



Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation

Annual Report 2017-18

Service User, Soussan

mewso.org

Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation
is a registered charity in England and Wales
Charity Number 1150129



A message from our Director and Chair

Halaleh Taheri,
Executive Director



This year we are very pleased to say that our organisation has almost doubled in size. We have supported more women than ever before and expanded our services into the borough of Westminster to reach vulnerable women in this area who have experienced gender based discrimination and violence. We have provided much needed support to these women, who often suffer in silence, to break down barriers and empower them to create a better life for themselves.

The Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation have started some exciting new workshops this year such as Storytelling (group counselling) and Mindfulness to give vulnerable and isolated women emotional support and build friendships in the community. Due to such demand, we have expanded our befriending and one-to-one English language-learning scheme to build women's confidence and help integration.

Cordelia Mayfield,
Chair of Trustees



This year we have also launched our new campaign 'Polygamy Matters' in partnership with Greenwich University. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of polygamy in the UK and expose how vulnerable women can be in polygamous relationships. We now look towards the continuation and expansion of this campaign in 2018.

With the growth of our organisation we are proud to have hired another part-time permanent member of staff to help with the rising demands for our services. We have also hired more skilled volunteers from the general public and from among our clients. MEWSO is always grateful to the support of its volunteers without whose support we couldn't meet the needs of all the women who come to our services to recover and heal from abuse.

Despite the challenges we face being a small organisation, we work creatively to ensure that every woman's needs are met. Our organisation is made up of dedicated and hard working individuals who strive for better. We feel such pride leading an organisation where the staff, volunteers and women who use our services are so passionate about supporting change.

Our Story



We're the Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation. Since 2010 we have been supporting Middle Eastern, North African and Asian women refugees and asylum seekers in London to build a life free from gender based violence and discrimination.

We reject every form of discrimination, inequality and exclusion and aspire to a society where every woman lives in safety with equal opportunities. We hope for a society in which diversity is considered an element of strength and not of division. The Middle Eastern Women and Society organisation is built on the values of secularism, solidarity and social justice.

Our Impact



This year we have supported over

2,000

Middle Eastern, North African and Asian women in London

98%

of service users were very happy with our services and would recommend us to a friend or family member



Our Work



Counselling

MEWSo provides one-to-one and group counselling in Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish and English.



English Lessons

We offer one-to-one English Language support to isolated women through our team of qualified volunteer English Language teachers.



Befriending

Our dedicated volunteer befrienders provide weekly one-to-one encouragement to help isolated women get out of the house and integrate into society.



Advice

MEWSo offers one-to-one advice by appointment or at drop-in sessions with trained Advice Workers in Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi, Turkish and English.



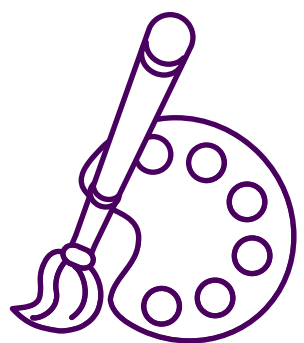
Exercise Classes

At MEWSo we recognise the importance of physical exercise and we run weekly exercise classes specifically tailored to women who have experienced gender based discrimination and/ or violence in Arabic, Hebrew and English.



Mindfulness and Meditation Classes

MEWSo provides Mindfulness and Meditation Classes designed specifically for refugee communities in Arabic and English.



Art Therapy

MEWSo understands that for some women speaking about their issues is too difficult so we offer Art Therapy classes as a way for women to creatively express their emotions.



Social Clubs

MEWSo Social Clubs allow our clients to have their say in what they want to do and are a chance for women to take a leading role in shaping what activities the group do.



Training Workshops

Throughout the year MEWSo offers a variety of Training Workshops on issues such as domestic violence, housing, employment and health.

