

Knowledge is **Power**

*A peer-led evaluation of the
'Our Rights, Our Communities'
advocacy project*



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Summary

► What is the report about?

This report describes our evaluation of the 'Our Rights, Our Communities' project, which we evaluated through peer-led research.

'Our Rights, Our Communities' is a partnership project involving community organisations Unity Sisters and Milk Café, and Southside-based anchor organisation Govanhill Baths Community Trust: Community Action.

The aim of the project has been to build a *unique model of community-based advocacy*, replicable within Scottish refugee communities.

► What did we do?

We are a group of asylum seeker, refugee and migrant ('New Scots') women who received basic training, guidance and mentoring on research methods and analysis from a professional researcher at Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

We interviewed all 16 women who took part in the advocacy training that was provided to New Scots women as part of the 'Our Rights, Our Communities' project.

We talked to them before and after they took part in the training and asked them how confident they were, what they thought of the training and what they wanted to do next.

► What did the women tell us?

Most of the women we interviewed had confidence, which they developed through positive life experiences, gaining useful knowledge and being more integrated into their communities. They were less confident when being judged by others, which left them feeling vulnerable.

The women felt they needed more knowledge on women's rights and how systems work in Scotland. They said they needed to better understand how to present themselves in front of officials, including school staff, doctors, lawyers, and the Home Office.

Through the advocacy training, the women learned what advocacy is and can achieve. They now know how to protect others and themselves with all the tools they were given and know when to say no and set boundaries.

► What will we do next?

We are using what we learned through this project to develop an advocacy network for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people living in Glasgow - the 'Community Peer Advocacy project'.

Background

► What is the ‘Our Rights, Our Communities’ project?

‘Our Rights, Our Communities’ is a partnership project involving community organisations Unity Sisters and Milk Café, and Southside-based anchor organisation Govanhill Baths Community Trust: Community Action.

The aim of the project has been to build a unique model of community-based advocacy, replicable within Scottish refugee communities. We created a programme of activities that engaged with around 200 refugee and asylum-seeking women through around 600 encounters over the project.

Starting in late 2021 and finishing in late 2022, we delivered a range of culturally appropriate and effective events, workshops and training sessions, based on tailored human rights awareness and advocacy discussion and training. Activities included confidence building workshops, storytelling, filmmaking and other visual arts, upcycling craft skills, crochet, first aid, pottery sessions and ESOL classes.

Through this programme, New Scots women were able to:

- develop understanding of contextualised human rights
- access tailored advocacy and signposting
- develop confidence and skills to engage and fully participate in decision-making networks to effectively voice their concerns, needs and aspirations
- create solid support networks
- develop employability skills
- participate in several festivals and events around the city, e.g. COP26

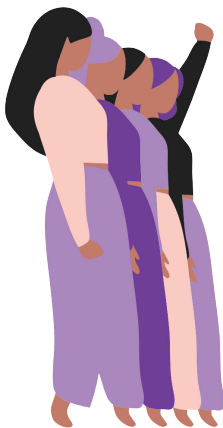
As part of this project, we commissioned The Advocacy Project Glasgow to deliver training to 11 women from Milk Café and eight women from Unity Sisters. The training provided an introduction to basic independent advocacy skills. This allowed the women to learn about systems, set boundaries, work with clients and all the institutions that might support women and signposting, as well as negotiating with clients.

The training ran over eight sessions – two online (due to COVID restrictions) followed by six in person. The sessions began in May 2022 and finished in August 2022, with a break for school summer holidays in between. A total of 14 women completed the full course of training.

We ran this training so that we would be able to support women to navigate the issues they are facing, for example, housing issues, health issues, issues with schools, public transport and discrimination. The women who completed this training have been supporting 80 women at the women's group at Milk Café, and 82 women who are part of Unity Sisters.

As a group of six peer researchers, we decided to evaluate this process for our own learning and to inform a range of audiences about our experiences. We want the Scottish Government, those who fund community action and our wider community members to read and understand our experiences through this report.

▶ Who are we?



Unity Sisters is a group of over 80 women and their children going through the asylum and immigration system, who have been supporting each other through shared experiences since 2014. Women empower each other against the system and help each other to understand and improve their lives. They work on peer support: supporting each other and talking with people who have been or are experiencing the same things, as well as thinking of practical action to take advice on dealing with the system.

