN has faced greater challenges with the ways in which the hostile environment has had an impact on the lives of our service users. We increased our commitment to campaign and stand up for the rights of our service users. The power of the collective voice which we nurture within the organisation, which always comes directly from the needs and experiences of our service users, not only has an impact within our organisation, but reaches far out across the sector, within campaigns and movements on a UK-wide level.

> **I think even if we had the opposite of a hostile environment policy, you know, even if it was really smooth, it was really easy for people to get their status, that they were supported with housing and finance and had the right to work, I think even if you had all of those things, you would still need to have something like Maryhill Integration Network. You would still want to have services that provided that social and cultural focus that helped to channel those energies and helped different parts of the community come together and provide that bridge or space for encounter and communication.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

Today, MIN is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation with a staff team of eight, with 10 trustees and over 40 volunteers involved in delivering our programme of activities. In June 2021, we said farewell to our outgoing Director Rema, as she makes the most of her well-earned retirement. We took this chance to take stock of our organisation, and the situation we face emerging from the pandemic and making sense of the new reality it has brought about for many charities. Staff and trustees took the decision to make a shift in the organisational structure, to nurture leadership within the team, and reinforce our commitment to the principles of grassroots organising and community development.

Where We Are Today

In 2018, MIN began to take steps to refresh our vision, mission and also clearly define our core values in order to develop a new strategic plan to guide the organisation through the following years. The process took some time in order to fully engage with, and represent as many voices from within and outside the organisation as we could. It all began with a stakeholder survey which involved a balanced range of stakeholders, with service users and volunteers forming the largest percentage of respondents, yet also included partners, referral agencies, funders, and local politicians.

How would you describe MIN?

"A vibrant enthusiastic and forward-looking organisation that positively contributes to the integration of new people in Glasgow"

"A safe, friendly and inclusive environment where people of different cultures and backgrounds can meet and interact as equals. It also provides support for people who require it, in a respectful manner. The inclusive atmosphere allows people to grow in confidence and therefore integrate better into society."

"A safe space for people to socialise, learn and get involved in lots of opportunities to celebrate their culture and the city that is now their home. It is a place of learning, empowerment, sharing and warmth."

"Inspiring. Everything a community organisation should be. A place of refuge, offering a sense of family and belonging to people most in need of it."

"It is the best place to be integrated to UK life. I say go to MIN and you find everything you need!"

(A selection of responses to MIN's Stakeholder Survey - 2018)

Following on from this, the results were shared and discussed at focus groups and sessions with staff and trustees were also held with facilitators from Glasgow University and Social Investment Business Scotland via the National Lottery Community Fund. After final agreement between staff and trustees, our renewed vision for 2020 emphasised an inclusive society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and can live supported and connected lives, whilst our mission focussed on developing a unique and creative environment in which communities to can come together to share experiences and demonstrate the value of cultural diversity in Scotland.

It felt important to all involved that we not only present single words when listing our values but to provide a description of our interpretation and commitment to each one as follows:



WELCOME

We encourage everyone to feel safe, forge friendships and make social and supportive connections across the community, helping to rebuild lives and create a neutral, welcoming place for all.

RESPECT

We believe in universal human rights and treat everyone on an individual basis, and with dignity; we strive for "acceptance without judgement" [service user quote].

EQUALITY

We understand the negative impact of inequality and social exclusion in our society, and aim to reduce barriers to equality and make Scotland a fairer place.

INCLUSION

We support participation in the development of our services with the aim to reflect the diversity of all involved.

EMPOWERMENT

We promote awareness of rights and entitlements, supporting ambitions to live autonomously, providing access to advice, support, personal development opportunities and a collective voice within the community.

CREATIVITY

We celebrate the use of arts and culture as a means of expression, challenging stereotypes and negative media coverage, in order to create authentic narratives which value contributions made by all in our community

Our Strategic Plan outlines how MIN will move forward between 2020-2023, building on our strong reputation within the community, capitalising on partnerships, and as always, listening to the diverse voices of those we work with. The structure of our plan is based around the four themes which MIN works across:

1. Human Rights and Citizenship
2. Wellbeing and Safety
3. Arts and Culture
4. Development and Sustainability

By 2023, we plan to continue to have a varied and innovative programme of activities with diverse engagement and even more opportunities for individuals to influence the decision making in our organisation. We want to continue to set a precedent in terms of empowering our service users and engaging with partners to create progressive policy change from the ground up. We will work collaboratively with others within and across sectors to bring about the best possible outcomes for our service users who will continue to value the role that MIN has, and will, play in their lives as a constant and reliable source of support and information, providing the first steps onto a pathway to a fairer future for all in our growing community.



Reflecting on our approach

In this section, we reflect on MIN's approaches to community development and 'integration.' We sketch out five key themes which define our activities, as well as highlighting a number of key projects and campaigns from the last twenty years.



I. Collaboration

MIN's growth and development has been one that is aligned with the direct needs and experiences of those we work with and it has been our ongoing commitment to creating connections – specifically the social connections between people, organisations and communities – which has been the key to rebuilding lives and developing a supportive society in which prejudice and fear are replaced by belonging and acceptance.