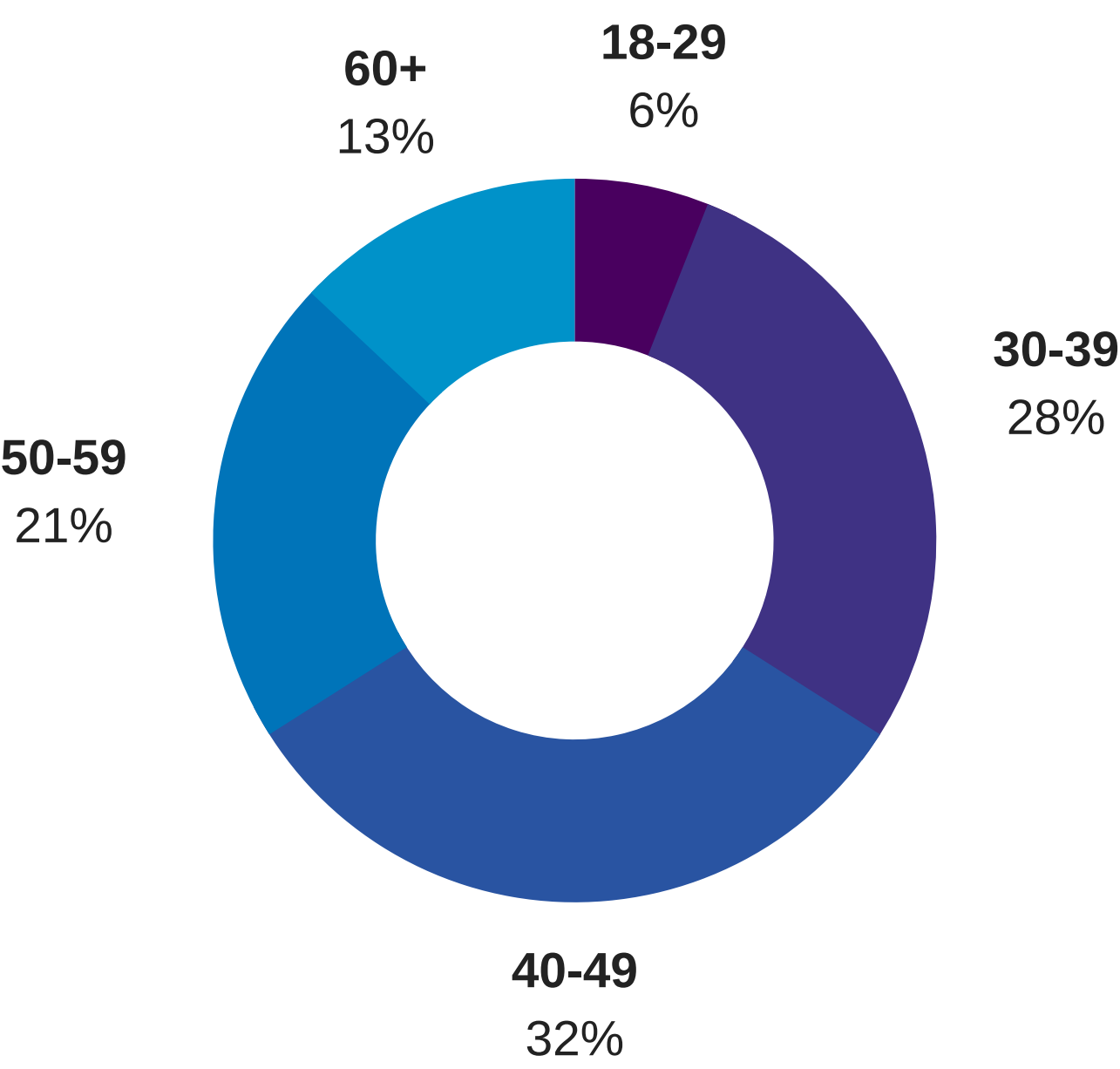


Help for Children in Need

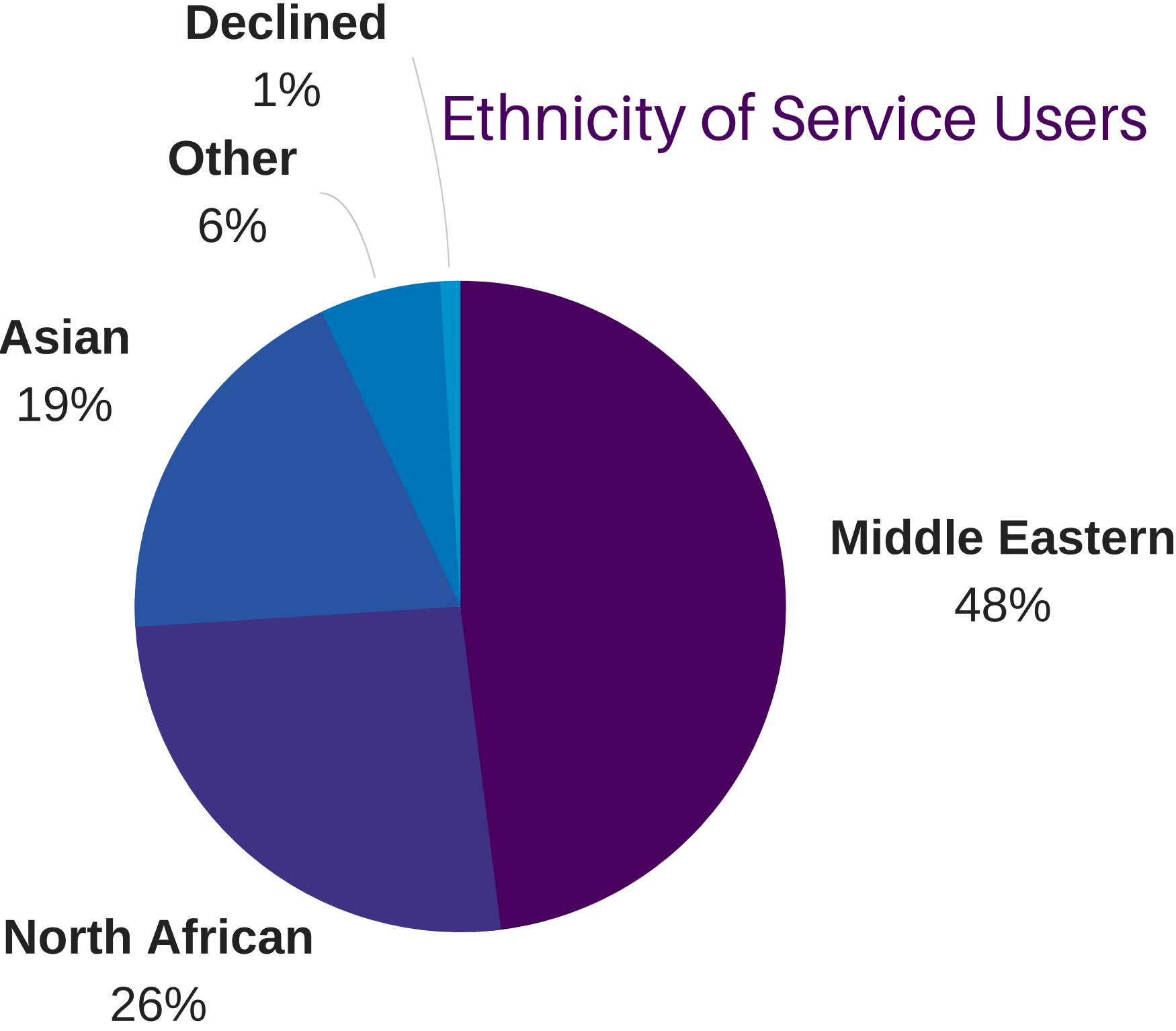
We offer financial support to mothers' of children living in poverty through helping buy Christmas gifts and paying for special kids days out.