They discuss a wide range of things that affect women's lives. They are based in the Southside of Glasgow. We have fortnightly meetings at Langside Parish Church and an office in Kinning Park Complex where some activity workshops are run. This is a small, self-organised constituted support group.

Milk Café is a social enterprise set up to empower and support New Scots women living in Glasgow. Milk runs in a small café in the Southside of the city where they provide a safe and welcoming environment that promotes integration within the community. The café is a multifunctional space in which people can enjoy high-quality affordable food, while simultaneously hosting a number of other supportive and inclusive activities.

Milk Café was created as a safe and welcoming place where women can come together, meet new friends, share ideas and learn from each other. Everyone who has been involved in the café has changed it in some small way, whether it's adding to the menu, nurturing the plants or giving their time and expertise. The café offers continuing friendship to the community, and support to the women who are trying to build a life in their new home.

They also offer a variety of free classes and workshops, including ESOL, IT and mental health, open to all women in the community (and sometimes, where appropriate, men and children too). They also offer the space to other groups and individuals who share the same values, and we are always delighted to work with new partners on new and exciting ideas.

Govanhill Baths is a grassroots activist-based organisation in the heart of Govanhill delivering wide ranging health, wellbeing, arts, environmental and heritage projects. Community Action is one of Govanhill Baths Community Trust's projects. As an anchor organisation it works in solidarity to challenge attitudes and systems, supporting community initiative to make the maximum difference. The Trust organised the funding for this project, which is part-funded through the European Union Asylum Migration Integration Fund and by the New Scots Refugee Integration Delivery Project Fund (Scottish Government, COSLA and the UNESCO Chair at the University of Glasgow).

Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) is a public health organisation funded by the Scottish Government to generate insights and evidence and support new approaches to improve health and tackle inequality. GCPH have been supporting Unity Sisters and Milk Café to carry out this research as a peer research project, by providing mentoring, guidance, and publication support.



Methodology

▶ Peer research

Peer research is a participatory research method in which people with lived experience of the issues being studied take part in directing and conducting the research. From peer researchers' point of view, peer research is when people with lived experience take the initiative to do research with the support of a person or organisations they choose themselves. The aim is to solve issues they face.

Like other participatory methods, peer research recognises that individuals within any community being researched are themselves competent agents, capable of participating in research on a variety of levels, including as researchers.

In this case, people with lived experience are New Scots women, and the issue is that their voices aren't heard by decision-makers in Scotland. Glasgow Centre for Population Health is supporting and guiding a team of 'Our Rights' researchers in this peer research project.

▶ Methods

The peer research team interviewed all the women taking part in the Advocacy Training before and after the training. We wanted to find out how their confidence changed, if they were willing to advocate for other women, and if they were interested in taking part in further development or training.

We decided to do individual interviews because, in a group setting, people might follow other's opinions and not express themselves by saying what they have in their heart or might not be able to explain why they are struggling. So, we decided on one-to-one interviews to allow women to express themselves. We did consider doing both focus groups and interviews, but we wanted the women's personal views.

All interviews took around 15 to 30 minutes with permission from the interviewee to be recorded with a voice recorder for analysis reasons. The women interviewed felt very safe to be recorded, because we were frequently meeting them in the weekly activities of the project, and also during the training. From these regular meetings, friendship and trust have emerged between the participants and the interviewers that allows them to express intimate aspects of their personal lives with a certain freedom.

The first interviews took place during February 2022, when we interviewed 16 New Scots women who resided in Glasgow. At Milk Café, the interviews were carried out with the volunteers who had attended the group's activities on Wednesdays, and those who had attended the computer classes on Tuesdays. The interviews were done during the weekly activities, choosing a quiet place away from the group, in such a way that there were no interruptions or disturbing noises in the environment. At Unity Sisters, we did a mixture of

online and in-person interviews, to suit the participant. When we interviewed in person, it was in a safe space and private place.

We interviewed a very diverse group of women, which helped us to better understand the huge impact the women's surroundings have on their confidence. Most of our questions were regarding their confidence and how we could help them improve that. The data gathered in these interviews will help inform us how to help women increase their confidence.