In academic research, humanitarian practices based on charity, benevolence, or largesse are often criticised for reinforcing hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations among those who are on the giving and receiving end of it (Harrell-Bond, 2002). The emphasis placed on 'marginalised' subjects denies people agency by designating them passive beneficiaries of an external benevolent agent (Ticktin, 2011). Recognising the relevance of these debates to refugee support and care in Glasgow, MIN foregrounds methods of co-creation, participation, and equal voice in its structures, decision-making processes, activities and understanding of 'community.'

We've always considered our service users as equal partners, not as people we have to serve. We have listened to their voices to shape the way we implement our programme of activities.
(MIN Staff Member)



When I was studying for my BA in Community Development, I chose to do my placement at Maryhill Integration Network because I was once a volunteer and a member of the board with the organisation. The majority of my time on placement was spent on networking, and outreach work to promote community engagement, as well as researching information to promote learning. The reason for doing this, was to provide information which was helpful to support refugee women to make better decisions and access the right resources. The most interesting journey with the placement, was about building friendships, and empowering women to use their voice – as learning from my own experiences – to push for social justice. By encouraging self-esteem for members of the group, I helped them to continue to build confidence, this was my highest priority to see them stand

independently for themselves and support others to challenge issues that affect them or demoralise their strength. MIN has always been a place of home to me, meaning that my confidence to participate and learn from all the projects which I'd taken part in, had been done with a grateful human soul; working positively without feeling different.

(Report Contributor)



The 'hostile environment' created by the UK's immigration system causes social, physical and mental harm (Strang and Quinn, 2019, Meer, Peace and Hill, 2019, Kearns and Whitley, 2015). Acknowledging that the system creates conditions in which people who might have experienced traumas and loss are also likely to experience language, employment, education and healthcare barriers, as well as cultural, ethnic or racialised discrimination, MIN embeds ideas about social connections and social justice at the heart of its values. To do this, MIN works with human rights organisations, and supports service users to work with experts on issues relating to their rights, how to navigate the system, and how to effect change. MIN actively connects service users with the important debates that are relevant for their lives and supports them to pitch in ideas, raise concerns with MSPs, go to the Scottish Parliament and experience the process which might even lead to political milestones.



We're working a lot with human rights professionals. A lot of questions asked. We had a chance to question MPs. We had a chance to engage with the First Minister. We had a chance to go to the Scottish Parliament, taking our cases there and networking with them and to say 'this cannot be life for anyone. It has to change.'

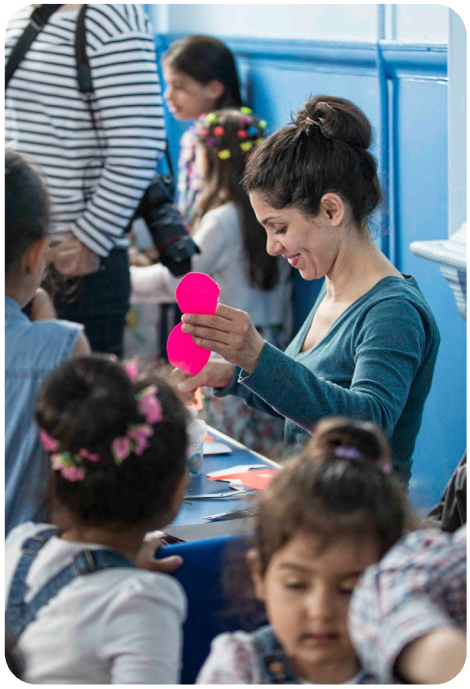
(MIN Community Member)

MIN also actively encourages service users to influence project development and opens up spaces for them to take ownership throughout the projects. People pitch in ideas, discuss, and work in collaboration to explore ways to realise them. Whilst we deliver these projects, we undertake processes of continuing reflection and evaluation. Although project delivery takes longer this way, it enables people to actively engage throughout the process and dismantles hierarchies of power and politics by centring the voices of everyone involved.

I have made MIN to be like my home, and whatever they're doing I want to be part of it. If I did not find MIN, I believe my options would be limited. I wouldn't be able to reach out to the new opportunities I can access now. Without MIN, I felt alone, being part of the activities has made me realise my potential. I used to be a shy person, I didn't want to speak in front of others, now I want to speak and stand up for others, and represent asylum seekers. In the future, with MIN, I would like to do more volunteering and advocacy work in order to help other asylum seekers and refugees. This is what I have a real passion for and I hope, one day, to train to become a lawyer. MIN gave me more confidence and belief in myself. I feel like when I speak, that

people will listen to me. Here I've felt real compassion, and a feeling of welcoming; MIN is a safe-haven where I feel I belong.

(MIN Community Member)



Service users are involved in decision making for programming choices, policies, and can select and suggest agendas for MIN's meetings. MIN aims to grow ethically and sustainably by involving more people with lived experience into the organisation. To this end, our volunteering programme creates more opportunities, especially for asylum seekers, to volunteer and build their capacities, share their skills, and enhance their knowledge whilst waiting for their leave to remain. In addition, participants have commented on how this policy change shifted perceptions of communities who are often portrayed as passive recipients of care and support.