Our Service Users

Age of Service Users



Ethnicity of Service Users



25% of our service users are new arrivals from mainly Syria and Iraq

11% of our service users are disabled

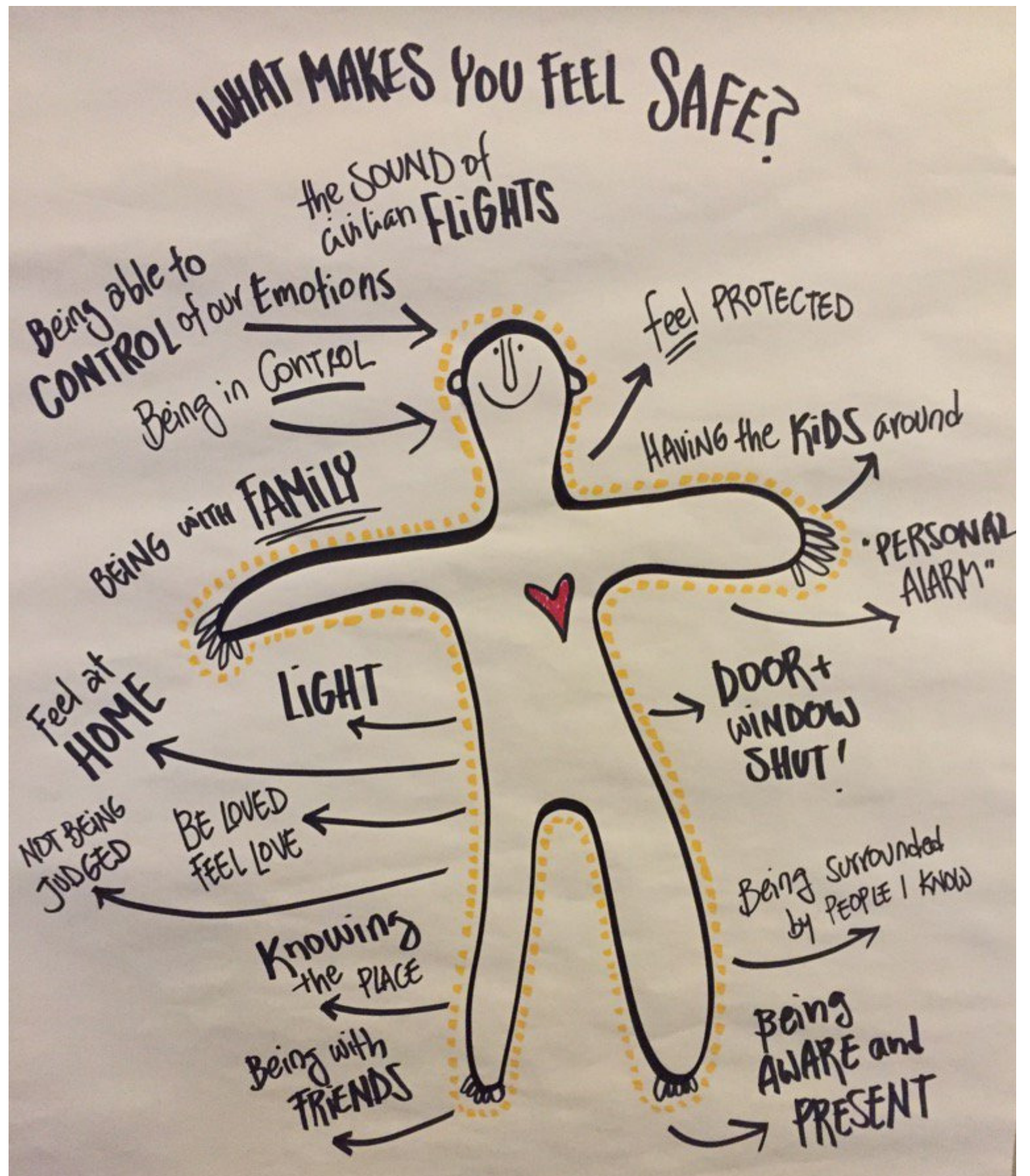
Amirah's Story

Amirah is a single mother of two children, originally from Syria, and came to the UK as part of the Syrian Resettlement Scheme for vulnerable people. The family have suffered a lot of trauma while in Syria and are now adjusting to life in the UK. She approached our organisation after hearing about us through a friend. Amirah wanted immigration advice and with the help of a volunteer Arabic translator we successfully helped her fill out all the documents and she now has refugee status. We periodically help her with other immigration issues as well as general help such as understanding her utility bills. This Christmas, with the help of Islington Giving, we were able to make her Christmas special by giving her children Christmas presents.

