SLRA

South London Refugee Association

Trustee Information Pack

Our Vision

Migrants are welcomed and valued. They live safely and are treated with compassion and respect.

Our Mission

To ensure that migrants live safely with access to justice and opportunity.

Our Values

Kindness

We are caring. We recognize the unique challenges faced by our community. We understand that human connection is the core of everything we do. We focus on wellbeing and a caring environment for those we work with and for our staff and volunteers. We understand that this is key to resilience.

Agency

We amplify the voices of those we work with to demand justice in a system that seeks to make them powerless. We do this by supporting self-advocacy and independence. We believe that those with lived experience of migration must be central to the discussion of migration in the UK.

Inclusion

We create a welcoming, non-judgmental and inclusive culture. We foster belonging and celebrate difference so that everyone can thrive. We appreciate and take account of diverse needs. We understand that inequity shapes the lives of the people we work with.

Respect

We strive to be trustworthy, ethical, reliable and fair in everything we do and say. We trust the people we work with and each other and treat others with dignity. We are determined when advocating for the rights of those we work with.

Thank you for your interest in South London Refugee Association (SLRA). We are looking for new trustees to join us in our work to support refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants who are at risk or in crisis in South London. You can find some details of the services and activities we currently provide in this pack and more details on our website here

You will also find information about the history, work, organisation and strategic plans for SLRA, what is involved in being one of our trustees and how to apply.

This is a challenging time for SLRA as we respond to the growing demand for our service and the ever changing political landscape in which we work. We need the support and expertise of trustees who can help us to build partnerships, develop our strategic plans and ensure that we achieve our aims.

Our current trustees bring a wealth of varied expertise and knowledge. But most importantly they bring a commitment to our organisation and to the people we work with in our local area. As a trustee of SLRA, you would join a committed and forward looking team and become a vital member of our wider SLRA community.

We are currently actively recruiting a Trustee with expert knowledge of safeguarding, but would also be happy to hear from you if you have experience with fundraising, charity governance and/or strategy, and/or UK immigration or asylum law and policy.

Our Impact

Each year we provide specialist advice and support to over 1000 people.

Over 800 people access specialist advice to resolve immigration or asylum issues

Our Homeless Migrants project enables street homeless migrants across South West London to move on into safe accommodation.

Adults, families and young people gain friendship, confidence and knowledge of their rights and entitlements through attendance at our groups, activities and training.

Our Community Hub provides a warm and welcoming space throughout the year for people to come to learn, be creative and enjoy a hot meal.

The people we worked with in the last year came from 62 different countries

Our aims

Our current Strategic Plan identifies the following aims

Reduce the impact of hardship and poverty

Involve our service users in decisions and actions at all levels of our organisation

Use our learning to amplify the voices of those we work with in order to influence policy and practice.

Increase migrants' capacity to advocate for themselves to gain access to justice.

Our History and our work today

South London Refugee Association is a registered charity which was established in 1991 and became a company limited by guarantee in 2003. The charity historically worked to consolidate the services of small voluntary and faith groups which were at the forefront of challenging the exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the 1990s. South London Refugee Association now runs a range of services which continue to promote the inclusion of migrant individuals and communities in South West London. We are proud of our long history and of how we have changed and adapted in order to meet the changing needs of those who access our services.

We are a front line community organisation providing advice and support to people who find themselves in extreme difficulty because of past trauma or because of restrictions related to their current immigration status. Vulnerability is the core criteria for accessing our service. As a relatively small charity with a wide reach, we support those who hold an aspiration of a normalised safe life here in the UK yet who face numerous obstacles in realising their dreams of settlement and safety.

We review and monitor our services and activities regularly to ensure that we target our resources effectively and achieve positive outcomes for those we work with. We ‘re able to evidence excellent value for money to the numerous Trusts, Foundations and public agencies which fund or commission our services.

Tesfah's Story

Tesfah (not his real name) is a refugee from Eritrea and came to the UK in 2014.

His history of war and military conscription in Eritrea had affected him profoundly and he suffers from PTSD because of the terrible things he witnessed in Eritrea.

Tesfah was granted asylum in the UK, which is valid for 5 years, at which point, he needed to apply for indefinite leave to remain (ILR).

His poor mental health, compounded with lack of support and access to free legal advice meant that he was unable to submit the ILR application, and ended up on the streets rough sleeping for more than two years.

Tesfah was referred to us through the GLA funded migrant rough sleepers initiative when he was found rough sleeping in Croydon. He had no money or support and couldn't afford to attend appointments.

To ensure that he was able to engage in legal support, SLRA provided him with hardship payments to cover the cost of his travel to and from appointments, to ensure that he could meaningfully engage in immigration advice and resolve his immigration problems.

As he came to know and trust our service when visiting the office he joined our therapeutic men's group for weekly sessions and began to build the network of friendship and support he had been without for years.

Appointing new trustees

We currently have a small but committed Board of Trustees who bring a range of experience and expertise to the organisation. We are currrently looking for new trustees to join this group to further extend the range of trustees skills and experience and to make sure we have continuity as and when trustees retire.

