

Project 17
2022-23
Annual review

Charity number: 1152621

PLEASE
Clean up after yourself.
Ensure that the bathroom is in a clean and tidy state for the next resident to use.

Don't hog the bathroom.
At times of high demand other residents also need to use the bathroom. Please be considerate and do not take any longer than you need to.

Remember that this bathroom is shared
and don't do anything to cause your fellow users nuisance or annoyance.

Hostel Staff will take action against anyone who does not comply with the above rules.



NO SMOKING

It is against the law to
smoke in this area

PLEASE STOP
SMOKING IN THIS
TOILET BECAUSE OF
MY CHILD'S HEALTH.
THANKS.

Mission and vision

Project 17 works to end destitution among migrant children.

It works with families experiencing exceptional poverty to improve their access to local authority support. We believe that all children have the right to a home and enough to eat, regardless of immigration status. To achieve our vision, we provide advice and support for individuals; build capacity in other organisations; and we campaign for the improved implementation of support.

Project 17 works to ensure that local authorities comply with their duties under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need. Section 17 enables local councils to provide accommodation and financial support to avoid children being taken into care. This duty exists even if the family has no right to work, no access to welfare, and no leave to remain. Project 17 exists to ensure that families eligible for support under section 17 can access it effectively.

Introduction from the Chair of Trustees

It has been another challenging year for people with uncertain or insecure immigration status. While attempts to scrap the Human Rights Act were thankfully abandoned, the government focused on pushing the Illegal Migration Act through parliament at breakneck speed. In doing so, it brought in more legislation making the immigration and asylum systems even less accessible and more punitive, with the risk that even more families will find themselves with NRPF and facing destitution.

In such a hostile political environment, Project 17 has had to consider where to focus its efforts and resources. We have provided advice and support to hundreds of families, while also working hard to share our expertise and build the capacity of others to assist people with NRPF. We have also consciously decided to focus our energies on engagement with *local* rather than central government.

Making space for people with experience of NRPF has remained a key priority. We've supported members of the solidarity action group, United Impact, to share their experiences and views with those in power and have welcomed new trustees with lived experience of NRPF to the Project 17 board. This is a significant step towards ensuring meaningful inclusion in discussions and decisions about all aspects of the charity's work. Working together in solidarity we hope to achieve change both in individual lives but also in the wider system.

Ayanthi: We are five people in my family and we are living in a one bedroom flat. We have only got one electric heater in the flat, and we still can't use it because we can't afford it. Winter is a really difficult time, we hope this struggle will end soon.