Our Highlights

MEWSo launches the Polygamy Matters campaign

In partnership with Greenwich University, MEWSo launched the Polygamy Matters campaign in 2017. We started the campaign with the workshop Polygamy Matters: Preliminary Reflections with a combination of academic researchers, third sector organisations and ordinary women whose community is affected by polygamy. The workshop was a great success and a fantastic start to the campaign! After hearing about the research done on polygamy by some academics, the group was split in order to start debates in smaller groups around questions such as what are the main issues in polygamous relationships and what steps can be taken to raise awareness about polygamy. The workshop was charged with energy and everyone engaged with the tasks. For many of the participants the subject of polygamy is an emotional one. The documented stories and experiences that were told touched the hearts of everyone there. We have now started Polygamy Workshops, engaging with women from the communities who are personally affected by polygamy. Through this campaign, we aim to raise awareness of polygamy and its harmful effects to women and children in order to end this practice.



Halaleh Taheri, Executive Director of MEWSo, and Elena Vacchelli, Senior Lecturer at the University of Greenwich

Client Testimony

"I am in a polygamous relationship but I don't talk about it with anyone. Someone told me about the polygamy workshops that MEWSo were doing and I wanted to go but I was scared. My friend had used MEWSo services before and she persuaded me to go. I met some other women like me with similar issues. It made me realise that I am not alone and this gives me hope."



Our Highlights

Women and Displacement Seminar

As part of MEWSo's partnership with Macquarie Group and Slaughter and May, achieved through Big Alliance, we held the Women and Displacement Seminar. This seminar discussed the impact it has on women who are or have been uprooted and displaced for a variety of reasons. The practical and psychological effects of displacement are often very individual, and are influenced by the individual's stage of life. Although displacement affects both men and women, the effects are often different and this seminar specifically focused on the difficulties that women typically face.

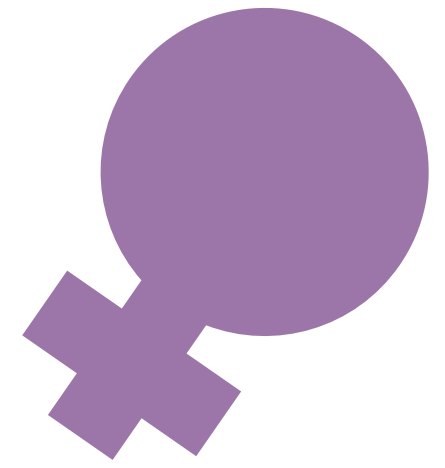


Christmas Celebrations

MEWSo had a Christmas meal with some of its staff and volunteers at a local Turkish Restaurant to say thank you to everyone for all their hard work this year! MEWSo also had a fantastic Christmas Party in Westminster with all our clients. There was lots of food, laughing, dancing and singing. Everyone really enjoyed themselves and we also used the opportunity to present the women with some of the beautiful jewelry they had created in the Healthy Living workshop. They were able to show their friends what they had created and everyone was really impressed with what they had created. MEWSo would like to thank Westminster Council for funding the Christmas Party and spreading the Christmas cheer!



Our Highlights



International Women's Day Celebrations

100 Women for Islington Giving

On International Women's Day, Islington Giving hosted a Women's breakfast at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Islington. Islington Giving brought together women who had made an impact in the borough. Halaleh Taheri, Director of MEWSo, spoke about the impact that Islington Giving's funding has made to the lives of our service users.



Islington BAMER Women's Forum celebrates International Women's Day 2018

In partnership with other BAMER Women's organisations, MEWSo celebrated International Women's Day with our service users. It was a fantastic day of music, dancing and food!



International Women's Day in Finsbury Park

MEWSo organised, in partnership with other Women's organisations in Finsbury Park, an event for women and children from all community to come together and celebrate International Women's Day.



International Women's Day in Westminster

MEWSo organised an event for International Women's Day for our Westminster service users to come together and have fun together and celebrate their own achievements. There was dancing, music, exercise, arts and crafts and food for everyone.