Women of different nationalities, different ways of thinking, religion and customs were interviewed. All very simple women in their way of being, with different life experiences. Most of them agree on how the environment has affected their particular situation, some have grown up learning from personal experiences, and others have isolated themselves, depending on how circumstances have affected them. Most women have a lack of confidence because English is not their first language, and they have the hope and desire to improve it and thus be able to function better in their new country.

The questionnaire used for the interviews before the training:

1. How much confidence do you have in yourself and why?
2. How much confidence do you have to support other women?
3. How much confidence do you have in challenging those in power?
4. Where and when do you feel most confident and why?
5. How much confidence do you have in attending training and development?
6. What training and development will help?

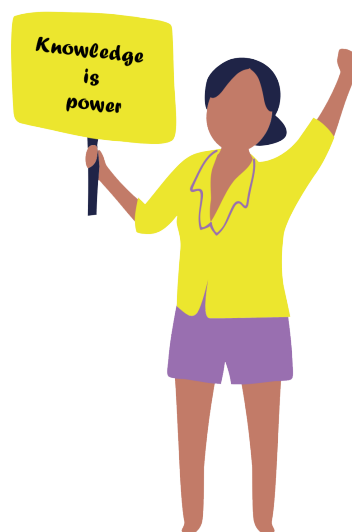
The questionnaire used for the interviews after the training:

1. What did you think of the training?
2. How have you changed since you started the training?
3. Has your confidence improved (and with what)?
4. What were the benefits of the training for you?
5. What would you change or improve about the training?
6. How do you want to use what you learned in the training in future?
7. What are your suggestions for new training in the future?
8. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

The peer researchers from Milk Café, Unity Sisters and Glasgow Centre for Population Health worked as a team to analyse all interviews. The team wrote their interviews into transcripts for analysis. As a team of six peer researchers, one researcher from GCPH and one research intern from Govanhill Baths, we grouped what interviewees said into different themes:

- ▶ What affects confidence?
- ▶ Do you have confidence...
 - ... supporting other women?
 - ... in training and development?
 - ... challenging those in power?
- ▶ What will boost confidence?
- ▶ What training and development will help?
- ▶ What did you think of the peer advocacy training?
- ▶ How have you changed since the training started?
- ▶ What would you change or improve about the training?
- ▶ What are your suggestions for new training in the future?

We then looked at the common points across all of these areas, to come up with the report's findings.



They are also happy to create a positive impact on other women. Some women are grateful for beautiful sunny days, when they smile at strangers and they smile back, most of the women are grateful to be in the UK with their family and children so they can have a safer and brighter future. Some women are grateful to be confident and to have strength. Some are grateful for what they've achieved in life and the privilege they have to be here.

► What affects confidence?

Women gain confidence through positive life experiences, gaining useful knowledge and being more integrated into their communities. Women being surrounded by people they trust and love plays an important role in their confidence development.

"I have confidence in myself. I don't accept defeat."

However, we have also learned that women are less confident when being judged by others, which leaves them feeling vulnerable. We are taught that, in some cultures, men and women still aren't fully equal, which leads women to see their confidence decrease uncontrollably around men. This limits their ability to express themselves.

Most women also have a fear of judgement when with people they're unfamiliar with, this could be an issue with how they view themselves as they would constantly feel the need to please others, which implies that their self-confidence is low. Some of our women have informed us that they feel more confident when they're spending quality time alone, meanwhile some of them are more confident with people they know. This lack of confidence can mean they are lonely and this, in turn, makes them less confident.

When support is no longer provided, women slowly lose their confidence as they tend to feel lonely and forget their worth. The minimum information and support can have a massive impact on other women: allowing them to express themselves and giving them the opportunity to feel valued is extremely important when it comes to boosting their confidence.

Communication is key in every aspect of life, finding it difficult to communicate can massively decrease women's self-esteem, especially when there is a language barrier. Not being able to express your thoughts and feelings as a result of language difficulties makes it easier for others to take away your rights and for you to misunderstand them. Struggling to be in charge and speak your thoughts shouldn't be a difficulty, especially when it comes to presenting yourself as a woman in our community.



► Do you have confidence...

...supporting other women?

Some women feel more confident than others in their ability to support each other and other women. The women we interviewed described feeling comfortable seeking support from people who share the same culture or ethnic background. A lot of women may not have the specialist knowledge, yet they recognise the value of offering support. A majority of women spoke about having a strong desire to support and empower their peers, which motivated them and boosted their confidence.

