



Chair of Trustees

Candidate Pack

About Us

In 2017, we were a group of 15 or so mums, grandmas, daughters and members of the public concerned about the difficult time mums and under-fives were having in temporary or insecure accommodation in our neighbourhood. We resolved to try to give them somewhere clean, fun and supportive to spend time during the day.

Nearly six years later, we have been so lucky to be able to attract the very best staff and volunteers to help us fulfil our mission.

We start with the essentials

- Baby and nappy bank
- Children's clothes bank
- Travel expenses
- Food bank referrals

We then offer advice and support to enable mums to access the support to which they are entitled:

- Shelter Housing Advisor
- Health Visitors
- Local Authority family navigators
- Mums' steering committee
- Mums' advocacy and campaigns group

We also work to make sure that every child has moments of joy and their mothers experience moments of togetherness through:

- High quality play
- Dance artist and musicians in residence
- Community celebrations/outings
- Collaboration in creative projects such as a fashion line and opera.
- Relaxation and self care including Reiki in residence and regular visiting beautician.

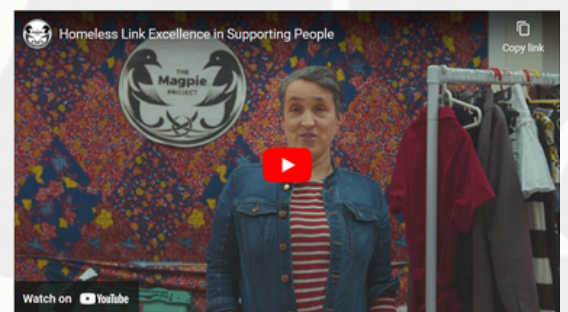
And then we work to point out the systemic issues we see acting as barriers to our minis' wellbeing and development.

- Evidence to the House of Lords Committee on Covid recovery
- Evidence to All Party Parliamentary Committee on temporary accommodation,
- Evidence to Amnesty, Council of Europe, UNHCR, Runnymede Trust, and others on housing/human rights.



At the Magpie Project, we believe all children have the right to a secure, safe place to play, healthy food, engaged, informed parents, and access to support, no matter what their family circumstances.

Watch the following [clip](#) for more details about us



Our mums' stories

Jankhana's story

Jankhana and her family have been living in one room in a building in Plaistow, in east London, for two months by the time we first meet them in September 2019. They have been declared homeless and are forced to rely on the council for housing, which has placed them into this property.

The room, which is the family's only private space, is dominated by two beds and a kitchenette in one corner. As we speak to Jankhana, who is 29, her baby daughter Anaaya is playing on the double and single beds pushed together in the centre of the room.

The family has been homeless since Anaaya was 15 days old. Life in the room revolves completely around the beds and Jankhana fears the impact of this on her five-month-old daughter and four-year-old son.



"It's not normal, if you think about it from the point of view of children, for their development," she says. "What my son sees every day is we eat in a bed, we sleep in a bed, we play in a bed, this is what our life is like.

"I grew up eating in a kitchen, sleeping in a bed, playing outside or maybe in the living room. But his life is not like that. We don't have space for the baby to crawl."

The little floor space available is crammed with the family's belongings, leaving hardly any area for the children to play. There is no table or chair in the room, meaning the family spends most of the day on the bed. There is a small communal kitchen, which is shared with people living in two nearby rooms.

Perhaps inevitably when a space of this size is inhabited by four people, there is some evidence of infestation in the room when HuffPost UK visits in September 2019. Jankhana shows us an insect trap underneath the sink, only a metre from the bed, which has two dead cockroaches stuck inside it. She holds up a packet of rice that has teeth marks in the plastic wrapping where mice have bitten into the family's food.

"When we sleep, the mice just start eating and I always wake up and try to find out where they are. Are they eating or are they licking my kids' food?" says Jankhana. "So it's very difficult. I have nightmares. If I close my eyes the mice start making noises and I'm scared.



Money is incredibly tight for the family, who are surviving on £37 each a week. This means Jankhana cannot afford to replace food or even buy tupperware. Underneath the bed is a large plastic Heinz mayonnaise container with a lid. Jankhana says she begged a local chicken shop to give this to her so she can store food and try to keep the mice out. She is nervous about putting groceries in the shared kitchen because they could be stolen.

While the summer has brought one set of challenges for the family, by February 2020 the winter months have also brought new difficulties. Jankhana says there are no longer mice in the room, but she describes how the family has been left without hot water on four or five occasions over the winter. At times, Jankhana has to bathe Anaaya in cold water.

"My kids get sick – they catch cold," she says. "When we need to clean them I have to use cold water, to clean her bottom or her face or her hands. [We could] use another flat, but if we go there then people complain. It's not hygienic for the baby because she's very little. She can catch anything any time."

An elderly man living in the next door room, directly on the other side of the wall, has also been very loud at night since he returned from hospital a couple of months ago. The noise wakes the family and disturbs them. Jankhana says the man is often sick in the shared toilet.

"The toilet gets so dirty and the kids, especially my son, gets infections or diarrhoea," she says. "It's like there's no end for that, even though the amount of times I clean the seat."

The constant mental drain of living in this room takes its toll. Jankhana has previously suffered from post-natal depression and is still having treatment for mental health problems. Being homeless, and the uncertainty of their situation, has left her with little hope for the future.

"I don't know what will happen," she says. "I have a roof, some money to eat. But I am just staying without any hope. Any time I try to be positive or hope for something, if it doesn't happen it puts me into depression, so I stop thinking [about] what will happen next."