Our Highlights

MEWSo Volunteers

Through the Big Alliance, MEWSo partnered with Macquarie Group and Slaughter and May who supported MEWSo to create a business plan, review policy documents and liaise with funders. The partnership was a great success and opened up more opportunities for MEWSo. The group leader, Laura McCarthy Cronin (Associate Director and Senior Vice President at Macquarie Group) won the Islington Action Volunteer of the Year Award 2017.



MEWSo has reached a record high in the number of volunteers supporting us. Two of our most dedicated volunteers Yasmine, Interpreter and Outreach Worker, and Zhara, Advisor, won MEWSo's Volunteer of the Year Award 2018. We'd like to thank all our volunteers, we couldn't do it without you!



Volunteer's Story

One of our volunteers is a well-educated refugee woman who experienced domestic violence and currently lives in a refuge. She started at one of our Mindfulness workshops which greatly improved her confidence and helped her to manage her anxiety. After completing the Mindfulness workshop she approached our organisation requesting to volunteer with us to gain more experience in order to work towards getting employment. She now attends our office every week to help with administration tasks, translation and also escorts other Arabic speaking clients to appointments and workshops for support and translation. We are really proud of the progress that this woman has made and we have seen her confidence grow.



Our Highlights

Client Events, Workshops and Training Days

Art Therapy, Westminster



Advice and Guidance, Westminster



Dinner for Parents and Children, Haringey



Day Out at the Beach!



Our Highlights

Client Events, Workshops and Training Days

Art Therapy, Westminster



Exercise Class, Islington



Picnic in the Park, Barnet



Art Therapy, Westminster



Pilates and Exercise Class, Westminster



Employability Training Day, Westminster



Social Club, Islington



Our Thanks



Funders and Partnership Support



Board of Trustees



Cordelia Mayfield - Chair
Sue Halawa - Secretary
Behnaz Fatherazi - Treasurer
Rejna Alaaldin
Bahra Mahmood



Our Future

As we start another year of life-saving work we will focus on provision, prevention and partnerships. We will continue meeting the needs of displaced, vulnerable women who are struggling to adjust to life in a new country while facing other challenges like domestic violence and discrimination.

With the growth in demand for our services and expansion of our organisation into other boroughs in London we must make sure that the needs of all our service users are met. We want to be able to reach women in the community who trust our organisation and bring our services to their door. We have found that in the last year Mindfulness has been extremely popular among our service users and therefore we want to expand this service to reach more women. MEWSo's projects establish structures enabling participants to continue benefiting from the initiatives long after the lifetime of the project.

In addition we will develop our polygamy matters campaign to include more educational workshops with women who are affected by polygamy. We also aim to strengthen MEWSo through more partnerships with other charities, organisations and corporate groups. We aim to raise further awareness of our services among our target communities but also in local services and other organisations. In the next year we want to increase awareness of domestic and gender based violence and in particular around polygamy through our polygamy matters campaign. We want to create real change by asking difficult questions to get polygamy laws enforced.

While developing stronger social networks, engage in activities and potential training for improved communication, volunteering and

employment, MEWSo anticipates a reduction of hidden domestic violence within its grass-root networks as taboos are broken and women ask for help. This, in turn, will lead to reduced numbers of potential visits to GP surgeries, hospitals and mental health services, reduce dependence on the welfare system and pressure on London's overstretched statutory resources.

In the next year we hope to further increase our income in order to meet the needs of all our service users and increase our unrestricted funds to give more individual and personal support to our clients. In the next year we aim to create full time staff positions to coordinate the different projects that MEWSo provides. In the next year to also aim to have a desk in at least one other borough in order to more easily reach our service users in other areas of London. Further into the future we want to have a main office of our own with a training room for staff and clients.