I like to come along to the Gardening Club at MIN because I want to offer something to this community. This country has helped me and so now I want to give something back. I've been volunteering here for 9 months or so, in the garden I like to make myself useful, to do something for the community, it feels good. Here it is a good community you can learn lots of things, not only about gardening, but you can improve your English and meet other people from different countries. I feel at home, and I have many friends here at MIN, they are all good people. We meet every week and each time we do something new; it is useful, practical work and by doing it, I feel that I am someone in the community, that I am part of society.

(MIN Community Member)



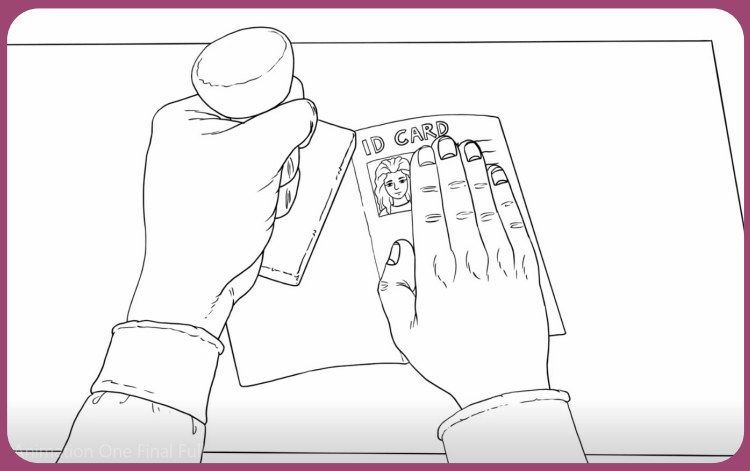
CASE STUDY: MIN VOICES

Without MIN Voices, the voice of our people would be taken away, we wouldn't have a place to air our views on issues in our lives. We would not benefit from information about human rights, or be able to know where to get help and assistance. Coming to MIN Voices highlighted many issues that were not clear for me, as well as addressing topics such as housing. It gives hope for the future and reassurance. It puts our unheard voices into one big one. It taught me that I am equal.

(MIN Community Member)

MIN Voices aims to empower its members to use their experiences to influence the structures and services that impact their lives. The group operates a peer support model through which participants work together to develop the group's ongoing programme according to need. It also builds a strong, collective and influential voice in the community, by embracing the skills and diversity of its members and transforming their past experiences into a positive force for change within society.

MIN Voices - originally called the Framework for Dialogue group - has a long history of campaigning, focusing on issues at the heart of our service users' lives. One of the first campaigns the group was involved with was around the provision of childcare at reporting centres. Today the group continues to be part of campaigns such as Lift the Ban, and has helped to organise days of action with partners and supporters. The group have also developed campaign material in the form of animations and film testimonies.





MIN Voices also has support from local MSPs:

I will at least twice a year meet with the MIN Voices Group so that we're getting an overview of the range of challenges and experiences that the asylum-seeking and refugee communities are going through. And that's very valuable in terms of then being able to speak up in Parliament on behalf, on wider issues and challenging the hostile environment as well as supporting individual asylum seekers.

Below is a testament to the impact of this support:

At MIN Voices, I got to speak face to face with lawyers, police officers and also MPs. One MP, was especially helpful. He really listened and gave me and two of my friends so much support. I will never forget this, he made a promise to us that he would help us, and he did. After one year of being without any communication from the Home Office, we finally got a response, we felt they had forgotten about us, but he showed us how we can make a difference. Because of MIN, I was able to speak to him in more detail about the problems that people from Eritrea have with their asylum claims, it can be very complicated but he listened to me and, by learning about my experiences, understood more about the issues which are specific to those seeking asylum from my country. Being part of MIN Voices was very insightful for me. I learned a lot about Scottish law, customs, culture, I couldn't have found this anywhere else in Glasgow.

2. The Whole Community

Whatever you call it, multiculturalism or integration or community cohesion... it's nothing that's an easy fix. The stuff that has to be done, people working together side by side within communities. And one of MIN's strengths, is about that.

(Report Contributor)



MIN is guided by an understanding of welcoming not only asylum seekers and refugees but everyone including migrants, visitors, and long-term local residents of the community who share its values. Our projects aspire to bring these different populations together to work to make 'integration' meaningful for all sides. We also work in partnership with various institutions (academic and cultural), civil society organisations, and freelance artists and facilitators, to increase our reach and impact.

Here at MIN, I found that there are so many different activities, and I'm making friends with Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, Sudanese, Kurdish, people, we all speak different languages, it's a unique experience. This group is so important to me because I don't have family here, and only a few friends, but now I am beginning to meet more people, we chat, share problems, and listen to each other.

