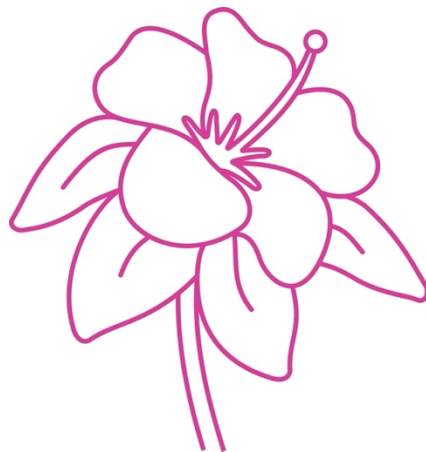


Hibiscus

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 -2023



for social justice

Hibiscus

Published by:
Hibiscus Initiatives
Resource for London
356 Holloway Road
London N7 6PA
United Kingdom

First published 2023

hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk
X: @hibiscuscharity
Instagram: hibiscuscharity

This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee or prior permission for teaching purposes, but not for resale. For copying in any other circumstances, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher, and a fee may be payable.

Editors: Mufeedah Bustin, Esther Oke
Flower design: RVLV (Revolve)

for social justice

CONTENTS

WHO WE ARE	3
HIBISCUS BACKGROUND	4
MESSAGE FROM CEO & CHAIRS	5
OUR STRATEGY 2023 – 2028	8
SERVICES AND SUPPORT	9
OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS	17
ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS	18
INTERNATIONAL TRIP TO GHANA	19
APPRECIATING OUR FUNDERS	20

WHO WE ARE

Hibiscus Initiatives is a UK registered charity, empowering and championing the rights of foreign national and black, minority ethnic and refugee women and families at the intersection of the immigration and criminal justice systems.

Our work falls into four broad areas:

- Advocacy, information, assistance and mentoring in prisons and on release.
- Assistance and support on returns and reintegration to home countries
- Assistance with community resettlement and reintegration in the UK
- Identification and support to victims of human trafficking

Purpose Statement

Hibiscus enables marginalised migrant women trapped in the immigration and criminal justice systems to rebuild their lives.

Our Mission is to:

- Provide advocacy, support and specialist services to marginalised, vulnerable foreign antional and BMER women and men
- Enable informed choices
- Promote social justice and respect
- Reduce inequalities

Our vision is to build a fair and just society where inequalities are eliminated from the criminal justice and immigration systems.

Our values

INTEGRITY	To be pro-active in our intentions, for our work and actions to reflect the values we hold as an organisation.
RESPECT	To respect our colleagues, stakeholders, and the women and families we support. Even when we disagree, to see each other as full human beings, with struggles and dreams.
LEARNING AND INNOVATION	To be curious. To invest in our staff to develop and grow. To find new and innovative ways of supporting migrant women to rebuild their lives. To reflect honestly when things haven't gone well.
INCLUSIVE	To center those with lived experience throughout what we do. Being an ally, co-producing services, research and articles. To be inclusive in a meaningful way, to support our clients to be part of Hibiscus as employees and trustees.

HIBISCUS BACKGROUND

Hibiscus Initiatives was founded by Olga Heaven MBE, a woman who began her work as a volunteer in Holloway Prison, where she observed a high number of black, minoritised women. Olga discovered that many of these women were victims of exploitation or drug smuggling and that there was inadequate support they could access in prison.

Olga developed networks across Nigeria and Jamaica with the purpose of prevention: to spread awareness of the severity of the dangers experienced by women exploited in the drug trade. This had a huge impact in reducing the number of women being exploited to transport drugs to the UK.

Today, Hibiscus has expanded to support women across the Criminal Justice System, within the community, in courts, on probation and in prison. We also support women (and men) in Immigration Removal Centres across the UK.

OUR TRUSTEES

Annette So (Co-Chair), Rosalyn Akar-Grams (Co-Chair), Michael Greenwood (Treasurer), Anne Langton, Anne Stephen, Klara Skrivankova, Louise Swan, Roz Morisson, and Sara Khan.

With thanks to Rachel Youngman who stepped down in 2023.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Kate Shurety – Interim CEO Oct 2022 -2023
Baljit Banga – CEO (joined October 2023)
Mufeedah Bustin – Director of Operations
Hazel Alcraft – Head of Community & Prisons
Seika Aziz – Head of International Resettlement & Support
Ghadah Anasseri – Head of Policy & Public Affairs

With thanks to Marchu Belete and Waseem Saghir who left Hibiscus in 2023.