Staff

Abi Brunswick, Director

Leah Cowan, Adviser

Maria Danciu, Adviser

Shadin Dowson-Zeidan, Advice Supervisor

Kris Harris, Policy Coordinator

Hannah Hoseyni, Advocacy & Communications Officer

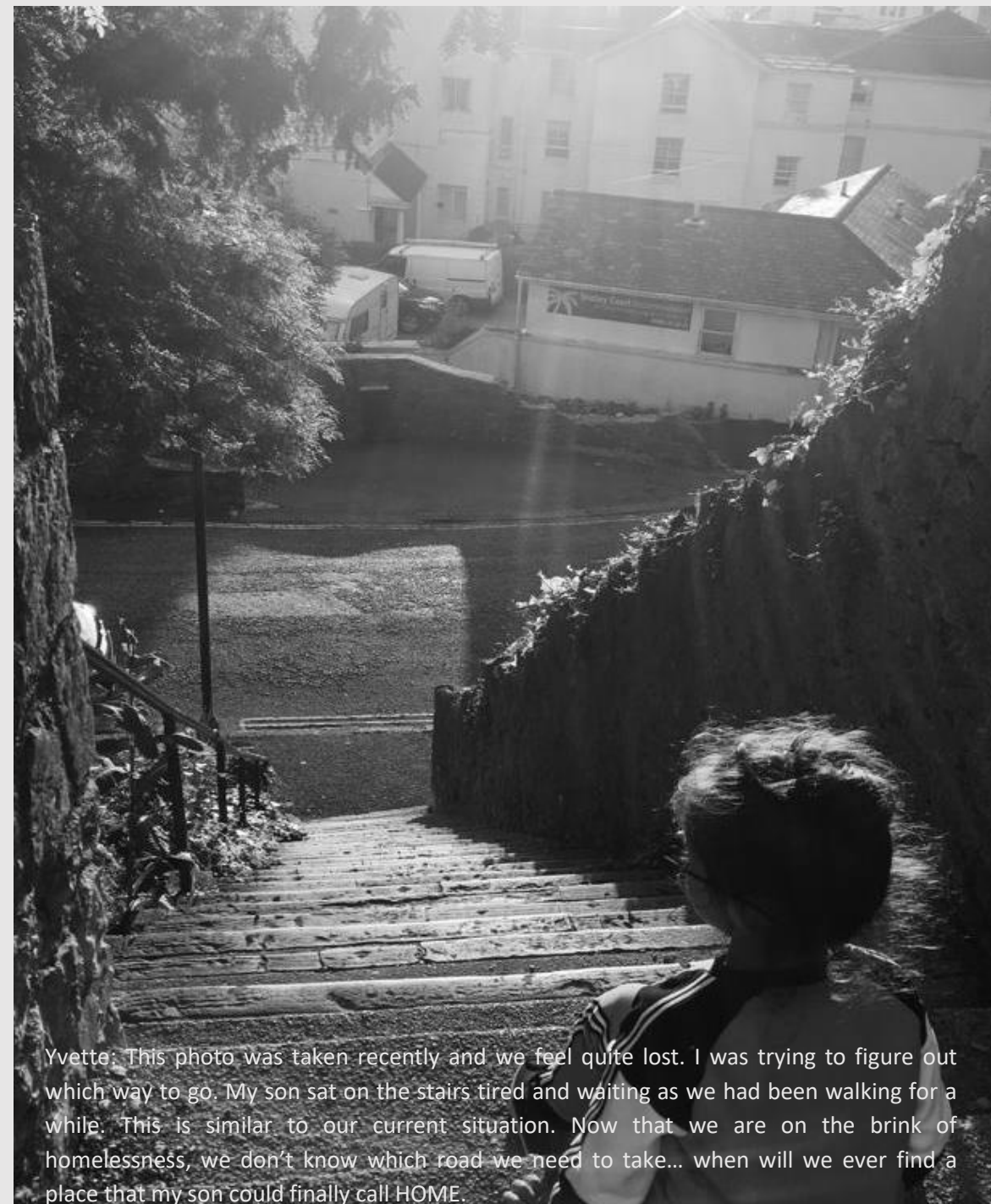
Claire Kaleab McGuinness, Development Coordinator

Yasna Khan, Administrator

Asfah Kosir, Policy Coordinator (maternity)

Oluwatosin Kuforiji, Group Support Officer

Sydney Shea, Capacity Building Supervisor (maternity)



Yvette: This photo was taken recently and we feel quite lost. I was trying to figure out which way to go. My son sat on the stairs tired and waiting as we had been walking for a while. This is similar to our current situation. Now that we are on the brink of homelessness, we don't know which road we need to take... when will we ever find a place that my son could finally call HOME.

Trustees



- Bec Aoude
- Mary Awoniyi
- Tim Bull (Treasurer)
- Kamena Dorling (Chair)
- Libby Fry
- Clare Jennings
- Ruvimbo Mutaymbizi
- Gwawr Thomas

Pratima: This is a dress made by me for my princess. Even with the difficult situation we're going through, we have had to improvise in order to clothe my children as I can't always afford what they need.

Martha: This is how bad the black mould is in my place, provided by the NRPF team at Children's Social Services. It is more black in other parts. I emailed the council about it. I spend £100 a week on the electric heater, which leaves us without money for other essentials like food. The bed is close to the walls. It's worse in winter

Advice and advocacy

Our frontline service works directly with families facing homelessness or serious poverty because they have no recourse to public funds. This year we worked with 433 families, including 199 new clients.

Our advice focuses on accessing accommodation and financial support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which gives local authorities powers to support families with children in need. Our frontline advocacy and advocacy service exists to ensure those eligible for support can access it effectively.

