



# MAMASUZE IMPACT REPORT

Autumn 2024



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## WELCOME

“MamaSuze is a unique project which brings joy, agency and respite to women. It provides a much needed space where they can laugh, cry and be themselves together. I was privileged to visit, no, join the group several times and to feel the warmth of the facilitators and participants. We need MamaSuze in every community supporting refugee women to have time for themselves and their creativity.”

**Dr Wanda Wyporska,  
CEO, Safe Passage International**

## OUR MISSION

We exist to enhance the lives of survivors of forced displacement and gender based violence via weekly workshops in different art forms. MamaSuze aims to provide a welcoming, joyful space where women can socially interact, be creative and play together, strengthening confidence, resilience and identity.



“Coming here every week makes me feel part of something, for the first time since I left my country (Afghanistan) I am able to laugh and feel safe. These women understand what I have been through and playing together we get stronger.”

Farzana, MamaSuze participant

## THE NEED FOR OUR WORK

### 1 in 5

Refugee or internally displaced women have faced sexual violence UNHCR, 2021.

### 5 x

Refugees are five times more likely to have serious mental health issues than the UK population.

### 30,000

In 2020, 1000 asylum seekers were housed in hotels. In 2024 this figure stands at 30,000.

### 180 days

Is the average time spent in hotels waiting for asylum decisions in 2024. Squalid conditions include: mould, rotten carpets, rodent infestations, broken beds, and bed bugs.

### The need for this work is urgent and growing.

The women who come to the group face multiple disadvantages. They arrive in the UK emotionally and physically exhausted, often with limited language skills, having fled gender based violence, war and persecution in their countries of origin. Many also have children to care for.

### Waiting for immigration papers can take years,<sup>1</sup> during which time,

#### They are NOT eligible for:

- More than £40.85 per week (as opposed to £58.50 a week in an EU country)<sup>2</sup>
- Childcare support
- Statutory play provision for under fives
- Seeking paid work.

#### They live at risk of:

- Being relocated or moved out of London with little notice
- Re-victimisation, re-trafficking, detention and deportation
- Severe isolation, being away from family and social networks.

Sources : (1) *Will I ever be safe? Asylum-seeking women made destitute in the UK* (page 8)

(2) *Amnesty International, Truth About Refugees*

“Common mental illnesses in displaced adults include PTSD (31%), depression (31%), anxiety disorders (11%), and psychosis (1.5%). There are also high rates of distress, grief and PTSD in displaced people under the age of 18, especially in the context of war and trauma.”

Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health, Royal College of Psychiatrists



## OUR APPROACH

MamaSuze is an arts company run by women for women, based on the core belief that creativity and play unites us and nourishes us like nothing else. We combine this with providing a creche, vital casework support and referrals, to build a reliable, joyful and safe space for all the women who come.



## OUR MODEL

### Participants

A woman is referred by a frontline organisation.



She attends the weekly community group. If she has a pre-school child they will attend the creche.



Through attending the group her confidence grows and she is signposted to other specialist organisations. She may want to be referred for art therapy at The Maya Centre, or she may need casework support.



After a year and/or when she feels ready to leave the group she can join the spin-off projects like the Creative Writing for Growth Group, or the Luna Theatre Project. She can also check in with us by attending the monthly group at Hackney Migrant Centre and attending our biannual seasonal feast parties.

When she graduates she will be put in touch with the Refugee Employer Advocate at Islington Council.

### Partner Organisations

MamaSuze also delivers workshops to new partner organisations. (See Our Work) Partners enhance their provision with MamaSuze's supportive, creative sessions, extending their services to participants they may have not previously reached.

# OUR WORK 2022-24

**MamaSuze has supported 252 displaced women since 2022.**

We only take referrals from frontline refugee organisations such as: Helen Bamber Foundation, Freedom From Torture, ECPAT UK, Islington Refugee Centre, Dahlia Project (Manor Gardens), The Hackney Migrant Centre, The Red Cross and Migrants Organise.



