

**“You have no idea the power you have,
it delights my heart to encourage you to continue.”**

Maya Angelou

Perhaps you are thinking that this is a rather optimistic quote in the present difficult times [Dec 2020] but it is this kind of resilience and determination we need when there are battles to fight on every front. For this reason, this edition of our newsletter has a particular focus on some of these battles and the activism, advocacy and campaigning involved in making the change.

This edition of our newsletter is quite long as it was meant to come out early this year but we were overtaken by events. Of necessity, this issue has to address the impact of COVID. It also looks at the No Recourse to Public Funds Rule and other areas in which racism and sexism intersect in policy and practice in violence against women. There is nothing new about this but the [Black Lives Matter](#) campaign, founded by three black women in the US; Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, particularly in the wake of the killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd among others, do seem to have provided an impetus to anti-racism work in our sector in the UK and in our own organisation and we hope this continues to bear fruit.

Sometimes we have to directly or indirectly challenge the failures of the state to respect, protect and fulfil women’s human rights. Often talking about rights, particularly women’s rights, and pointing out the failures of the state is seen as threatening or unpalatable to those in power and holding the purse strings.

So thank you all – whether that’s activism, runs, cycles, hikes and mountain climbs or fundraising, donating from profits from your business, donations, likes, retweets or a combination of them all – they all count.

COVID-19



It would be so nice not to have to talk about this but that is not an option. COVID-19 has presented so many challenges for the women we work with and for our own staff. We have seen increases in demand across all our services. We kept services going mostly online and by phone but where women need a face to face appointment our staff have continued to do this with due regard to COVID safety. Our refuges have remained open throughout, staffed 24 hours, and our prostitution outreach van service has started up again and is going out as normal. Many of you, recognising the challenges lockdown would present for women in controlling, coercive and abusive relationships, have supported us in many ways; from donations and gift vouchers to this box of hand-sewn face masks for women to use. A supporter of our service made a box of masks for service users (pictured) and many of you sent in donations.

Working from home is not the same for all. Some of our staff are single mothers with caring responsibilities for children and/or elderly, others are in shared flats with the only private and confidential space being their bedroom. It is very difficult to switch off when your personal space is

the same place in which you are listening to women's experiences of violence and abuse. One of the benefits of working at **nia**, reported by our staff, is the colleagues they work with and with whom they can debrief, vent, share and seek support – that is much easier to do in an office together than at home in isolation. Luckily we were able to maintain clinical supervision remotely for staff but colleagues miss their peers. We are very grateful to the commitment and hard work of all our staff through this period – they have excelled themselves.

Many funders responded promptly releasing funds in quicker and easier ways to meet the emergency. We submitted funding applications and benefitted from crisis funding to provide some extra staffing hours, PPE equipment and to buy or upgrade more laptops and similar technology which enabled us to move to mainly home-based working. However, much of it is crisis funds with a short window in which to spend the money on very specific COVID-related activities and equipment and, of course, brings with it requirements around monitoring and reporting.

No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

The no recourse to public funds rule (NRPF) is an immigration condition which means the individual concerned is not allowed to access public funds – public funds include benefits such as employment, welfare and housing allowances and support as well as some health and education access. This can mean, for instance, that refugees, which normally cover their costs through receipt of a woman's housing benefit, may feel obliged to turn away women subject to NRPF as there is no money to cover their stay.

Migrant women experiencing male violence often are too afraid to access the rights that should be upheld by public services – they fear that services like health, police, local authorities including housing and social services may prioritise her immigration status over her right to immediate safety and to justice. This is not an unfounded fear; Southall Black Sisters (a specialist black and Asian



women's charity working on violence against women and specifically challenging racism and sexism in state responses to violence against women) together with Liberty brought a [successful police super-complaint which found that police were sharing information on immigration status](#) when a woman was in immediate danger and seeking safety and justice with the police.

Similarly, the new Domestic Abuse Bill specifically, and shockingly, sets out to exclude migrant women from the protection provided by this bill. The Step-Up Migrant Women coalition, led by [Latin American Women's Rights Service](#), is leading the charge in this fight. Their campaign is the latest in years of hard work and campaigning led by specialist Black and Asian and minoritized women's groups. Another example is the long-standing Abolish the No Recourse to Public Funds Coalition led by [Southall Black Sisters](#), which has managed to achieve variously; pilot schemes, pots of funding, exemptions and changes to the rules over time enabling increasingly more women, otherwise subject to the rule, to access some support. However, that campaign is far from over as we do not want charity or exemptions and exceptions and pilot projects: women, all women; need, and are entitled to, equal access to safety and justice when experiencing male violence.

