

Hope Sarah Taal

The Ujamaa project provides specialist support for refugee and asylum seeking women. They work mainly with women seeking asylum who have suffered trauma and violence, and have complex needs. Mental health tend to medicate stress, and depression but do not address the actual problems people face. Ujamaa offer 1-1 support, listening and giving practical advice and support. They work closely with other women's agencies to try and holistically help people. Most referrals to the service are self-referrals from women that Sarah Taal has contact with through housing advice and refugees services.

The service offers support in a number of different areas; health, housing, benefits, immigration status, etc. and is a service that is entirely led by the primary needs identified by the client. The service is meant to be 2 days a week support work, but it overlaps with housing work and other things Hope Projects are doing. This leads to a capacity issue, and the need for more funding to do more work.

What works well is the partnership working **between refugee agencies across the West Midlands**. They are trying to work better **in partnership** [ST1] with the Home Office and Social Services but. **They** already working effectively with university practitioner research programme which aims to encourage the women involved in the project to speak for themselves, and start their own research at the university to enable them to take agency over their cases and the issues affecting them.

One key challenge is the relationship between the women and the Home Office. Ujamaa can support the women by believing them, hearing them and helping them with practical issues, but if the Home Office decides their story is not credible, they feel disbelieved, disempowered and are at risk of deportation, detention, criminalisation, are unable to get work etc. which makes recovery from trauma and mental illness **much more difficult** [ST2].

The project started last year and has funding for 3 years. However, new projects are constantly starting from scratch and can't draw on learning from other projects that fold due to insufficient funding. This is also an area where they feel consistent funding is hugely necessary as there is constant change in the legal environment and a need to follow all the current information and developments or projects will quickly offer out of date advice.

Sarah has been working in this area for the past **7** [ST3] years and has designed the service based on her experience during that time. **Although** [ST4] Funding for the project comes from Comic Relief, and they are very thorough in the feedback they require. Gathering and working from feedback has been a challenge for the service **that she is currently focused on improving** [ST5]. Mainly a capacity issue in terms of evaluating the feedback in detail. She is aiming to increase her involvement in this project to full **time** [ST6] in order to tackle this. However, at present feedback is collected every six months from all clients.