**250** hours of creative and psychosocial workshops at Highbury Roundhouse.



**33** sessions with partnership organisations including Hackney Migrant Centre, The Maya Centre.



**22** hours of social and cultural events at the Southbank, New Diorama, St Luke's Church, Highbury Roundhouse and Hackney Migrant Centre.



**60** hours of workshops in theatre-making with The Luna Project and Creative Writing for Growth with resident writer Catherine Milne.



**30** referrals including 8 referrals for art therapy (The Maya Centre) and 18 referrals to organisations for legal, housing issues and further therapeutic support for women.



**50** clothes parcels for children from partner Little Village.



**16** continuing professional development sessions in Trauma Informed Practice, Safeguarding (adults and advanced), Care Mapping and supervision for our team.



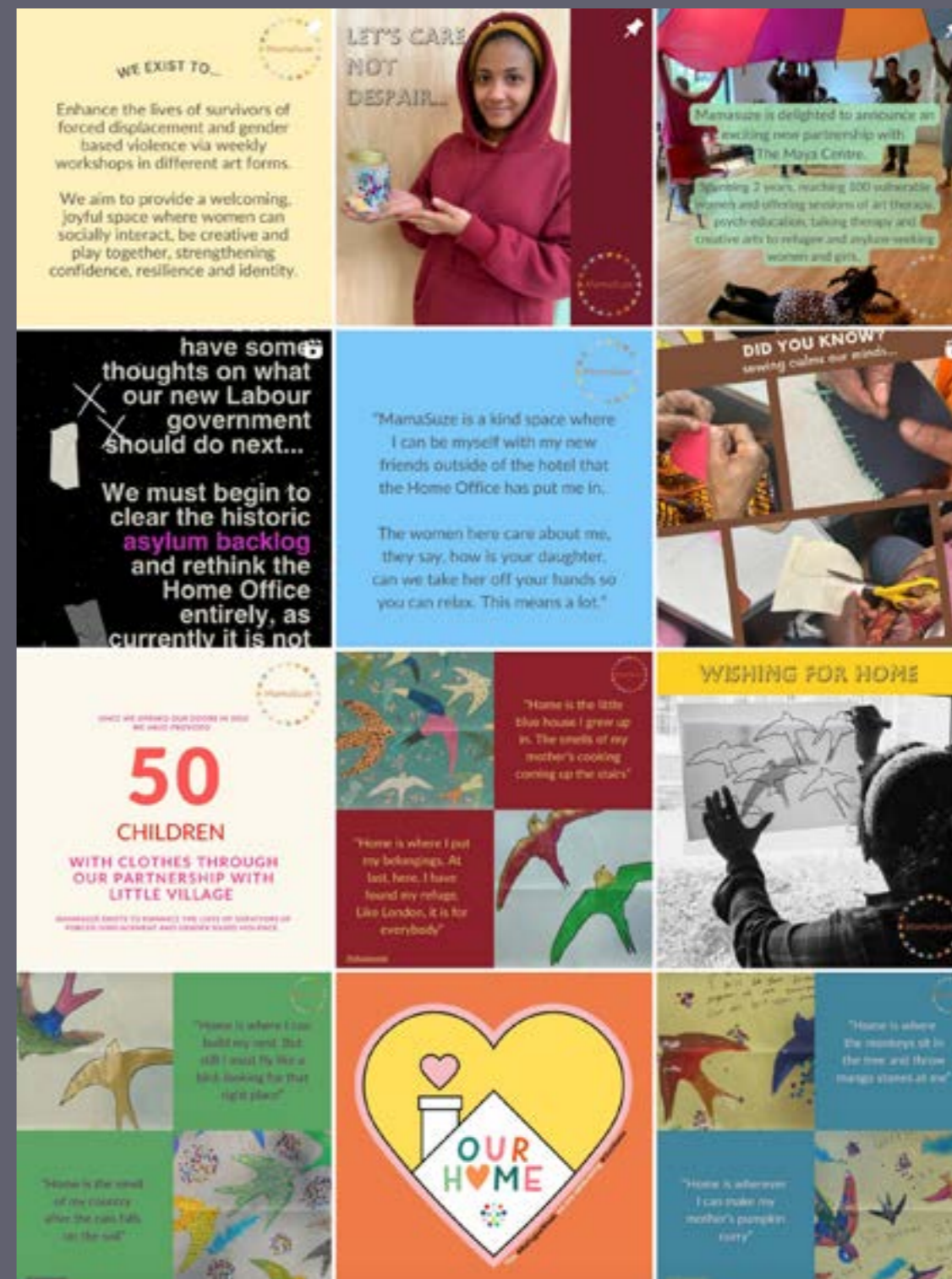
**9** partnerships with Feedback Theatre, Hackney Migrant Centre, Highbury Roundhouse, The Maya Centre, Little Village, Islington Council, Tea & Shop, Renata Felipe Craniosacral therapist and Lots of Lovely Art.