(MIN Community Member)

MIN has done brilliantly in terms of engaging various communities. I've been to lots of events, I've been to lots of workshops, and I've seen people from many different backgrounds, even people who may not be refugees but are engaging within MIN because it's well in the heart of the community. That makes engagement with a diverse group of people possible. I think that is important. MIN's approach is not a singular community, it's not one group but I think it's an open approach and one that really celebrates diversity at all levels and long may that continue.

(Report Contributor)

MIN welcomes audiences to interact with us by organising public performances, exhibitions and hosting community events shaped by our service users' different cultures and traditions. We also participate in national celebrations and festivals, such as Black History Month, International Women's Day and Refugee Week (now Refugee Festival in Scotland). Our service users and project partners often referred to these engagements as opportunities to facilitate recognition and understanding between communities across Scotland.

It's a language, it's a vehicle for communication, for empathy and realising some of the things that we have in common, experiences that we might have in common, however different they might have been lived out in practice, however more challenging those experiences might have been for some people rather than others. But there are things that people can relate, it's relational, people can relate to the content and therefore, by extension, to the person. If they get the chance to meet them in person and go further and talk about... that's even better but even its just an exhibition and the person isn't there or it's a performance of reading a poem and you don't have a chance to speak to the poet... there's still something about the performative nature that's empowering for the person whose expression it is but also for the audience.

(Report Contributor)

It's really a way of reducing discrimination. A way of saying 'You need to welcome us. This is our culture and we can't throw it away. We'll meet up with some of the Scottish culture and everything, but this is my culture.'

(Report Contributor)



The impact of such diverse encounters at MIN, is not only empowering for those who are finding their feet in a new community, it also has an enriching impact upon those who are longer-term residents of Glasgow. As we open our doors for anyone who shares our values to participate in our groups, we often welcome participation from members of the local community. We are very interested also in understanding more about how their lives are impacted as part of this encounter.

For me, the most interesting part is meeting people from different countries and backgrounds. It has been a humbling experience and a privilege to meet people who have come to the UK as refugees or asylum seekers. When we see people who are different from ourselves, whether because of their clothing, language or the colour of their skin, it is very easy to think of them as 'other'. I would have been as prone to that as anyone else. Now, when I see people who are different from me, I very often make an association with MIN and Family Nest – my first response is a feeling of connectedness and welcome. I am also much better informed about those who come to Scotland as refugees and asylum seekers and about the challenges they face.

(MIN Community Member)



CASE STUDY: JOYOUS CHOIR

MIN's Joyous Choir use singing as an inclusive activity that celebrates the many cultures within Glasgow today. The group consists of women from diverse backgrounds including those who are seeking asylum, as well as those who have lived in Maryhill for a long time. Since 2013, members of the choir have shared songs from their own cultures and languages with one another. They chose songs which focus on themes such as solidarity, friendship, freedom, journeys and dreams. The group love performing and have sung in venues across Scotland including, Dundee's Cooper Gallery, Glasgow's City Halls and the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

At the choir I enjoy singing with others, it's nice to be in an all-female environment, meeting others. Before MIN, I didn't have any female friends here, which was hard for me. Since joining the choir I got to know many other women, from all different countries, and we all talk to each other, it gives you strength and a feeling of support. These feelings, and the happiness I feel after coming to the choir, it lasts when I go back home, I feel stress-free and happy. Being in the choir took me to many places, the best was the Scottish Parliament. I could never imagine to go there if I hadn't been part of the choir. It was an amazing experience for me. I can't go to places like this by myself, I've seen so many new places because of the choir.

(MIN Community Member)

Overall, it has been a humbling experience for me. Why do we do it? We all come to the Joyous Choir to sing, for that feeling when it all comes together and sounds wonderful! We come because it is moving and when we sing with our arms around one another, you really feel warmth and solidarity with one another. A recent highlight for me was when the choir sang at an event organised by The National Advisory Council for Women and Girls at the Parliament. I sang "my name is Christine, I come from Glasgow and these are my sisters", everyone in the audience stood up and clapped in agreement. That is the kind of Scotland I want and the Joyous Choir is important to me in realising this.

(MIN Community Member)

In 2015 the Choir won the Scotland Sings 'Unique Story' award.



3. Arts and Culture

There are two understanding of arts in my view, one of them is very elite culture that gets put into exhibitions or wins global prizes, and then there's the work of making, as I prefer to describe it. The work where you come together and make something together and that process, art as process, not as product, that's where the magic happens.

(Report Contributor)



Having long pioneered arts-based integration projects in Glasgow, MIN has a creative dimension to most of its work, from social groups and events to publications, and campaigning. We tap into the arts' potential to open-up channels of communication for its service users to talk about issues they experience, to tell their stories, voice their needs, aspirations and inspirations, and to enable them to express things that may be difficult to articulate with words only. Arts-based approaches offer ways of breaking the language barrier and thereby allow MIN to engage with diverse communities with different backgrounds and experiences.

A lot of the people who we work with are incredibly artistic and creative, they often come from cultures that have beautiful traditional art forms which they want to express and share themselves, or perhaps they want to find new ways of sharing how they're feeling and experiencing life at the moment. Having the opportunity to do so within MIN's groups and activities, it's just priceless really, and definitely something that is key to MIN's success.