Indeed, the Committee of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women made [recommendations to the UK](#) as long ago as 2008 to address the inequality in access to safety and justice that the no recourse to public funds rule represents for migrant women. Similarly, the [Council of Europe Convention on the Elimination of Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women](#), also known as the Istanbul Convention, which the UK has [still not ratified](#), calls on states to ensure equal access to safety and justice for all women fleeing violence and to proportionately resource and fund specialist women's organisations.

We are pleased to say we are partners with Southall Black Sisters and others in a project providing support to women subject to no recourse. We also have a ring-fenced bed space for women with no recourse and we support the campaigns highlighted in the links in this section. If ever there were an argument for specialist women's sector organisations and specifically for women's sector organisations led by and for Black, Asian and minoritized women this is surely it [yet they are the organisations most at risk](#).

nia, like many other organisations has upped its game on anti-racism work in our own organisation. This year's staff training had a specific focus on anti-racism, we have new structures internally looking at our performance on anti-racism, looking at reviews of many of our policies and practices. We are also looking at anti-racism charters for our organisation and in this regard applaud the work of the [anti-racism working group in the VAWG sector](#).

Femicide Census



[Karen Ingala Smith](#), our CEO, runs a blog called [counting dead women](#) in which she records details of all women killed by men with a view to better informing the potential for prevention and early intervention. Her blog inspired the development of the [Femicide Census](#) which produces reports on the killings of women by men in the UK. In recent years, staff based at **nia** have been responsible for drawing the report together. On 26 November, the Femicide Census launched a 10-year report [2009-2018] of 1,425 femicides in

the UK. Femicide Census is used by lawyers preparing relevant strategic litigation, by academics developing work in the field of violence against women and girls and is cited as good practice at national and international level.

Women-only services and accommodation for women escaping male violence



Women have been exposed to rape, sexual assault, prostitution, trafficking and other forms of violence. Some women have developed mental health issues as a result of their experiences and some have coping strategies which can involve problematic substance use. Women leaving violence need safe services and accommodation – refuge is only a temporary solution. We believe that women who have experienced male violence need access to women only services for problematic substance use and mental health support – including residential where necessary.

Similarly, we believe that women leaving violent relationships or moving on from refuge need appropriate accommodation – not mixed sex hostels and multi-occupancy B and Bs.

We were appalled, therefore, when a local authority told women leaving the refuge that they could not have women only accommodation and that if they turned down their offer they would “have made themselves intentionally homeless” and the council would argue it owed them no further duty. That is why we supported [Public Law Interest Centre](#) in a challenge they brought for a women to the local authority about their failure to provide appropriate accommodation. We were delighted to learn that the local authority has settled the case and is likely to convert some of its existing mixed-sex temporary accommodation into women-only to address cases like this.

We run two specialist refuges, one for women affected by sexual exploitation and one for women with problematic substance use. These are unusual because women facing such multiple disadvantages are often deemed too high need for mainstream refuges and are turned away. We are grateful to our many supporters who help us with donations of new bed linen, clothes and toiletries for women and other donations – it is much needed and much appreciated.

We can't consent to this

You may have seen cases where a man has killed a woman and has sought to suggest that this was an accident arising from consensual “rough sex gone wrong”. [A new campaign sprang up to challenge the idea that a woman can consent to abuse, violence and injury so extreme as to be killed by it.](#) Continued campaigning has resulted in an amendment being added to the Domestic Abuse Bill which further prevents defendants from seeking to rely on consent in cases like this:

Megan Bills was 17 and met Ashley Foster, 24, hours before he killed her. He hid her body and searched for “snuff films” and violent pornography. He claimed she asked him to strangle her and that she died accidentally in a sex game gone wrong. Fortunately, the Court was not fooled and he was sentenced to 26 years for murder.



Women exiting prostitution challenging criminal records

As some of you are aware we undertook research into the barriers to exiting prostitution and further research into one of those barriers: [prostitution specific criminal records.](#)