**3** emerging partnerships.



**84** new followers on Instagram in 5 months, after hiring social media manager.



@mamasuzecic



### Drama

*"I am so proud of myself, I didn't think I could stand in front of people and talk about anything but I can."*



### Writing

*"I am reminded I have stories inside me, stories people might want to hear."*



### Seasonal Feasts

*"The winter party was wonderful. It was the first time I have been able to enjoy the Christmas holidays since I came to the UK five years ago and that is because of the friends I have made here at MamaSuze. The food, music and gifts made me feel loved. I thank you so much for that."*

### Artwork

*"I have not done any painting since I was a child, it was so relaxing and I am very impressed with my bird. I will hang it at home to remind myself to be strong, I have come this far and I can make it to freedom."*



### Pastoral Care

*"Catherine is helpful and understanding. She is so concerned about the situation of the client."*



### Talking Circles

*"I always look forward to attending every Thursday; to talk and share my ideas and discuss my worries with the beautiful and lovely ladies."*



### Craniosacral Massage

*"I love to do this, it is so relaxing, I don't often get to relax in my life."*



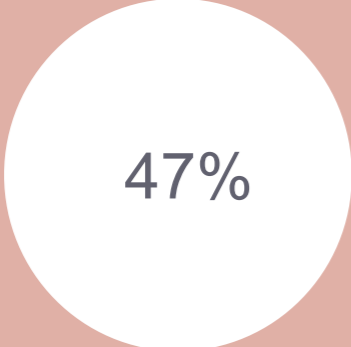
### Dancing

*"I like Michelle a lot. She makes me feel strong, healthy and good."*

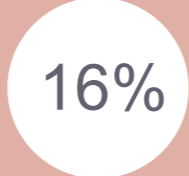


# WHO WE WORK WITH

MamaSuze has worked with women from 32 countries including: Afghanistan, Angola, Albania, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Congo, Dominican Republic, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia, Grenada, Guinea, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zambia...