We provide advice on a range of related issues, including evictions, health access, and access to free school meals and healthy start vouchers. We also provide practical support such as foodbank vouchers, emergency payments and grants.

Steph: We love taking a walk especially when there's lots of sunshine, enjoying some fresh cool air and putting all the worries of life aside.

Our clients

We worked with 433 clients in 2022-23. Of these, 199 were new clients.

- 55% were undocumented and 24% had leave to remain on family life grounds with no recourse to public funds
- 93% were women
- 73% were lone parents
- 72% lived in London
- Clients came from 64 different countries



“Destitution”

More than half of clients had already been turned away by social services when they approach us. 56% of clients had been unable to meet basic needs for more than three months, and 27% had been destitute for more than a year. Being refused support has serious consequences, including:

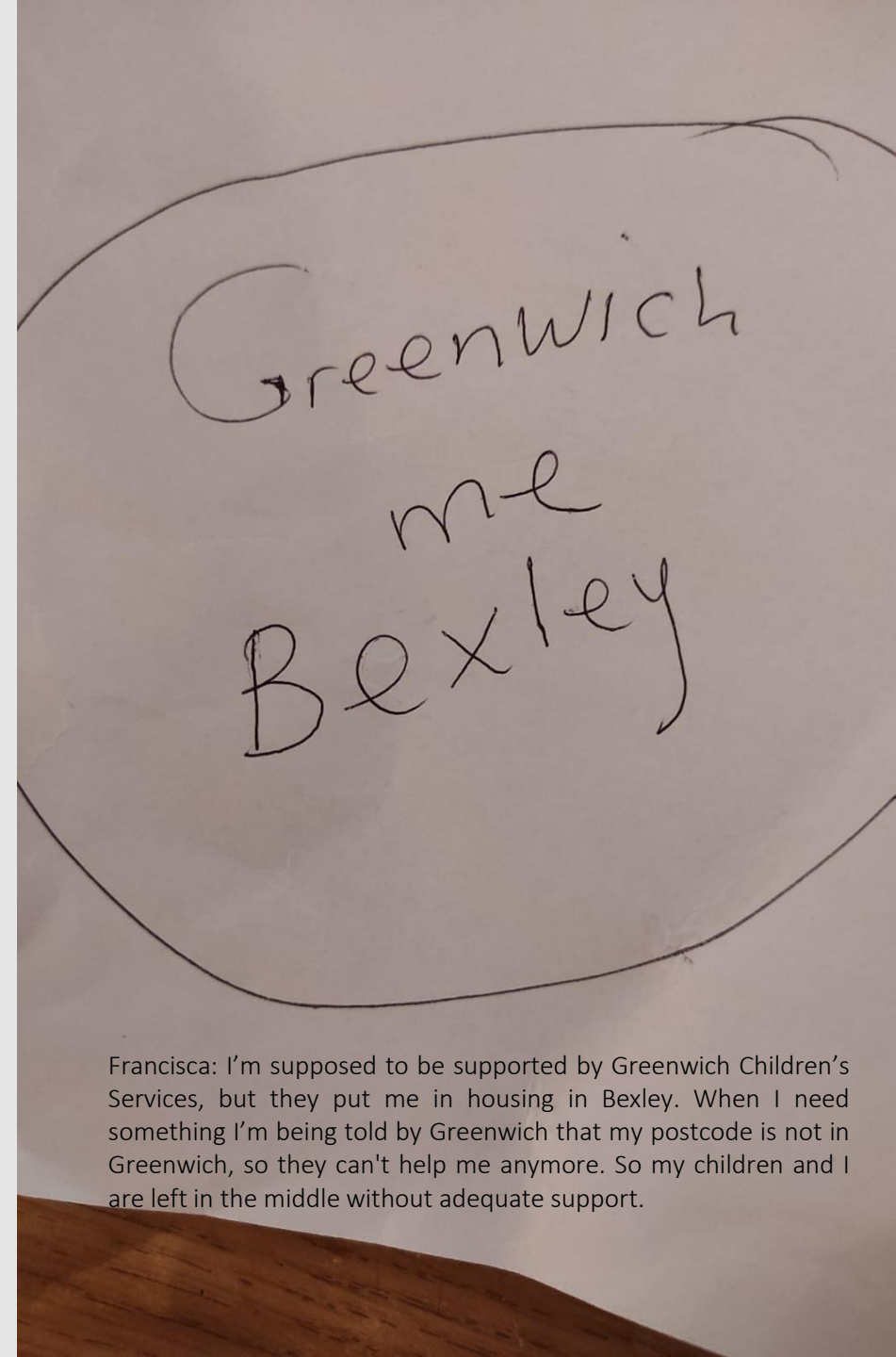
- Domestic abuse
- Homelessness
- Inadequate housing
- Not enough money
- Threats to safety