HIBISCUS STAFF TEAM (as at October 2023)

Amy, Andrea, Anna, Boryana, Elena, Esther, Faith, Fatima, Fernanda, Fleur, Indigo, Izabella, Jo, Julie, Katy, Kanika, Kerry, Lashan, Liezel, Michaela, Mina, Monica, Olivia, Priscille, Priya, Rakie, Ritika, Ruby, Silvia, Simona, Valbona.

MESSAGE FROM KATE SHURETY, INTERIM CEO



I have been at Hibiscus as Interim CEO since October 2022, arriving mid-year to pick up from Marchu Belete. Her vision and ambition for the organisation was clear and strong and our 5-year strategy is testimony to that.

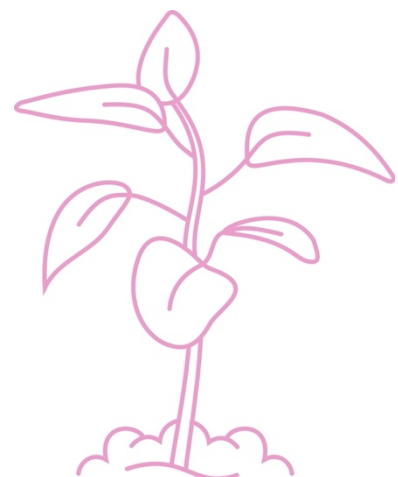
Our work through the past year has been split in two distinct phases. First, the period from April to October where under Marchu's leadership, the organisation dug into its roots and looked to its future, forging a new strategy with women at the centre of everything Hibiscus does. The second half of the year has been marked with consolidating our strategic plans and enabling our teams and people to move forward on that new path.

One of the things that has most struck me about Hibiscus, is the incredible agility and resilience of our teams and the women we work with. In a world with so many structural and systemic obstacles to navigate, we must be flexible, looking for new and innovative ways to support and work with women facing the very hardest circumstances the UK immigration and criminal justice systems can deliver.

Some highlights of the past 12 months have been:

- Our work with other criminal justice organisations through our Double Disadvantage partnership shone a light on the systemic discrimination experienced by Black, minoritised and migrant women and culminated in a Westminster Hall debate.
- The redevelopment of our community service coproduced with women and with growing links to a local community garden.
- Work centring the voices and experiences of women we work with through the creation of award-winning film, *The Women Inside*, and opportunities to speak directly with policy makers and the media.
- An enriched learning and development framework which has brought the team together regularly for shared and considered learning
- A growing team – in our Policy and Public Affairs, and Community and Prisons teams – meaning we can do more work, and support women in a broader range of contexts..

Fundamental to all of this and everything we do are the women we work with. We will continue to foster stronger links and opportunities with, and for, them as the organisation continues to deliver on its strategic ambition.





Annette So



Rosalyn Akar Grams

MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS

One of the great privileges of being a Trustee of Hibiscus is just how unique it is. Hibiscus is the only organisation in the UK that is focussed on working with migrant women trapped in both the immigration and criminal justice systems.

Our work has become much more challenging, as throughout this year we have seen the development and then the passage of the Illegal Migration Bill through Parliament. Many of the women we work with have already been subject to criminalisation for their experience of trafficking, of domestic violence and coercion, and now migration itself is becoming increasingly criminalised.

The expansion of both prison and detention estates continues to be a major concern for Hibiscus. However, it has been encouraging to see new areas of work for Hibiscus, for example, providing support services in courts in London, which hopefully will make an impact on reducing the likelihood of custodial sentences for migrant women.

Our new work on housing will also start to tackle the most fundamental issue that many women face- a lack of affordable and accessible accommodation. This piece of work both delivers advice and support for women and looks to influence policy too -an approach we are keen to see across the many areas we deliver on.

Finally, we have recently taken on, as an interim basis, as Co-Chairs following the departure of our former Chair Rachel Youngman. It has been an honour to step into her shoes to hold fort. This introduction would be remiss without formal and heartfelt thanks to her for her leadership over the past eight years – as both Chair, Trustee, and colleague. The organisation has gone from strength to strength with her steadfast support and dedicated guidance.



Hibiscus

OUR NEW CEO

Hibiscus is pleased to announce the appointment of Baljit Banga as the Chief Executive Officer.