Over the last few years SLRA has grown considerably. We now have an annual turnover of just under £1 million a year and a staff team of around 20 people, supported by up to 70 volunteers. We have clear management, administration and finance policies and procedures which reflect this growth and our trustees lead on setting and monitoring the strategic direction of the organisation.

We are always particularly keen to involve trustees who have lived experience of the immigration or asylum system or an understanding of and an empathy for those who are experiencing this.

> Before joining men's group I had very low mood. I couldn't trust anyone as I thought everyone was against me due to my previous experiences. The men's group through the activities really helped me to manage my mood and to have trust again in the community.
> Ali, Men's group participant

Our Community Leaders programme is going from strength to strength. Community Leaders are local people with lived experience of the immigration or asylum system (most are current or former SLRA clients) who are keen to work together to build their individual and community confidence and skills for community organising to influence the local and national decisions which affect migrants' lives.

"Community leaders training made me believe in myself. I realised that my voice also count. That together we are stronger and we can make a change.

Beh, Community Leader

"There is a power in everyone's voice and in people coming together and speaking in one voice. Our lived experience is important. We know what we have been through, we know the pain. We know what we are talking about."

Grace (Member of our NRPF community support group)

How we are organised

The SLRA team is managed by a full time CEO. The CEO oversees the day to day running of the organisation and works with the Board to develop and monitor strategic direction.

We have two Heads of Services who manage our specialist advice , casework and community services. There is a service for Adults and Families, and a specialist Youth service which provides casework and activities to children and young people aged 14 to 24 years. Most of the young people we work with are unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.

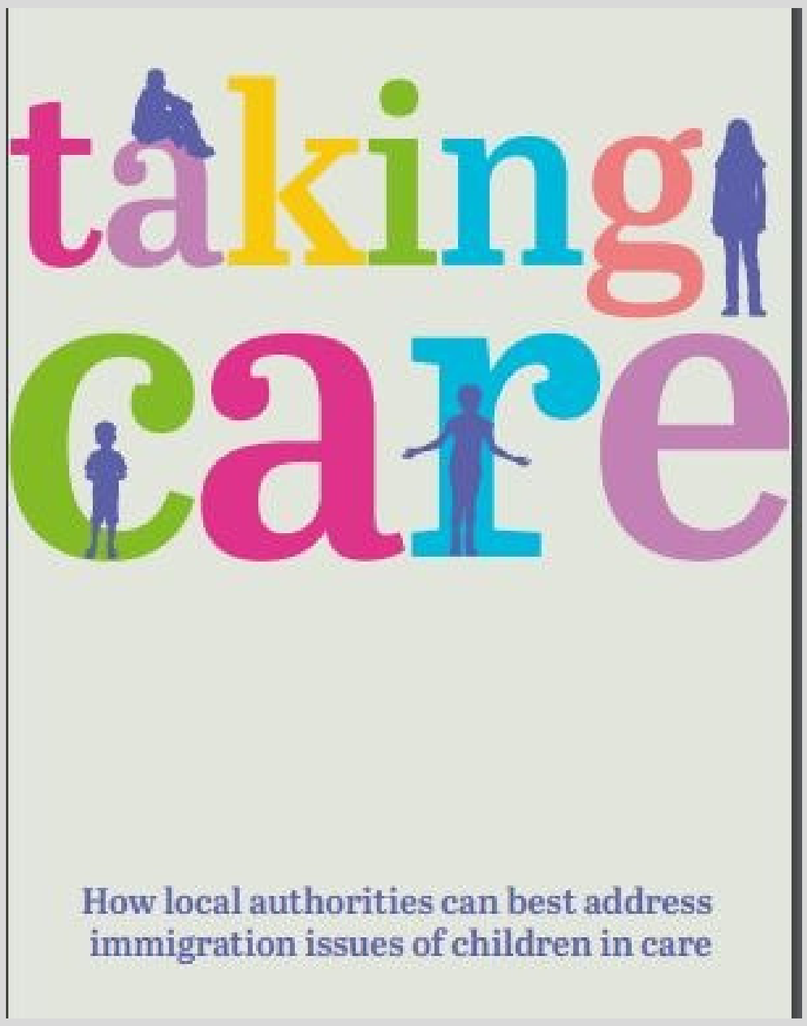
An organisational chart is available with details of the current staff structure and post holders. There are currently 22 staff members and a team of around 50 volunteers supporting our work.

We have our office base in Streatham, close to Streatham Hill station and we ensure acccessibility by providing outreach and accompanying across a wide area including providing immigration advice in primary schools, a food bank and other local community settings. Our service users come from boroughs across South London and beyond.

We are authorised to provide immigration advice at OISC level 3 and hold the Advice Quality Standard.

We are committed to involving those who access our services and others with lived experience of the UK immigration or asylum system at all levels in our organisation. We recognise that this is an essential part of ensuring that we are genuinely responsive to need and that SLRA is a true 'community' resource. We gather feedback from our service users in many different ways and we involve our service users in consultation and decision making on service development and evaluation.