Section 17 support

s.17 gives local authorities powers to provide accommodation and money to families with no recourse to public funds, but families experience a range of problems when asking for help. Last year only 22 families accessed support following our initial referral, without the need for advocacy or legal intervention.

- 18% were wrongly told they were ineligible for support because of their immigration status
- 17% were told to rely on friends and family
- 11% were told there was no support available
- 11% were told they couldn't be supported because they 'weren't destitute'

A further 26% faced delays once the assessment started.



Francisca: I'm supposed to be supported by Greenwich Children's Services, but they put me in housing in Bexley. When I need something I'm being told by Greenwich that my postcode is not in Greenwich, so they can't help me anymore. So my children and I are left in the middle without adequate support.



Provision of support: accommodation

Once s.17 support is provided, it is often of a very low standard.

80% of clients found their accommodation to be inadequate. Families were expected to live in hotels and HMOs, often far away from schools and support networks. Many properties were in a state of disrepair.

Amara: We are a family of four having to share a house with many other families, provided by Children's Social Services. As the bathroom is often occupied, my son has had to use the potty in our room, where we also have to sleep, eat and where the children do homework.



Kehinde: This is the main passage in the building of our shared house. The ceiling is falling in and dangerous, we are scared to walk underneath it.

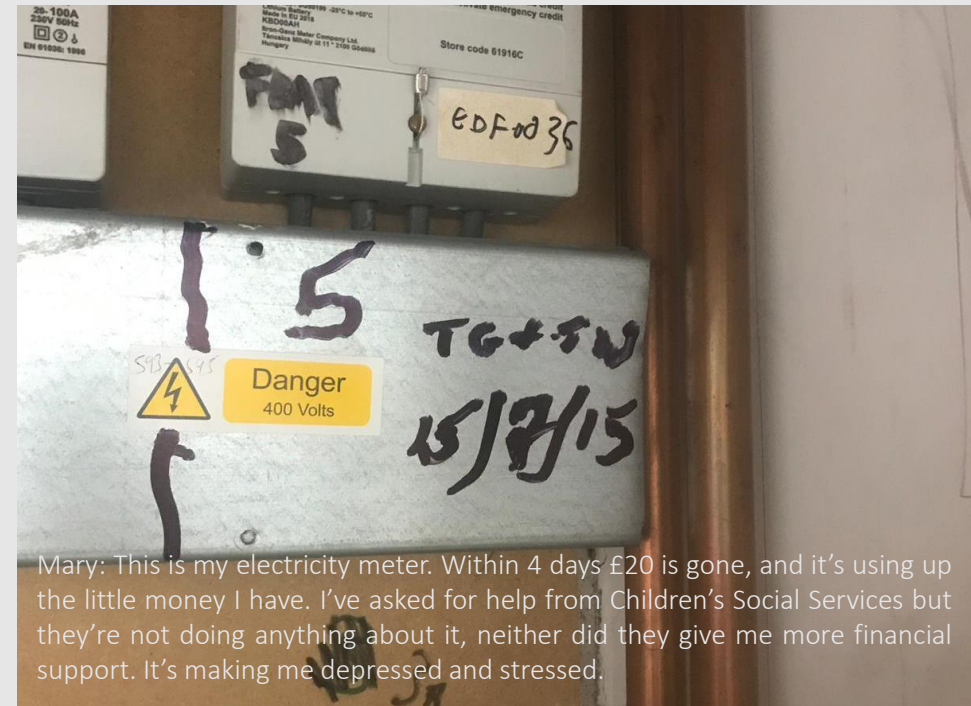
Provision of support: subsistence

Many local authorities did not provide enough financial support to meet basic needs.