“If you call yourself an advocate, I believe you have to stand up and not to be afraid. You need to speak the truth. It doesn’t matter how much hierarchy they have, you have to push yourself.”

Although confidence was a huge topic in the interviews, the women also expressed the significance of building a relationship with the people they are supporting. A good foundation for this relationship is shared womanhood and ethnicity. Shared language is also very important, because a language barrier can negatively affect one’s confidence to speak up and seek support from the fear of not being understood.

...in training and development?

All women stated that they were eager to attend the training. They also expressed how motivated they were to take part, no matter how challenging they may find it. They appreciated the opportunity to prove themselves:

“We need to know more about the dos and don’ts. We need to know more of how to carry ourselves in certain situations, how to talk to people in certain situations. As you know we are different people with different cultures. So we need to arm ourselves. We need to be knowledgeable. Knowledge is power. If we know more, we can be better.”

The majority of women were excited to learn and equip themselves with new skills.

...challenging those in power?

Women who speak fluent English, have status, and know their rights have high confidence in challenging those in power. However, for the women who are going through the process of getting their status, not sure about the rights they have, and the language barrier stops them from expressing themselves, they find it effortful to challenge those in power and it feels risky.

► What will boost confidence?

Some women build and or boost their confidence through exercise or learning new skills to expand their knowledge, whereas other women stated they need resources and time to boost their confidence. They were keen to equip themselves:

“I am going to succeed. Because I still believe in myself that I can do it. [...] I think believing in yourself gives you confidence.”

They also spoke about how being loved and having happiness can develop their confidence. Some women gain confidence when they are around their family, as the family can push them and encourage them to use that confidence when they are around people outside of their family. This can repair loneliness.

► What training and development will help?

Some issues that are holding women back from moving forward are culture, children, language, the Scottish accent, time and the lack of resources/support. Public speaking is a huge issue and once they are comfortable with that, their confidence will rise.

They need more training to get more knowledge or information about women’s rights and how the systems work in Scotland. The language barrier and the Scottish accent make ordinary obstacles in everyday life very difficult. They need to understand how to present themselves in front of schools, doctors, lawyers, and the Home Office.

► What did you think of the peer advocacy training?

Through the training women learned what advocacy was. They got an understanding of the difference between counselling and advocacy, and how they could use the information provided. The training was educative to the individual and an eye-opener that gave a perspective on how to work in a formal environment. The training was absolutely vital and relevant, and quite interesting and useful. The women learned new laws and legislation, which was important in decision-making. They also learned the importance of signposting, when to do it, how to do it and why it should be done. This will guide women on how to support others the right way and when to draw the line or perhaps put boundaries in place.

► How have you changed since the training started?

All of the women said their confidence improved after the training. The women learned a lot of facts and how advocating is important, and they are even more confident than they were because of the knowledge they acquired. The training gave them more perspective and strength.

From this training, the women now know how to protect others and themselves with all the tools they were given, and know when to say no and when to set boundaries. They also know how to work together as a team, with passion, and pass this knowledge onto others and help other people to support each other in the community.

“I feel community should have a voice. When communities have a voice, we are empowered and there is more power in numbers.”

They can now be an ambassador to support the BAME community and be a voice to the voiceless. This could include creating an advocacy service in their community or in other settings, e.g. working with NGOs.

This training has opened up other avenues or possibilities for the women and has given them a different view in career development, which opens up opportunities for jobs. This training has opened them up to change and adaptation in finding their path in life. They now know so much more and still want to know more for their personal development. In terms of confidentiality, they know when to ask for consent or permission and that this is very important. It is hard to work effectively and efficiently without understanding, so as a peer advocate you need to be competent and confident. These two work hand-in-hand and the more you know your rights, the more you have the ability to speak forth, with comprehension and action.

► **What would you change or improve about the training?**

Overall, the training was good and some felt other organisations could benefit from it to build awareness of advocacy. The women were grateful for the people who provided and organised the training. Some women were keen to have more training materials to take home, including presentations given and background documents. It was felt this would help consolidate learning at home and help trainees remember and renew what they had learned.

