

MEETING: 18/03/2016

Ref: 13035

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty

Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

Adv: Julia Mirkin

Base: Islington

Benefit: London-wide

Amount requested: £96,724

Amount recommended: £97,000

The Charity

The Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) is a user-led human rights organisation set up in 1983 to address the needs of Latin American migrant women living in London, who have been displaced by poverty or violence. LAWRS has three main areas of activity: its advice service, for which funding is requested; crisis intervention for those who have experienced domestic violence and an education, training and personal development programme. Through these programmes LAWRS offers information, advice and support on issues relating to welfare benefits, debt, employment, housing and education. It also offers ESOL classes and supports the personal development and wellbeing of the 4,000 women accessing its services each year. The charity seeks to be holistic in its approach, addressing the range of related issues that can contribute to poverty, such as domestic violence, poor English, a lack of skills and limited employability. LAWRS offers on-site Crèche facilities to remove all the barriers facing Women who are trying to change their lives.

The Application

LAWRS requests support for the advice service for Latin American women in London through funding of the Advice Service Coordinator role and project costs, including costs associated with providing a Crèche, workshops, volunteer expenses and staff supervision.

The Recommendation

LAWRS is the only agency in London that offers linguistic, gender and culturally sensitive advice, focused on tackling poverty amongst Latin American women, many of whom live outside of all statutory systems of support. In the last year, LAWRS helped users to secure £1,984,500 worth of in-work benefits; supported 292 women to break free from violence; and enabled 289 families to obtain affordable housing. LAWRS was hailed as an exemplary organisation by the Cabinet Office in 2009 and holds the Advice Quality Standard (renewed in 2014); Investors in People (renewed in 2013); and Investors in Volunteers (currently being renewed).

£97,000 over three years (£31,300; £32,300; £33,400) towards the full-time Coordinator, costs of delivering the Advice programme in London, management and on-costs.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
23/09/2015	Application withdrawn.
17/02/2011	£90,000 over three years (£32,000; £30,000; £28,000) towards a counselling project for Latin American women traumatised by political, sexual and gender violence.
02/11/2006	£85,000 over 3 years (£33,000; £34,000; £18,000) towards the salary and running costs of a homelessness and housing project supporting Latin American older people.

Background and detail of proposal

The 2011 publication, 'No Longer Invisible' (Queen Mary University of London), states that the Latin American community in London is fast growing and exceedingly disadvantaged, being 11 times more likely to earn below the minimum legal wage than the rest of the population. In addition, only 20% of the Latin American population (estimated to be 113,500 in 2008) are receiving any form of state welfare support and only one in five access GP services.

The specific issue facing the Latin American community is not unemployment: 85% of Latin Americans living in London are employed. It is a lack of English and it is high levels of in-work poverty caused by people holding numerous low-paid, part-time jobs, such as cleaning, catering and hospitality. Being employed means that LAWRS beneficiaries are not entitled to free ESOL classes and they are unable to pay for courses independently due to having low incomes. This cycle of having multiple low-paid and part-time jobs traps Latin Americans into a situation in which they are excluded from British culture and from the benefits to which they are entitled.

The proposed project aims to reduce poverty by offering free advice and casework in mother tongue languages on welfare benefits, debt and housing. It also aims to increase financial literacy by disseminating information and delivering workshops for women to develop their capacity to negotiate the system independently. It is estimated that 780 women will access the project each year, 400 of which will access advice on welfare, debt and housing. There will be 384 drop-in advice sessions each year, in addition to 288 advice sessions by appointment.

Financial Information

Forecast income for the current year to 31st March 2016 is £483,252, all of which was confirmed as at 12th February 2016. Budgeted income for 2016/17 is £502,099, of which £442,439 (88%) had been confirmed as at the same date. The organisation's turnover is increasing in response to growing demand for its services.

Audited accounts for 2014/15 show that LAWRS incurred a planned deficit on restricted funds in that year, which relates to restricted income received in advance in 2013/14. The organisation advises that as it has significant funding expertise on its Board, it has fundraised efficiently and kept the cost of generating funds low.

Year end at 31 March	2014/2015 Audited Accounts £	2015/2016 Forecast £	2016/2017 Budget £
Income and Expenditure			
Income	400,297	483,252	502,099
Expenditure	459,419	469,533	519,897
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	30,478	13,026	(17,798)
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	(89,600)	693	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(59,122)	13,719	(17,798)
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	(14.8%)	2.8%	(3.5%)
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	7,703 (1.9%)	5,250 (1.1%)	20,914 (4.2%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Unres free reserves held at Yr End	140,335	153,361	135,563
months' worth of expenditure	3.7	3.9	3.1
Reserves Policy target	114,855	117,383	129,974
Months' worth of expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	25,480	35,978	5,589