- 33% of clients received financial support below the rate of asylum support, which is the minimum the courts say councils should pay.
- 21% received support equivalent to asylum support rates.
- 18% received support above asylum support rates.
- 8% received vouchers instead of cash, making it impossible to buy items like bus travel or haircuts.



Mary: I found this used and abandoned table and chair outside on the roadside. I cleaned them up for my child to use, as we were given accommodation without adequate furniture, fittings and fixtures.



Mary: This is my electricity meter. Within 4 days £20 is gone, and it's using up the little money I have. I've asked for help from Children's Social Services but they're not doing anything about it, neither did they give me more financial support. It's making me depressed and stressed.

Impact of Project 17's work

93% of clients had at least one positive outcome following our intervention.

- 50% of clients accessed financial support under s.17
- 46% accessed accommodation under s.17
- 66% accessed foodbank vouchers
- 49% accessed an emergency payment from our destitution fund
- 36% accessed a grant

Other outcomes included Healthy Start Vouchers, free school meals, early nursery access, Care Act and asylum support.

Francisca: In our accommodation provided by Children's Social Services, this is my children's bedroom. There is a lack of space. I made their bed and the shelves above it myself, to find space to store their books and toys. They should not need to be kept above their beds as it's dangerous, or stuffed in a tower of boxes next to the bed. We would like families to be provided with enough space for children to thrive.

Case study

BO approached us a few weeks after she had given birth. Her daughter was born prematurely and was still in hospital.

BO came to the UK as a student and her visa was extended during the pandemic. She decided not to return to her country of origin because of domestic abuse. She became pregnant in 2022 and her visa expired. She was relying on a relative for food and accommodation, but when the baby was born her relative asked her to leave.

While the baby was in hospital, BO was homeless. Sometimes she stayed at the hospital; sometimes she slept on night buses and occasionally she stayed with friends.





BO had approached social services already, but they said they couldn't help. Despite the efforts of her midwife and health visitor, BO remained homeless. The medical professionals were worried about where the baby would go when she was discharged. The hospital social worker told BO that if she didn't have somewhere to live, the baby would be taken into foster care.

We provided emergency cash support from our Destitution Fund, and helped BO approach social services again. Initially they refused to help, but after some advocacy they provided accommodation and financial support to the mother under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Soon, the baby was discharged into her care. The accommodation is of poor quality: a small room in a shared house, with shared kitchen and bathroom. We continue to advocate for alternative, suitable accommodation.

We supported BO to access immigration advice through a partnership project with South London Refugee Association and Southwark Law Centre. She is now working on regularising her immigration status.



Feedback

We asked for feedback from 30 clients who used our service last year.

- 83% rated the service as 10/10
- 100% said they better understood their options after speaking to us

“It is very different now. I was mentally and emotionally drained. I was pregnant. I got support in all possible ways beyond my expectations.”

Yvette: This is a photo of my son playing at the beach. I used an app to create the oil painting effect. It symbolises freedom! My son and I have been stuck inside a box for so many years now with NRPF, blocked by the walls on each side and nowhere else to go! Seeing my son playing freely in the waters makes me worry about his future.

Training

Our training supports other organisations to work with families with NRPF. This year, we delivered 23 sessions for 536 participants.

- 100% rated the training excellent or good (67% excellent, 33% good).
- 90% say the training improved their knowledge (the other 10% rated their knowledge as on same level after training).
- 100% say it was useful for their role.

“Informative and very useful. Excellent trainers, useful information for us to take back...Case studies and discussions were excellent.”



Francisca: We have to stay in the park to play even though it's cold, because there's not enough space inside at home to play, and we don't have a garden or outdoor toys for the kids to play.

Advice line

Our telephone advice line supports and advises other professionals on specific cases. This year we responded to 452 calls, up from 331 last year.

When we asked for feedback, 100% of respondents said they found the service useful.