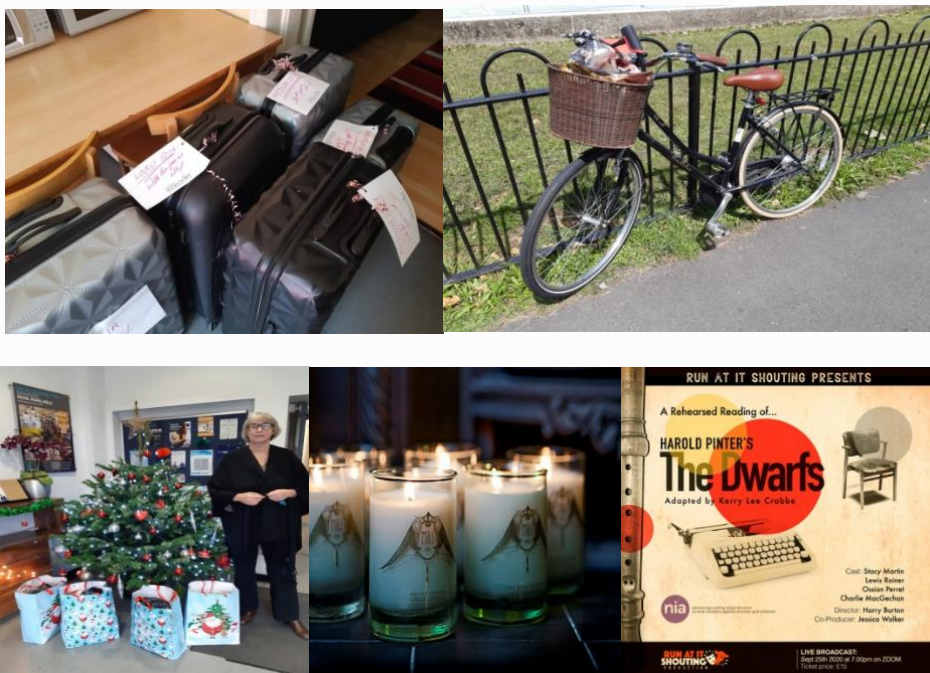


Our research has been helping inform a legal case with [Centre for Women's Justice](#) in which a group of courageous women have been challenging the DBS regulations. There are many stages to their challenge but the Supreme Court handed down judgement affirming that the operation of the Disclosure and Barring Service regulations and the retention of records in these cases was disproportionate. As of November this year, minor and older convictions will not show up on checks.

Fundraising

In September, 2019, some of you took part in the “ride for murdered women”, in which women only cycle rides sprang up all over the country on September 7th – an amazing initiative kicked off by [Jean Hatchet](#) who has been doing bike rides in the name of women murdered by men for some years now to raise money for her local women’s aid service and increasingly now also for **nia**. It was a great day and we were hoping to make this an annual fixture for the future. COVID was a bit of a challenge of course this year but in July we still had women all over the country taking part in “socially distanced” cycle rides in their “allotted hour” of exercise and raising money for our services. Thank you all for your support and note that we are not defeated – and we will continue to ride and ride again.

There are too many donors and fundraisers to picture and thank you all but here’s a selection:



- Suitcases of necessities for women moving in to the refuge from long-standing supporter (Making herstory)
- Bike ride fundraiser 7 July (socially distanced) on initiative of Jean Hatchet
- Zonta London, year on year, providing luxury parcels to women in the refuge and many of you buying up our Wish List for service users and their children at end of year celebrations.
- M&J luxury candles; long standing supporter providing proportion of sales to support nia
- Fundraiser, rehearsed reading of Pinter’s *The Dwarfs* by Run at it Shouting

So that’s just a quick round up of some of the battles we, and others in the women’s sector, are fighting with your support. And the point about working on women’s rights is that we are a movement, we support each other and take strength from each other so that we may all benefit – as Audre Lorde put it: *“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”*

Thank you all for your continued support, in whatever form it takes, and we hope you have a good break at the end of what has been a very difficult year. In the meantime, we fight on www@niaendingviolence.org.uk for more information about nia and <https://www.justgiving.com/niaproject> if you wish to donate.

We wanted to share this feedback with you, to show what a difference our support can make:

“ I wanted to write to you to let you know how much your service has helped me, in particular Natalie, who has been so supportive in the months that she has worked with me.

Natalie has been so professional and knowledgeable, and shown so much empathy and compassion. Your service has been a lifeline, when things, at times have felt so desperate for me. Whenever I have thanked Natalie, she will always say "I'm just doing my job" but I know that potentially, other people could be in this role with a very different attitude.

Nothing was ever too much trouble, and even though at times I felt a bit of a burden, Natalie had a way of making me feel that I wasn't. The mixture of knowledge, experience and attitude, that she has, is quite remarkable.

Natalie helped me understand what was going on, when I was in a state of confusion at the beginning of my journey, and has been the catalyst for my continued learning and reflection. I cannot put into words how helpful it has been to feel believed, and I seriously cannot put into words how helpful it has been to have her support and understanding. Nothing was ever too much trouble, and I felt she went above and beyond any expectation I might have had, always fighting for the best possible outcome. I wanted to forward this, so you know what help you have been and let you know how important it is to have a service like yours.”

Susan

(Shared with consent).

Your support means women, girls and children subjected to sexual and domestic violence and abuse, including prostitution, can get specialist, independent support delivered by women who understand and care.

[PLEASE DONATE HERE](#)

Thank you