Baljit Banga was most recently Executive Director at Imkaan, a UK-based, umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritised women and girls. Prior to Imkaan, Baljit served as director of London Black Women's Project for thirteen years. She is now preparing a PhD for submission to the University of Bath and joined the Hibiscus team in October.



OUR STRATEGY FOR 2023 -2028

Hibiscus has developed four key strategies which reflect how we work at a glance.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: We will continue to work directly with marginalised migrant women at every point in the criminal justice and immigration systems, to provide emotional and practical support and to enable them to influence change.

PRACTICE: We will work with institutions within the criminal justice and immigration systems as well as with stakeholders and other NGO partners, to help improve understanding, service provision and support to create fairer practices.

POLICIES: We will work collaboratively with other organisations to campaign for policy change. Hibiscus will provide evidence and the voice of migrant women themselves to influence policy and practice.

PUBLIC OPINION: We will provide communication platforms for migrant women with lived experience of the criminal justice and immigration systems to be heard in the media. We will work to ensure honest, accurate, representative coverage in the media about the experiences of migrant women.



SERVICES AND SUPPORT

In 2022/2023 Hibiscus supported 1651 clients. Our project workers provide practical and emotional support tailored to individual needs including housing, family, immigration, mental health, domestic violence, and trafficking. We adopt a cultural mediation approach to help overcome language and cultural barriers and facilitate mutual understanding between migrant women and the systems/professionals they interact with to access and exercise their rights.

We work with marginalised women at every point in the criminal justice and immigration systems to provide emotional and practical support and to enable them to influence change. We work with institutions, stakeholders and NGOs within the criminal justice and immigration systems to help improve understanding, service provision and support to create fairer practices.

We work collaboratively with other organisations to campaign for policy change, providing the evidence and voice of migrant women to influence policy and practice.

We provide platforms for migrant women with lived experience of the criminal justice and immigration systems to be heard.

INTERNATIONAL RESETTLEMENT & DETENTION SERVICES TEAM

The two main areas of work of this team are international resettlement and welfare support. We are represented in Yarl's Wood, Heathrow, Derwentside and the PDA at Gatwick. Our colleagues at the International Removal Centres (IRCs) offer independent and impartial advice to our clients so they can make informed decisions about their cases. We help residents with making applications such as the Voluntary Returns Scheme or gathering documentation for solicitors when they want to challenge decisions on their cases. We also offer returns counselling and work with our clients to assess their needs so when they return home, they can do so successfully and reintegrate into their communities in a sustainable and dignified manner. Hibiscus also offers financial support to clients who would like to open their own businesses in the countries of return.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

The adverse and hostile policy environment presents many obstacles for migrant women to access the support they need including access to appropriate legal advice, health services and housing support. For Hibiscus, we currently have more clients coming to us for support than we had in the previous years.

CASE STUDY: “CARA*”, SUPPORTED AT HEATHROW IRC

Cara is a gay woman from Kenya, where homosexuality is illegal and is punishable by 21 years in prison. Cara expressed fear of death, as homosexuals are attacked and murdered in the street, and as such, Cara has hidden her sexual orientation from her family and community in Kenya. However, questions have been asked and rumours are spreading within her community.

Cara sought support from an LGBT organisation in Kenya and they assisted her in getting a visa to come to the UK. This visa stated that Cara was married. Cara was stopped by Border Force on arrival in the UK, and detained when she did not know answers to questions about her ‘husband’ as stated on the visa. Cara was a very timid woman and was scared to be detained.

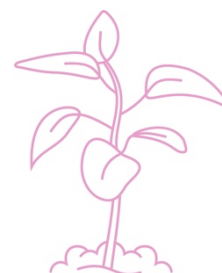
Hibiscus approached Cara in Sahara Unit and offered support. During the initial assessment, Cara disclosed her sexuality, and the depression and shame she has suffered for many years. She expressed fear of detention, and the risk to her life if she is returned to Kenya. Cara said she has never been diagnosed with mental health but has been suicidal in the past. Hibiscus referred Cara for a mental health assessment and informed officers of past suicidal thoughts and ongoing depression so they are aware.

Hibiscus discussed mental health support going forward, outside of detention, and encouraged Cara to consider counselling for her trauma and provided information about medication options for depression and anxiety. Hibiscus also supported Cara with her application for asylum, including explaining the process, providing key contact information and support with letter writing. With her consent, Hibiscus referred Cara to Rainbow Migration (a partner charity working with LGBTQIA+ migrants).