(MIN Staff Member)



MIN uses the arts as a powerful tool to create something that is bigger than participants' individual contribution. Whether its creative writing, visual arts, dancing, theatre, film, photography, the creative process and ongoing processes of discussion that feed into making any form of artwork may not only lead to creating something with others, but also to getting to know others throughout the process, sharing their cultures and deeper levels of understanding for one another. Approaching arts as a social process empowers service users by putting them in control of deciding what they will share with others and how they will share it.

Whether it's a dance performance, an artwork or a piece of poetry, it gives the audience a way in to be part of the dialogue and to connect their own experiences in some way however different or similar they might have been. It creates that space for connection to the person who's created the content, in a way that wouldn't happen through a simple conversation.

(Report Contributor)

Alongside encouraging our service users to engage with their sense of self and explore their creative potential, we also offer them opportunities to engage with wider societal issues such as debates around the right to work, housing, or detention, and provides them with platforms from which

to voice those issues. Whether it's through physical performances like reciting poems, staging theatres or through sharing material online such as MIN's Joyous Choir 'Welcome Home' film or MIN Voices Right to Work animations. MIN enables various spaces for its service users to develop their own arts-based takes on key issues and engage with a wider public.



> **Still, there is that need for re-education about the reasons why [asylum seekers and refugees] are here and what are the struggles, and what is the hostile environment they are facing after leaving their countries. Because people are seeking sanctuary to have a peaceful and restful life for their children, to have a roof over their head, to have security, peace, and freedom as well after experiencing loss and grief. People need to understand those stories of refugee plights. MIN has taken those stories through theatre, visual arts, animations and presented them in front of hundreds and even thousands of people over the years.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

The way MIN approaches integration through arts and cultural activities is reflected on in a body of academic work (Marciniak and Tyler, 2014; Rovisco, 2019) addressing artistic performances as a site of political struggle and way of actively engaging with community affairs. We therefore challenge widespread perceptions of arts projects being a 'soft approach' to integration. Embracing the primacy and power of arts to both make political interventions and to create connections across communities, MIN aspires to support artwork that is accessible to all.



CASE STUDY: ECHO DANCE AND THEATRE PERFORMANCE PROJECT

Since 2006, MIN has partnered with Barrowland Ballet to develop a unique creative space for participants from diverse backgrounds and dance experiences to create and perform together. Often the project incorporates elements of spoken word, and combines contemporary dance with traditional art forms to touch on different stories and themes developed in collaboration between the dance artists and participants.

The project gives participants the chance to tell their stories, their stories of struggle, of pain and sadness, but it also ends in a celebration, where you can see what everyone has learned from each other. The richness of this project is in the way that everybody gains something back as well, not only offering but also learning. It's the most amazing thing when you see that to the tune of the same music.

(Project Coordinator)

From my beginnings, volunteering on the dance project at MIN [in 2007], it's really shaped my whole career and become part of my family here in Glasgow. Working with MIN really opened up my eyes to the diversity we can celebrate within dance, and the fact that it brings people together. It helps that it's a universal language that people speak, it allows people to express themselves and tell their stories through movement where some people may have barriers to communicate through languages, dance really lifts those barriers.

(Choreographer)

It's very easy to get statistical with people, forgetting they are people and not numbers, and it's projects like these, or when you come to performances, whatever you're opinions on refugees are, you're kind of just like oh, they're just the same as everyone else. I guess it's about connecting with people and connecting with people I would have probably never have connected with had it not been for this project.

(Dance Artist)

The creative outlet that we're telling the story through, getting to meet people on that level where you're digging really deep into your emotions within yourself and sharing that with other people, when you are performing you get this sense of the emotion that's behind it and different people's pain or joy, and that's really special.

(MIN Community Member)

All this dancing, well I'm doing it because I like it a lot, and all this learning, it doesn't make me stressed, it just makes me learn more and know more.

(MIN Youth Community Member)





4. Engagement and outreach

Through partnering with frequently-visited and much-loved arts and cultural spaces in Glasgow, MIN has addressed some of the barriers our service users face in accessing and enjoying museums and galleries. Projects coordinated within these spaces work towards opening up accessibility to these venues for participants, and creating opportunities to broaden dialogue.

MIN's engagement with the 'New Scots' exhibition at St Mungo's Museum was inspired by this idea, and presents objects curated by asylum seekers and refugees who have lived in Glasgow for the last 20 years. By placing these objects in a shared public space, the exhibition begins a conversation led by asylum seekers and refugees which not only taps into the historical context of their migration, but also their lives in Glasgow, and how their experiences of culture, identity and belonging connect to the current cultural and political environment.