“It has to give us the necessary information, the papers, where we can continue reading after the course of a few days and we have to continue informing ourselves with documents, with documents that it is very important, for example, orally you can retain, it can be 50%, but when I go home, I have 15% of what I can keep.”

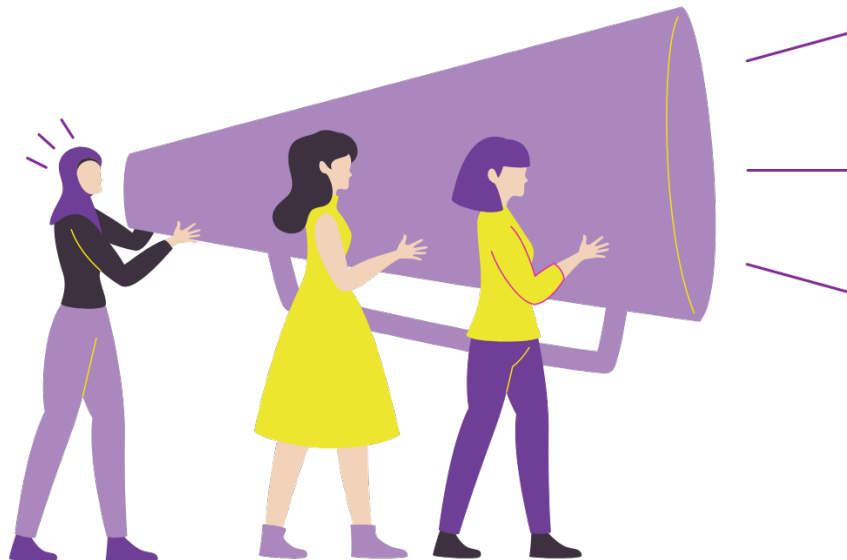
Others would have preferred to have more time in the training sessions (either more sessions or longer sessions) and for there not to have been a gap in the middle of training for school holidays.

► What are your suggestions for new training in the future?

The women would like to have opportunities to practice through role play or real examples to use what they had learned and continue training out in the field and the community. The women felt they would like more training related to other issues, for example housing and landlords, discrimination, and public transport, to expand their knowledge about advocacy on other focus issues.

“For future training I think that help should be emphasised not only in advocacy but also in the integration of people, and also training people on aspects and areas where many migrants can work.”

They would also like continuous training to update their knowledge over time. All of this will require more funding.



Conclusion

New Scots women feel that their voices aren't heard by the decision-makers in Scotland. For this reason, they expressed the need to acquire more knowledge about the women's rights so they can be able to advocate for themselves and support other women through peer advocacy.

The 'Our Rights, Our Communities' project was run in partnership with Unity Sisters, Milk Café and Govanhill Baths Community Trust: Community Action. It had the aim to build a unique model of community-based advocacy replicable with Scottish refugee communities. Through this the New Scots women built their confidence and gained more knowledge about peer advocacy.

The findings of our peer research show that the women in general have confidence, which can be impacted by their surroundings, and know how to work in a team. They want to put into practice what they learned. They are looking for more opportunities, for more training, but the issue is funding.

The New Scots women that were trained in advocacy as part of the 'Our Rights, Our Communities' project have now formed a new project called "Community Peer Advocacy" with the aim to peer support other New Scots in communities. They will focus on one issue, which is rights and inclusion, then signpost people who have other issues to organisations which are able to support them. This project is currently in development.

If there are further opportunities, the team are keen to attend more training to gain further knowledge and to update their skills. They hope the good practice of Community Peer Advocacy will be contagious across all the communities in Scotland.

Our dream is that this work can grow and develop, and be fully funded to cover all of the costs and allow the service to expand to its full potential.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the women who agreed to be interviewed as part of this project.

Thanks also go to the funders of this project and Govanhill Baths Community Trust for organising the funding and the project.

We would like to thank all of the facilitators who gave us training in confidence and advocacy, as well as those who have given us advice.

We would like to thank Milk Café and Unity Sisters for organising the events and activities that framed part of the wider 'Our Rights, Our Communities' project.

Thanks also to Glasgow Centre for Population Health - to Lisa for mentoring and guiding us and to Jennie, Berengere and Hannah for supporting us with creating our outputs.

Finally, thanks go to Lily for supporting us with admin and poster-making.