On release from detention, Hibiscus referred Cara to a local refugee support agency where she has been attending their centre and is receiving 1-2-1 support, including medical and mental health support. Hibiscus has made numerous referrals to legal aid immigration firms: due to high caseloads many solicitors do not have capacity and Cara is on a waiting list for representation.

Cara is still in contact with Hibiscus via email and has expressed gratitude for the support and care given. She is living in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation and engaging with local LGBT support.

* Name and country have been changed to protect identity.



CASE STUDY: “Mary”

Mary came to the UK when she turned 18. She was sold a dream by a man who later trafficked her into the United Kingdom. It was an abusive relationship, she depended on him for everything, after five years he abandoned and left her in a vulnerable state.

Mary was arrested by the police and detained at Yarl’s Wood because she did not have immigration status. Seven years later, Mary was detained a second time at Yarl’s Wood. After being released this time, she got into a roller coaster of destitution and abusive relationships. Having no recourse to public funds, she could not support herself, nor get a job or access to housing. Miss M resorted to rough sleeping in buses and anywhere outside.

This lifestyle had a huge impact on her mental health. She was tired and exhausted, and her health also suffered, finally Mary was able to see a doctor who prescribed her medication and signposted to some charities for support, including Hibiscus.

Mary came to Hibiscus five years ago, was given a caseworker who started looking into her immigration application. Over time, Mary started to engage in activities within the Hibiscus women centre and began interacting with other women in the who shared similar stories. Mary was reluctant to share her story as she was now in another abusive relationship and feared the consequences if the police were to get involved, as she still had no immigration status and was determined to stay with him despite his abusiveness.

Mary’s life changed at the beginning of the pandemic when her Project Worker at Hibiscus was able to secure her a hostel accommodation, this would be the first time in Mary’s life to have a room to herself, a space to recover from her trauma. Mary has been recognised as a victim of trafficking and an application made to the Home Office for this claim. Mary has been recently granted leave to remain in the UK.

* Name and country have been changed to protect identity.



PRISONS

Hibiscus is unique in providing dedicated specialist support to migrant women in prison, helping them overcome the double disadvantage faced by minoritised women in the criminal justice system. During 2022-23 we worked with nearly 200 migrant women in HMPs Bronzefield, Downview and Peterborough. 94 women attended Hibiscus group activities, 193 women received individual casework (including 124 new referrals), and 84 received direct financial or in-kind support.

CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Recent changes in legislation and government policy continue to drive the disproportionate criminalisation of migrant women, which is reflected in the growing numbers of migrant women held in prison on remand, sentenced, or detained under immigration powers. Additionally, the small size of our prisons team has meant we are often unable to meet the level of demand for our services and have had to reduce the frequency of visits to some prisons from weekly to monthly at periods during the year. Although we are also able to provide support over the phone, this is more limited and we know that some women have had to wait many weeks to see us, missing out on vital support.

One noticeable challenge this year has been prisons cancelling our planned group activities at very late notice, due to changes in the prison regime, security, or lack of officers to facilitate women's attendance. Despite this we were able to run 7 group activities through the year, including events for International Women's Day, Christmas, Eid and Refugee Week; and an information workshop with an immigration solicitor on extradition proceedings, which received especially positive feedback.

In Jan-Feb 2023 we carried out an internal evaluation to gather feedback from women supported in prison, consisting of 3 focus groups with women in HMP Peterborough and a client survey to women supported in prison during the last 12 months. Our key findings are as follows:

- Women strongly valued the support Hibiscus provides, with 90% agreeing Hibiscus support was helpful, and 94% reporting at least one positive outcome
- Waiting times are a concern for some, with 15% of women mentioning the length of wait to be been or wanting to see us more often
- Women would like to see more information about Hibiscus and promotion within the prisons to make sure others know about the support we provide, for example running specific groups for new arrivals

CASE STUDY: “ZARA*”, SUPPORTED IN PRISON

Zara has been a client with Hibiscus since 2016. Hibiscus initially supported Zara with her criminal case: as she wanted to appeal against her sentence and conviction. WE referred her to and liaised with criminal solicitors. We also provide emotional and practical support and Zara engages with the groups organised by Hibiscus.