Policy and Participation



In one example of our impactful policy and participation work a cohort of young people attended a six week-training course, delivered over three months by Citizens UK. The group chose a name for themselves: The Care for Young Migrants Participation Group.

Members of our Care for Young Migrants Participation Group were amongst 100+ young people in parliament for #ItsOurCare Action Day to represent young people with immigration issues in the care system & spoke directly to decision makers about what change is needed.

We jointly launched a report with Coram Children's Legal Services which is based on our learning from working with young migrants in care over the last 20 years and on the views and ideas of the young people in the Care for Young Migrants Participation group. This report, 'Taking Care: How local authorities can best address immigration issues of children in care', finds that delaying providing help on immigration and nationality issues could be costing local authorities hundreds of thousands of pounds per year.

SLRA Trustee Job Description

Strategic Direction and oversight

- To ensure that SLRA fulfils its objects and set out in its governing documents and complies with regulations issued by the Charity Commission, charity law and any other relevant legislation or regulations.
- To contribute actively to giving strategic direction to SLRA.

Decision making

- To ensure that funding received is used for purposes agreed with funding bodies.
- To review and approve the annual audited accounts.
- To manage the organisation's assets responsibly.
- To contribute to management decisions as and when they are required by the Chair and CEO.

Responsibilities

- To ensure that SLRA is managed efficiently by appointing and supporting the CEO and monitoring performance.
- To keep informed about the work of SLRA and the issues that affect our work.
- To raise the profile of SLRA and foster our excellent reputation.

Trustee Person Specification

Trustees need to be:

- People of integrity with good judgement and an ability to think strategically.
- Able to work constructively as part of a small team.
- Open minded with a strong commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Able to access the internet and to receive and send emails.

Ideally applicants will also have a knowledge of the local area gained through work or residence, however this is not essential if the trustee has other valuable and relevant experience.

Our Youth Services

Our Youth casework team provides specialist, holistic support to young people who are referred or self-refer to our youth service. Each year we provide one to one holistic casework support to over 400 young people, helping to ensure that they are able to stay safe and realise their potential.

Rafi's story

Rafi is 16 years old and arrived in the UK in June 2021. He was immediately arrested and placed in Home Office accommodation. Despite telling the local authority that he was 16, he had been incorrectly visually age assessed as an adult and was being accommodated in a hotel amongst much older adults. He was terrified and was sharing bathroom facilities with many people much older than him. This was totally unsuitable for a child. He had no access to a key worker, social services and was at risk of mistreatment.

He was brought to our office by a man he had met in the Mosque. He was timid, scared and had no idea what to do to resolve his situation. We immediately made a safeguarding referral to the local authority requesting that a full and proper age assessment be carried out. We found him a community care solicitor in order to put pressure on the local authority to fulfill their legal duty. Eventually the local authority agreed to conduct a full age assessment and to treat him as a looked after child in the interim period. They moved him to accommodation which was suitable for a 16 year old, and he now had the necessary support from a key worker and social worker.

The full age assessment found him to be 16. We found him a good quality immigration solicitor to work on his asylum case.

Now that he is receiving the proper care his mental and physical health has greatly improved. He receives daily support at his accommodation and he has been able to make friends with young people his own age. We remain in regular contact with him. We provided him with a laptop which means that he is able to access ESOL classes and a youth group online. He started college in September. From being frightened, lonely and distressed in unsuitable accommodation, he now has friends and opportunity.

What is required of all charity trustees

Trustees have ultimate responsibility for directing the affairs of their charity, ensuring it complies with the law, is solvent and well-run and is delivering the outcomes for which it was set up and which have been agreed with funders. For more detailed information see the Charity Commission's website below and in particular the publication CC3 The Essential Trustee. A small number of people are barred from serving as charity trustees and applicants will be asked to confirm their eligibility. Information on this can be found on the Charity Commission website here..

Commitment

Meetings

Trustees are expected to attend quarterly Board meetings. These take place in the evening from 6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at our Streatham office. Dates are agreed in advance and at present are held on a Tuesday. As each trustee brings unique knowledge, skills and experience which enhance the effectiveness of the overall Board and all trustees have a legal responsibility for the organisation, we expect trustees to attend all four meetings annually unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Trustee Papers

Trustees are expected to take time to review the papers carefully ahead of trustee meetings. Papers may include financial reports, activity reports or funding applications.

How to apply

Interested people who contact us will be invited to provide a CV along with a short expression of interest in the SLRA trustee role. They will then be invited to meet with the CEO in the first instance and to visit and see our services in action so that we can answer any questions about the trustee role and the organisation.

We will then ask prospective trustees to meet more formally with one of our existing trustees and the CEO. If all are then in agreement with regards to the appointment our new trustee would be invited to attend the next Board meeting as an observer.

Contact our CEO, Cynthia Orchard in the first instance.
Email: cynthia@slr-a.org.uk Tel: 07715561600 / 02034903443