> **Obviously, museums are quite fixed on objects and tangible heritage so I suppose that's one thing that Maryhill did, and other groups do too, is bring the kind of intangible cultural heritage into museums and spaces and give that as much value as, as tangible heritage which, you know, people might not have, or the museum itself might not have. I think the museum can show multiple aspects of migration so not one kind of narrative. It can put migration into historical context so, it's not something recent. It's got the right examples through artwork, through objects, of whether it's the artist themselves or whether it's the representation in the work.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

> **It was amazing to see behind the scenes at the museum, to look at many different objects and artefacts, and to have discussions about their meaning, history and function with others. At the end of the project, I also met with people from the Scottish Government who funded the project. It was an honour for me, and made me realise how important it was to do this project and to be involved in it.**
>
> **(MIN Community Member)**

Over the last twenty years, the importance of developing a society-wide understanding on why people move, how they are treated, and what welcoming should look like has been key agenda for MIN. To this end, MIN has also engaged in a series of outreach projects with schools across the city. These projects help to raise awareness amongst teachers and school pupils around the realities of the asylum system in the UK, how it impacts others who attend school alongside them, and develop greater understanding and empathy towards those new to our communities. MIN's outreach school projects have developed resources which increase accessibility of teaching materials relating to current social topics such as migration and human rights; issues which many children and their families in our society will be able to relate to.



CASE STUDY: THE SEA OF PAPERWORK

Between 2018 and 2019, MIN worked in partnership with ConFAB to deliver a series of outreach workshops in schools across Glasgow. Staff from MIN worked with the young people to explore the myths and realities around immigration and migration. The workshops also looked at the issues relating to the asylum process which many people face such as detention, not having the right to work, and the problems with integrating into a new society. The result of the outreach partnership project is a short graphic novel, 'The Sea of Paperwork', which brings to life all the themes and topics raised by the young people through beautiful illustrations.

'The Sea of Paperwork' links to the following items in the Curriculum for Excellence: Expressive Arts, Literacy (reading, writing, and talking & listening), and Social Studies; People in Society. In partnership with the Educational Institute of Scotland (Scotland's Teaching Union) MIN has developed an online platform and complimentary teaching materials as a resource for teachers wishing to use the book within the classroom.

It was a pleasure to work in partnership with MIN. Staff and volunteers made an extra effort to get to know the children, support their learning and value their opinions. Our pupils were involved at every stage in the design, development and delivery of the workshops. Through effective partnership working, we provided positive learning experiences for the pupils who got the opportunity to express themselves creatively, learn new skills and gain confidence in their abilities. By the end of the project, they expressed the values, attitudes, and knowledge required to be responsible citizens in an ever-changing world.

(Teacher, St Fillan's Primary School)

What the young people said about the project:

I want people to realise how hard it is to leave your home and country and life behind and come to a whole new place, having to start a whole new life.

I learned we all have a voice, and we should use it to speak out when we see anything unfair.

To refugees everywhere: you are welcomed, valued and loved.





A spin off from the Sea of Paperwork project was the animation Under the Jasmine Tree; inspired by the poetry of one of MIN's volunteers.

In 2020, it was shortlisted for a Charity Film Award.

5. Wellbeing

Speaking with other volunteers – who I count as my friends now – has helped me to change my attitude towards life. I try now to be more patient and less stressed. Visitors to MIN from the NHS team, told us about taking care of your wellbeing, and so now I try to be mindful of this, to stay relaxed and calm. Living through 4 years of civil war in Syria has a big impact on you, so learning from friends and listening to advice here, this has helped me a lot, to find a better balance in my life.

(MIN Community Member)



For 20 years, MIN has also developed a regular programme of groups and activities to combat and alleviate the conditions of uncertainty, isolation and powerlessness caused by the UK asylum system and the hostile environment (Hynes, 2011). Activities which facilitate social connections within MIN provide a space for service users to move away from their problems momentarily, and allow them to meet and talk with people they know and new people. For some, the sustained presence of a community that listens to them, tends them and cares for them creates a sense of home.

The staff at MIN respect volunteers as part of the community and I never feel any discrimination here, I'm free from racist attitudes which affect my life so often outside of MIN and outside of my home. I stopped wearing a headscarf because of the racist abuse I got in public and on the bus. I had to change my identity; it feels sad to do this but I don't feel that I had a choice. The welcoming environment here at MIN gives me a feeling a safety and acceptance. MIN is my favourite place.

(MIN Community Member)



MIN is often described as a 'second-home' and staff are regularly told that being part of MIN feels like being part of a 'big family.' This feedback illustrates to us that MIN symbolises a new beginning for many who have lost their own homes in their home countries and are now rebuilding their lives within an unfamiliar culture. MIN's activities provide an important step in this process by forming new friendships and connections across the community, building bridges and bonds.

In partnership with the Scottish Forestry Commission, MIN developed several projects designed to promote wellbeing and social connections through outdoor activities, including bike rides, bush craft and foraging. These activities are aimed at encouraging service users to engage with the landscape and the environment of Scotland and facilitate access to local greenspaces. This can help to reduce isolation and anxiety, as well as improving access to rural areas.