After years of being supported by Hibiscus in prison, this year Zara felt safe and ready to disclose how she came to the UK. Zara was born in Sri Lanka. Her aunt, who was a single mother with 5 children, was living in the UK and wanted Zara to come to help her. When Zara was 12 years old, she was forced to marry her aunt’s son (Zara’s cousin) who was an adult. A passport and a spouse visa were arranged. Although only 12 years old, her name and date of birth were changed to present her as an adult.

Zara came to the UK after the marriage and became a slave: she needed to look after the kids and do the housework. She was not allowed to go to school and she needed to wear clothes that made her look older. She would be beaten up by her aunt and her husband, and was also sexually abused by him. Her passport was controlled by her husband who always reminded her that he “bought” her from her family, and he could do whatever he wanted.

After hearing Zara’s story and identifying indicators of human trafficking, Hibiscus’ Project Worker, with Zara’s consent, referred her to the First Responders and entered the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. Hibiscus provided support throughout the process and accompanied Zara in the interviews for the investigation of her case with the police.

Zara was recognised as a victim of human trafficking.

Now Zara does not want anything that links her with her traffickers due to the trauma suffered. She wants to legally change her name and date of birth to her identity and, because this is a complex process, Hibiscus was able to secure legal advice and representation to assist Zara with this matter. We have also provided her with phone credit so she is able to keep in contact with her solicitor and assisted her in obtaining copies of original documents.

* Name and country have been changed to protect identity.



WOMEN'S CENTRE

Over the year, our regular activity programs have offered practical and wellbeing support, and empowerment and agency opportunities to women in our community. The practical support programme consisted of ESOL and literacy classes, IT skills training, legal advice clinics, information workshops and coaching. Wellbeing activities included yoga, singing, sewing, art therapy, counselling, and celebration events such as the Christmas party (see below). Through these programs, we have helped women overcome practical challenges, recover from trauma, and build the confidence and capacity to engage in the empowerment and agency programme.

A key focus this year has been to build and expand our Empowerment & Agency workstream, with a total of 33 women taking part in various aspects of the program this year. We have supported women to participate in workshops at Parliament, meet with an MP, and inform our policy work and priorities through focus groups. Additionally, women have been able to share their stories in the media or through creative expression. We believe that by providing these opportunities, we are making a real difference in the lives of the women we serve and helping them to achieve their goals.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROJECTS

Alongside our community services, we continue to deliver a number of specialist services to women at different stages in the criminal justice system:

Diversion project aimed to divert migrant women into support services at the point of arrest. Women could be referred voluntarily while in police custody, or as part of a conditional caution. Hibiscus' direct involvement in this project ended in September 2022, but women can still be referred to us through this route.

Wraparound project offers long-term support for up to 12 months to women on probation – either serving a community sentence, on release from prison, or who have had recent contact with the criminal justice system. Hibiscus is the specialist partner on the project for migrant women and accepts referrals from across Greater London. Women still in need of support at the end of their time in the Wraparound service can be referred into our general community services for ongoing support.

Advance regional advisory service provides advice to Advance keyworkers from 5 probation regions outside London when they are working with migrant women, helping them to better understand migrant women's situations and needs, and connect them with appropriate support.

CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Successive hostile changes to legislation and policies affecting migrant women, combined with the cost-of-living crisis, growing backlogs in the immigration and court systems, cuts to legal aid (and resulting loss of legal aid solicitors), have all had a significant impact and increased demand for our community services. As well as adjusting staff caseloads to accommodate the higher needs of clients, we continue to focus on empowering women to become more confident and able to manage their own situations, especially when facing long waits for the outcome of immigration decisions.

Staff changes and recruitment have also been a significant challenge especially for the Women's Centre, one we see reflected across the sector. We have successfully recruited a new Community and Women's Centre Manager and added new posts for Housing Specialist and Through-the-gate project workers to strengthen the team and provide increased resilience.

Project highlight: The Women Inside

In summer of 2022 we embarked on "The Women Inside", a collaborative project with Blank Cheque and International Film Trust to write and produce a short film. The aim of the film was to depict the experiences of women who have been supported by Hibiscus, with the goal of giving a voice to those who have been impacted by the criminal justice system, detention, and marginalisation by society. The women worked with playwright Suhayla El-Bushra to create an original script featuring characters based on their own lived experiences, which was then filmed with professional actors and an all-female film crew from International Film Trust.

