

Learning Case Study: Hopscotch Women's Centre

Organisation: Hopscotch Women's Centre

Grant type: Bridging Divides, Positive Transitions

Grant amount: £244,210 over five years from March 2022

Grant purpose: Delivery of a holistic, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed service supporting "easy to ignore" women experiencing or at risk of abuse

Interviewee: Benaifer Bhandari, CEO

Interview date: 17th June 2022

Website: <https://hopscotchuk.org/>

Address: 50-52 Hampstead Road, London, NW1 2PY

BBGM ref: 19066

Funding Manager: Aasha Farah

Summary

Hopscotch Women's Centre is a user-led organisation providing culturally appropriate support for "easy to ignore" women from racialised communities experiencing abuse and/or social exclusion.

CBT funds their outreach work to reach women not served by other abuse services, 1-1 support and group sessions on recognising, responding to and escaping abuse.

The cost of living crisis is putting pressure on service users and the organisation, with staff bearing the brunt of this.

Hopscotch suggests that CBT's application process could be simplified; this and further recommendations are included at the end of this document.

What makes Hopscotch Women's Centre unique?

Hopscotch is a user-led organisation providing culturally appropriate support for "easy to ignore" women from racialised communities experiencing abuse and/or social exclusion. They address the cultural context & barriers women experience, in ways mainstream services don't.

"Our work reaches those who are easy to ignore and face multiple barriers, not just language and socioeconomic barriers, there can be abuse, big immigration issues, loads of barriers that stop women from becoming Londoners and having the rights that the rest of us have."

Staff come from the communities they support, with 12 languages across the team.

They provide holistic support and advocacy using trauma informed approach, including:

- Abuse awareness & support
- Housing & welfare rights advice
- Support to access, and progress in, employment
- Mental health and confidence-building groups

“We work in a trauma informed way, which means when people come to us we don’t demand the whole story, we work at their pace, respectful of what they need to disclose and when. That takes a long time ... the more confidence and rapport is built, the more disclosures there will be and the longer we’ll need to keep working with them.”

The Homecare social enterprise arm offers women routes into employment as professional carers.

“We really elevate people to a place where they have the confidence to advocate for themselves. That journey is very very long.”

What part of Hopscotch’s work does CBT fund?

CBT’s grant funds:

- Outreach work to reach women not served by other abuse services
- 1-1 support and group sessions on recognising, responding to and escaping abuse
- Working with and empowering local charities to address abuse
- Confidence and skills building support to aid women’s independence

“We position ourselves in places where we know there’s very little support, like Tower Hamlets, Brent, Southwark... We engage essential places where women go such as school gates, GP surgeries, pharmacies. We put on events around food, arts & crafts, and show ourselves as a trustworthy space.”

“So-called honour based abuse, FGM, forced marriage ... Statutory bodies don’t have the framework to understand these cultural issues, which are life-threatening, so for them it’s easy to close the file – but it’s because your page [of questions to ask] is irrelevant to this person.”

“We have drop-ins, referrals and peer-led workshops where women from different cultures can learn together about the signs of abuse ... It’s a beautiful thing because women can realise it’s not just their community, they get a deeper understanding together.”

How are current inflationary pressures affecting Hopscotch?

Financial pressures in families increase rates of abuse so the need for Hopscotch services is increasing.

“When families are under financial pressure, sometimes the woman becomes an easy target, and her needs increase, so we’re having to brace ourselves for that ... While

simultaneously wanting to see that increase, because if we know that there is a rise in abuse and yet we don't have a rise in women coming to us, that's even more worrying."

Staff are under financial strain whilst also dealing with the increased demand for services, but raising salaries means dipping into reserves. It is also getting harder to recruit specialist staff.

"Your work is increasing because your service users are suffering financially and you're trying to help them get through this time and you're working longer hours and you're suffering yourself."

"We did an analysis of if we did a 2% hardship bonus in one month [for staff] ... but it came to so much I don't think it would be possible. And that's soul destroying, it really really is ... In an ideal scenario I wish all our funders would contact us and say you should be doing this as a one off hardship payment and here's the money."

How could funders better support Hopscotch?

Hopscotch need funders to invest in work supporting women with complex cases over the longer term and reduce restrictions on grants to allow staff to support women in the most effective way

"We have one [VAWG] project that's only for complex cases and that's really difficult to get funding for, which I think is indicative of funders not wanting to look at the really hard stuff. The work that is most essential is the one that's hardest to keep going."

Funders also need to recognise the importance of funding work towards softer, slower outcomes.

"Funders say we want to see hard outcomes, that they've got an income, but our women are so far away from that, those soft outcomes are really important."

Funders could also help by making it clear from the outset what they will and won't fund. CBT in particular could work to reduce the burden of the application process.

"City Bridge email you every day for tiny nuances on your accounts, we found that quite difficult when everyone was overstretched, the constant 'can you break this down, can you send it in this way.' That was painful. I wish there had been another way around that, it would have been quicker to do a visit with the finance team and just ask the questions there and then."

What can CBT learn from Hopscotch?

Hopscotch demonstrates the importance of culturally appropriate, user-led services; **CBT should continue its work to fund more of these.**

Hopscotch highlights the difficulties of getting funding for complex cases and 'soft' outcomes; **CBT should invest more in the slower, specialist work this requires.**

Hopscotch points out the pressure the cost-of-living crisis is putting on organisations; **CBT could consider providing additional funds to existing grantees to mitigate this.**

Hopscotch suggest how the application process and financial requirements could be done more effectively; **CBT should consider using calls or visits to minimise the burden on applicants.**