The building itself looks like a classic 1960s housing block that would once have provided flats for families. Now this privately-owned block has been further divided up to provide temporary accommodation to the homeless, and is rented out through the council.

Floor-plans, stuck in the entrance corridor to the building, show spaces that appear to be two-bedroom flats – with a living room, kitchen and bathroom. But each room is now numbered as a separate living unit, creating 32 rooms. Jankhana, Milan and their children live in one of these rooms. The elderly man lives next door and there is a young student in the third room of what would have once likely been a flat. They all share the small communal kitchen and bathroom.

While the units provide adequate accommodation for individuals, it is hard to understand how this room – even though it is bright and freshly painted, with clean floors – is a place where a family of four can live with dignity and respect.

"For a single person it is OK, but for four people – you just feel like it is a prison, four walls," says Jankhana's husband Milan.

More about Jankhana's story can be found [here](#).

Role Description

We are looking for a new Chair of Trustees to help ensure that the very best support is provided for the mums and children who attend our project.

What difference will you make as our Chair of Trustees?

This is a wonderful opportunity to bring your charity experience and leadership skills to support the Board and the leadership team to ensure our organisation can continue meeting the increasing demand for our services.

Role Summary

- Provide leadership and direction to the Board of Trustees that enable the Board to fulfil their responsibilities for the overall governance and strategic direction of The Magpie Project.
- Ensure that The Magpie Project pursues its objects as defined in its governing document, charity law, and other relevant legislation/applicable regulations.
- Work with the Board of Trustees to support the staff and volunteers, and mums' steering committee, to ensure the Magpie Project adheres to its core values of co-production, compassion, and trauma-informed work.
- Lead by example to enable the Board of Trustees to practice collaborative, informed, carefully considered, strategic decision making.
- Embody our commitment to active anti-racist, trauma-informed, child-centred, relationship-based working with women and children experiencing multiple disadvantages.

Chair's responsibilities

The Chair will be responsible for the following:

- Assisting the staff leadership team (CEO and Chief Financial Officer) in strategic plans and regular review of the long-term strategic aims of the organisation.
- Overseeing organisational policies, goals, targets and help to evaluate performance against these.
- Maintaining a direct line of communication with those using The Magpie Project through regular visits and mums' steering committee meetings.
- Approving the annual cycle of Board meetings, meeting agendas, Chair and facilitate meetings and ensure they are implemented.
- Liaising regularly with the Treasurer to maintain a clear grasp of the organisation's financial position and to ensure full and timely financial transparency and information disclosure to the Board.

- Leading and mentor other Board members to fulfil their responsibilities and enable access to training/coaching information to enhance their overall contribution to the Board.
- Chairing the CEO Performance Management subcommittee and lead on the overall support and supervision of the CEO within the Board.
- Reviewing the Board structure, role, relationships and ensure any agreed changes and developments needed are carried out.

In addition, the ideal candidate would:

- Be a spokesperson at appropriate meetings, events, and functions.
- Lead the Board in fostering connections and relationships that support the aims of the organisation.
- Act as final stage adjudicator for disciplinary and grievance procedures if required.
- Facilitate change and address conflict within the Board of Trustees and within the organisation.
- Ensure adherence and compliance around key policies in all decisions and discussions of the Board and any sub-committees.
- Attend and be a member of other committees and working groups as appropriate.

Who we are looking for

- Previous Chair experience is not essential, we can mentor and support if needed.
- Knowledge of UK charity governance (essential).
- Fluent in written and spoken English (essential).
- Previous experience on the Board of a UK charity (essential).
- Previous experience as Chair of a charity Board of Trustees (desirable).

We are keen to hear from those whose background and experience resonates with that of the women we support; applicants from a West African, Middle Eastern, Albanian heritage and those with experience of forced migration or homelessness. If you have not held a Chair role before but are interested in doing so, we are open to you joining as a Trustee in the first instance and the current Chair will support you to step up into the Chair role over an agreed period of time.



Time commitment and other details

- Average 3-6 hours a month, although this will vary depending on the schedule of meetings and other events.
- The Board meet 3 times a year (Meetings are held in person, where possible, in East London).
- Two annual CEO Performance Management subcommittee meetings, plus other subcommittee meetings as needed (held online).
- One AGM.
- The Chair and Trustees are encouraged to attend the annual summer party, project visits and other meetings by arrangement.
- Length of term for the Chair is to be re-elected annually.
- The role is voluntary however the cost of attending meetings and other duties associated with the role will be reimbursed.

"Being a trustee at The Magpie Project brings skills and experience to the charity that enables us to support the staff and volunteers and ensure that the very best support is provided for the mums and children who attend the project. Trustees bring guidance, governance and support to the staff, they create a well-governed charity that makes everyone feel safe. Really though the difference the role makes is to the trustees themselves. We get to give a small amount of our time and skills to the warmest, most inspiring, and wonderful group of mums, children, volunteers, and staff and become part of the unique Magpie family. The charity provides a safe place where everyone is heard and their stories believed and valued, people from across the world come together in a way that can only be described by experiencing it. Being a part of that restores my faith in human kindness and strength, so the real benefit is to me and my fellow trustees."

Sam Ward - Trustee at Magpie Project



How to Apply

Reach Volunteering's TrusteeWorks are supporting The Magpie Project with their Board recruitment.

Please send an up-to-date CV or LinkedIn profile along with a supporting statement stating how your skills and experience would add value to the Board as well as why you are interested in joining us.

Please email your CV and supporting statement to:
Trusteesworks@reachvolunteering.org.uk

Contact the TrusteeWorks team for any queries or to arrange an informal call with one of the Trustees.