The film premiered at Hibiscus "My Voice, My Story" conference in October 2022 and has now been shared with audiences across the country through a range of screenings and film festivals, many during Refugee Week 2023. We are delighted to share that the film won the "Jury's Choice" award at London Independent Film Festival in March.

"The film stands as a voice to the voiceless in the community and gives awareness to those in authority to know what migrants like us are going through in society."

Hibiscus client and film co-writer

POLICY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The new legislation on migration (The Illegal Migration Act) which has recently been passed by the Government is extreme and has posed a major challenge for our clients who are asylum seekers. This has been, and continues to be, a key area of focus for the team, to ensure that the women we work with have the opportunity to share their lived experience to inform and apply pressure to the political parties to adopt this as a major campaign issue.

In the last year, the team has continued to make an impact in the services that we provide for our clients. We host a regular Intersectional Feminism Group at the Women's centre, focusing on mental health, Black feminism, wellbeing, education, employment, and women's rights.

We also researched and published a number of reports, campaigns, statements and articles. The policy team responded to two calls for evidence from the Government with data and evidence from Hibiscus' work. One on the Human Rights of asylum seekers in the UK, and the second on the intersection of protected characteristics.

Cultural Mediation

Cultural mediation is an approach to establish mutual understanding between people from different cultures, in order to improve outcomes for Black, minoritised and migrant women. Our work on cultural mediation has had a significant impact on how we operate at Hibiscus and has extended to other organisations working in the CJS through the delivery of training sessions. We train women with lived experience to become cultural mediators and will be looking to increase the reach of this over the next few years.

Anti-Trafficking

The Anti-trafficking Steering Group (ATSG) was set-up in order to ensure that the different departments at Hibiscus work together and coordinate their response against Human Trafficking. The ATSG has updated their training for new Hibiscus staff and externally led training which serves as an introduction and reference for working with clients who have experiences of trafficking. Through Hibiscus' partnership with IOM to conduct research on the experiences of survivors of trafficking in the Criminal Justice System, the Policy Team has produced a six-episode podcast with clients to tell their stories and create their own narrative, contributing to the conversation around experiences of the NRM. The podcast was launched in Spring 2023, following the collation of women's experiences and stories.

Double Disadvantage action plan

Our work on "Double Disadvantage" in the criminal justice system has been funded by Barrow Cadbury Trust and Lloyds Banking Foundation. Over two years, we have worked with our partners (Muslim Women in Prison, Zahed Mubarek Trust, Criminal Justice Alliance, Agenda Alliance and Women in Prison) to produce a 10-point action plan which has been updated on progress after 12 months. We recently undertook a strategy day with partners to consider next steps and participated in a Westminster debate on the inequalities faced by Black, Asian, minoritized and migrant women in contact with the criminal justice systems.

Heritage Project

Our Heritage Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, focuses on the history of Hibiscus and the experience of Black and migrant women in the UK over the past 35 years. The project has supported our clients with training in order to share their lived experience and run activities and workshops to encourage others to share their experiences too. Drawing on our own archives, the project also includes a reflection of the work of Hibiscus over 35 years and how the criminal justice system has changed with Hibiscus' influence.

OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

Number of clients supported	1663
Number of clients with trafficking concerns across the organisation	201 (12%)
Number of clients that required language needs.	193
Number of activities and workshops	284

Nationality of clients	[%]
Brazil	23%
Albania	11%
India	7%
Romania	7%
Nigeria	6%
Poland	4%
Vietnam	4%
Other Nationalities	40%

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

(subject to audit)

INCOME	£ 1,730,000
EXPENDITURE	£ 1,600,000
RESERVES	£ 860,000

Hibiscus

ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS



Hibiscus

INTERNATIONAL TRIP TO GHANA

This year, the international resettlement team took a trip to Ghana. The fundamental purpose of these trips is to enable us to identify the push and pull factors around migration in returning countries. It is also an opportunity to hear first-hand the living conditions in the countries of return, meet former clients to hear about their returning experiences and know the obstacles they have faced since their return. Our team also use the opportunity to meet overseas organisations that can offer support to our clients returning in the future, therefore, creating a big network of trusted partners and organisations around the world. The report gathered from these trips informs us on the best ways to support our client.



Hibiscus

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS



In addition to the above, we have also worked with Serco, Mitie and the Home Office, as part of our work with migrants detained in Immigration Removal Centres.