“I received some incredible advice on the best way to proceed with applying to the Local Authority for section 17 of the Children Act 1989 for emergency support and subsistence payments for a mother and her 2 small children. I was also given a template letter to make a request, and further advice on things to look out for and be aware of when making the request. The advice was superb.”

Seke: We are living in a disheartening condition. Our flat is full of black mould, I try to clean it but it doesn't go. I have reported it to Children's Social Services who are supporting me, but nothing has been done. My baby blacked out and was taken by ambulance to A&E, due to a reaction to the mould. They have not moved us. I am so worried that this might become a fatal situation, especially after seeing the news of the little boy that died from a similar situation.

United Impact

We support and facilitate United Impact, a group affected by NRPF and committed to working together for change.

This year the group has continued to build power and solidarity. They worked with an academic and photographer to produce Photovoice, a photography project and exhibition examining the impact of NRPF on family life.

United Impact participated in Parliamentary influencing, giving evidence at events, and speaking to the migrants' rights sector about their experiences. The group worked to build its own collective voice, separate from Project 17.

Evaluation of the project show that people felt they had more opportunities to talk to people in power and felt more supported and able to share their thoughts and feelings around having NRPF.



Mary: This is on behalf of every family who still has No Recourse to Public Funds, and immigration issues. I made this poster at a women's group at South London Refugee Association (SLRA). We had to say what we had in our minds and what we wanted.

Yvette: This photo was taken while waiting outside my son's school. My son said to me, "Mama look a rainbow. I wish I could find the end of that rainbow so I could get the pot of gold." I asked him, "What will u do with the pot of gold?" He answered, " I will give it to you so you have money to buy our house and money for the taxi, so we don't need to walk everyday to school, and also buy you some seafood, I know it's your favourite!"

Policy & strategic work

At the local authority level, we have engaged with Croydon, Newham, Southwark and Birmingham. We have worked with Southwark and Newham to increase the rates of subsistence support provided to families receiving s.17. In Birmingham, we have been focusing on good practice, provide training for their teams and working with local organisations to reduce gatekeeping and ensure those in need of support can access it. Croydon has been less receptive to our attempts to engage, and we have recently submitted a long letter of complaint outlining various issues with the implementation of support. This is yet to be resolved, and will likely go to the Local Government Ombudsman for adjudication.

On a national level, we hold the co-secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on No Recourse to Public Funds. We held three events last year, giving parliamentarians the opportunity to hear from people directly affected by NRPF, as well as working with experts to provide briefings and evidence. We also worked with larger organisation and networks, reviewing, supporting and providing evidence for parliamentary briefings and consultations.

Financial information

	Unrestricted £	Restricted £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Income and Endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	118,018	-	118,018	63,431
Charitable activities	2	232,503	232,505	277,077
Total Income	118,020	232,503	350,523	340,508
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities	(27,516)	(341,306)	(368,822)	(342,413)
Total Expenditure	(27,516)	(341,306)	(368,822)	(342,413)
Net movement in funds	90,504	(108,803)	(18,299)	(1,905)
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward	148,266	209,997	358,264	360,169
Total funds carried forward	238,770	101,194	339,964	358,264



Photography

The photographs used in this report are from United Impact's photography project, PhotoVoice, which documents the impact of having no recourse to public funds on everyday life.

Thank you to United Impact for letting us reproduce their photographs here.

Thank you

With particular thanks to

- James Costerton for managing our website
- Kate Osamor MP for chairing the All-Party Parliamentary Group on NRPF
- The individuals and funders who have donated and supported Project 17

Linda: The little and inexpensive things cannot be purchased by some people, especially by families with NRPF. A lady went to the shop with her two younger children to buy a small bowl of peppers for just a pound, so she could make a meal for her children. She searched through her small bag countless times but couldn't find enough coins to pay, so she had to leave. A fellow customer had to pay for her. It's important to emphasise that families don't always find good samaritans in times of need, so would have no choice than to go without with is needed.

Due to the delays in the application process by the Home Office, and the ever increasing cost of living crisis, more families with NRPF are being left hungry and destitute.