We know that refugee and asylum seeker communities can be very isolated because often they have had to leave their family behind, they don't have that support mechanism, they could easily not see anybody for days on end, even before Covid so we feel the woodlands and forest naturally is a place of peace and people don't need to have specialised equipment or anything, they can walk to their local environment (...) you don't need a lot of money to be able to benefit from being outdoors

(Report Contributor)

In 2013, we also set up our community garden as a way to directly impact the wellbeing of service users. The Many Hands Garden not only created a new community space, offering respite and reflection for many, it also became a site for learning and skills sharing.

I came to MIN to socialize and to meet people, my housing officer said I should come so I would not feel lonely or depressed. Joining the Gardening Club really helped me to get out of depression, it was a blessing for me to come here, I met a lot of nice people. Coming to MIN makes me happy, it makes me VERY happy! Now there is no more depression for me, I know I have a family here, that I have somewhere I belong. After the Gardening Club sessions, I feel refreshed, it's amazing what you can learn. The head Gardener, she taught us all about what we can grow and care for in the garden, it's incredible all the things we are growing, and in such a small space. Now I know so many names, of the different seeds and plants, and how to sow them. We learn something new every week, there are many positive people here, we are all part of something and working together. I'd never done any gardening before, so now I know how to plant, how to grow things. It's made a great difference in my life to have these skills now, I can continue to use them at home and at times when I am away from MIN, the learning lasts and just grows and grows.

(MIN Community Member)





The variety of activities and opportunities provided regularly by MIN create ripples for participants throughout the rest of their week; providing them something to look forward to and something to reflect upon afterwards. Whilst doing so, MIN offers spaces of familiarity and safety in which Service Users can speak out and exchange ideas. This combination allows MIN to address both the holistic and rights-based aspects of wellbeing through which a process of healing can begin.

For some time, I spent too much of my days at home, not going out. It had an impact on my mental health and my GP told me I need to become more involved in the community. One of my friends told me about MIN so I joined Men's Group to see what it was like. The main difference that being part of Men's Group has made to my life is that I have made more friendships, meeting different types of people I would probably never have met before, I have learned new skills, and most importantly my mental health has improved. I am depending less upon medication from the doctor for depression, now I can manage this, only taking just a few now and then when bad news from the Home Office comes, but coming to MIN where there is a positive atmosphere helps, it is such a good place to be.

(MIN Community Member)



CASE STUDY: PARTICIPATORY FILM-MAKING WITH MEN

In 2015, our Men's Group co-created a short campaign film entitled 'A Strong Man.' The film was the result of a participatory arts project, using film making, campaigning and media awareness to engage more men in the White Ribbon Scotland Campaign. The aim of the project was to open dialogue and awareness around the root causes of gender-based violence and preventative measures men can take to end it. MIN worked in partnership with media co-op on the project which exceeded all initial expectations. The richness of working on a participatory arts project is not only evident in the quality of the final film, but also through the impact the workshops had on the men's group participants. Almost all of the men involved in the project had fled violence, or the threat of it, to seek safety in Scotland, so this is an issue that really resonated with them. Making the film was a powerful and positive process for everyone involved.

Being part of the group, I have seen many changes from the initial session. The programme has created confidence in the group and helped people form strong relationships with others. Personally, I have learned a lot important issues in society and how these are reflected by culture and understanding of different people. Using film and cameras has helped me to develop new skills and also helped to make the theme of the programme clear and easy; we are trying to start a campaign to change people's minds.

(MIN Community Member)

I am really enjoying the programme and hope we can continue to explore the ways that media and culture can be used to create film and campaigns, the theme of the programme is very important and one that we all have something to contribute to. I hope that more men will join and take part in the project to learn and share their ideas. It is important to explore our differences and find a way to seek a solution to the problem of violence in our new home, Glasgow.

(MIN Community Member)

The sessions, especially the filming, were such a great experience. The topic which we were filming for was very important as we also had the chance to know more about women rights in the UK and how it should be in all over the world. I would like to learn more how we can make the film very high quality, to be used for the campaign and to have a good impact and effect on other men in Glasgow.

(MIN Community Member)

Through this project MIN also made new partnerships with National Theatre of Scotland and Community Info Source. These partnerships meant that the men in the group were able to access and take part in cultural activities that reflected the themes and issues that the group were already discussing. They also offered additional training and support to take their learning and individual experiences beyond.

The film was screened at Glasgow's City Chambers to mark Glasgow officially receiving White Ribbon City Status, and in 2016, the film won the Charity Award for best Local Campaign at The Scottish Digital Business Awards.