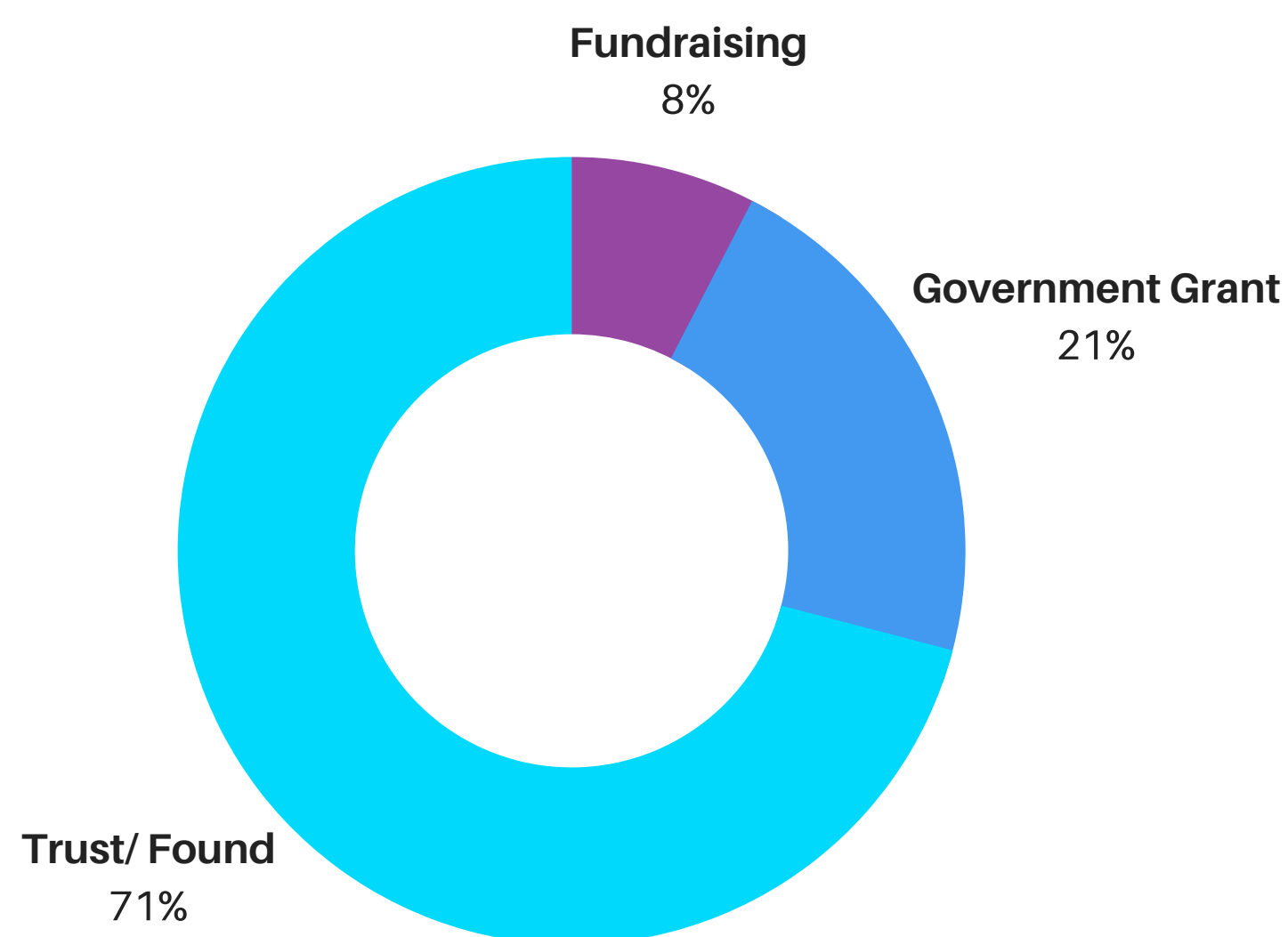
Our Income and Expenditure

Income

For the financial year 2017/18, total incoming resources grew by 5% from £37,690 to £39,564.

This is primarily due to new grants and additional funding secured during the year as well as grants secured through our expansion into the borough of Westminster.

The charity has also been successful in retaining its grants despite a difficult financial landscape. We will prioritise our fundraising to enable us to meet the needs of our service users in this challenging climate.



Expenditure

Growth through new activities has correspondingly increased our resources expended by 45% from £29,138 to £42,515. All incoming resources and resources expended are derived from continuing activities. In addition the staff needed to deliver these services has resulted in an increase in staff costs.

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