Conclusion

The COVID-19 Pandemic



The impact of the pandemic on MIN's service users, staff and activities has been huge. Pre-pandemic, many of the participants were experiencing poor mental health, felt isolated, and also struggled with living in poverty. As lockdown measures, social distancing and quarantining policies came into force, the pandemic made an already 'hostile environment' even worse, with service users facing restrictive and coercive housing conditions, further barriers to education and healthcare, and a higher risk both of infection and poor health outcomes. It also challenged one of our core objectives – to create and foster social connections within our community. A long-term MIN collaborator reflected:

> **I cannot get to the end of how much courage it has taken to do this work over the last couple of years, and to be in with the mess, the absolute mess, the absolute devastation of what we've had to deal with in the city as a result of Covid and the pandemic, and the use of the pandemic to alienate people to, to isolate people, to detain people, to deprive people of their liberty, to deprive people of access to joy and people, to deprive people of their right to give and receive hospitality in the way that MIN do that. I just can't get to the end of how devastating that has been for asylum populations [...]. So the challenges are off the scale, and the way we have tried to continue to make those happen and the way that MIN has done that has been absolutely remarkable to see, and incredibly costly, and it has been sustained by an enormous amount of humour and an awful lot of tears and anger and laughter.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**



During the pandemic, our work initially shifted to emergency response, and supporting service users in accessing supplies and support that had been prevented by pandemic conditions. We also quickly moved the majority of our services, groups and activities online which gave those participating a sense of hope and built much needed connections across the community.

> **With the pandemic, [...] we knew how important it was for people to have that connection and that consistency and that familiarity and respect for people because you have to understand the cultural backgrounds of people [...]. It was very difficult for some people to accept charity in this way, as opposed to the way we provided social support and activities, before, this direct emergency support, with the most basic of supplies was a real shift for us all. However, during the pandemic, our role became even more important to keep providing these social connections, as part of everything else.**
>
> **(MIN Staff Member)**

This presented new challenges, predominantly due to the digital exclusion

experienced by our service users. However, again, we adapted and found ways to fill the gap between funding and initiatives which helped provide devices and the skills and confidence people needed to make the best use of them. We set up a project to support digital inclusion by training multilingual volunteers to support service users with setting up and using their devices. Though this project was set up during the pandemic, we plan to continue to develop as part of our volunteering programme and ongoing support for skills development and confidence building.

Taking stock, looking forward

When MIN first began in 2001, the aim was simply to provide asylum seekers, refugees, a space to feel safe, supported and connected. Although this aim remains central to our renewed vision today, our understanding and approach to 'integration' has adapted. We interpret 'integration' not as a policy objective, but as something which is shared, lived and constantly negotiated by all members of our community.

> **Because we now have such an immense mass of people abundantly capacitated, living this as their life, who get it and get it because they [...] learnt, and made mistakes, and dusted themselves down, and still come to all the meetings and actually acknowledged, 'what we do now is not what we did when we started', [...]. Then we had something very, very different. [...] We're operating in very different ways and we've got a really quite mature understanding of what our work is, and we're capable of saying, 'What's mine to do? That's not mine to do.' What we also have now, which we didn't have eight years ago, and even six years ago, are organisations led by refugees.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

Our intention in writing this report was to provide a space for us to highlight MIN's achievements over the last 20 years, set out our key approaches, and reflect on what has worked, and what we would like to carry forward. As part of this process, we have reviewed the vast array of MIN's activities, campaigns, projects and community groups. Something we were particularly struck by was how much of MIN's work is defined by a careful balance between publicly shared events and campaigns, and long-term behind-the-scenes work. It is this latter factor, fuelled by the efforts of our community, which have enabled MIN to steadily grow over the years.

> **A lot of the things that have been done [...] you know, really quietly, through people like Rose and Rema and Pinar and Liane all pitching up at integration meetings for many, many years, at community level, at trade union level, at civic level, at governmental level, at European Parliament level, in the House of Lords, just pitching up and saying the same thing, 'til you're blue in the face, green in the face, pink in the face, but just doing it. And that's what's astonishing, it's not the 'wow, aren't we amazing, we're so resilient, we've got such inspiring stories', the thing that's really amazing is this day in, day out, work that is done by people to just keep it going and keep the narrative alive and get a change. And it works, because [...] you do then get a day where, you know – oh my goodness – [...] look what happened, refugees were voting.**
>
> **(Report Contributor)**

We continue to see every day that asylum seekers and refugees face multiple inequalities in the UK immigration system, and we have a dual responsibility both to support our service users as they navigate the hostile environment, and also to critique and campaign against the conditions that facilitate it. In many ways, therefore, though so much has changed since 2001, some of the core challenges we faced then still remain:

We still face all the challenges of people being housed in unsuitable accommodation, that there is still the threat of destitution, and also of being put in detention; these are things that we have constantly been campaigning against. So, in some small ways, we can try and make a difference to that, but there's still that ongoing issue of the way the Home Office treats asylum seekers, to try to make them feel like they are not welcome here, where everything we want to do is show them actually, that they are, that they have human rights and they should be respected in this country.

(MIN Staff Member)



As we move forward, we plan to establish our new organisational structure, one in which our 'whole community' and 'collaboration' approaches are embedded. We are developing a team structure which facilitates shared decision-making processes, creates new positions across the areas of community advocacy and wellbeing, and which actively supports the professional development of people with lived experience of seeking asylum and the UK immigration system. This development has been made possible not only by our community of staff, trustees, volunteers and service users, but also by the wider changes locally, nationally and globally, which do not simply support the rights and voices of asylum seekers and refugees, but which are actively working towards fundamental social and representational change. We are proud to be part of this movement.



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