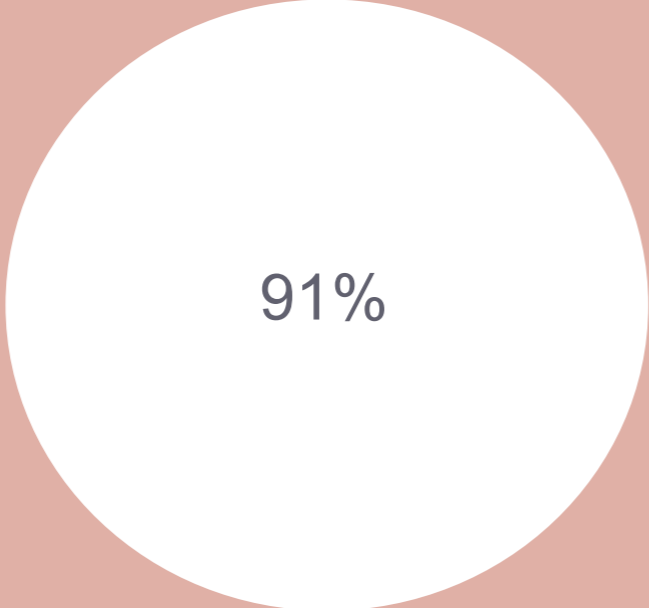
have survived domestic violence



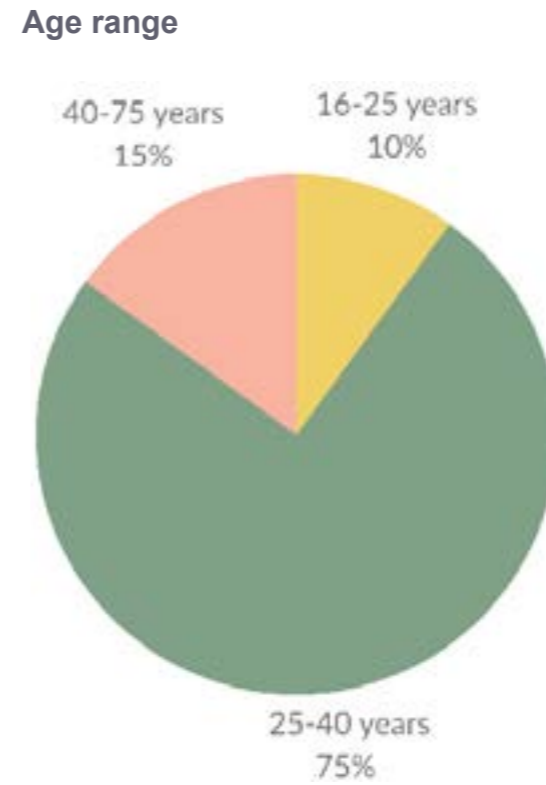
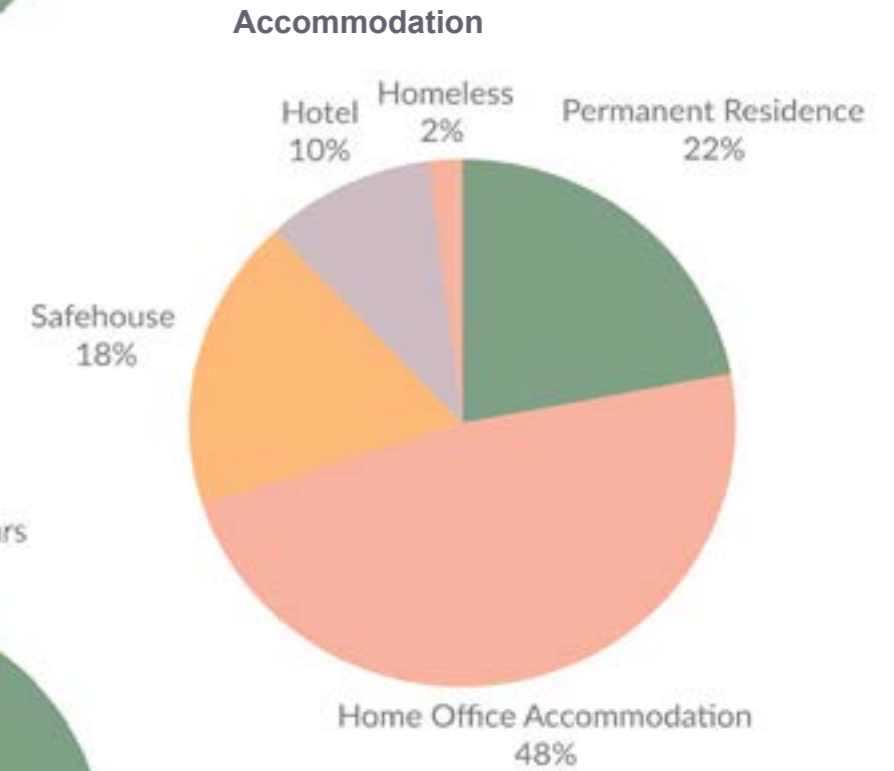
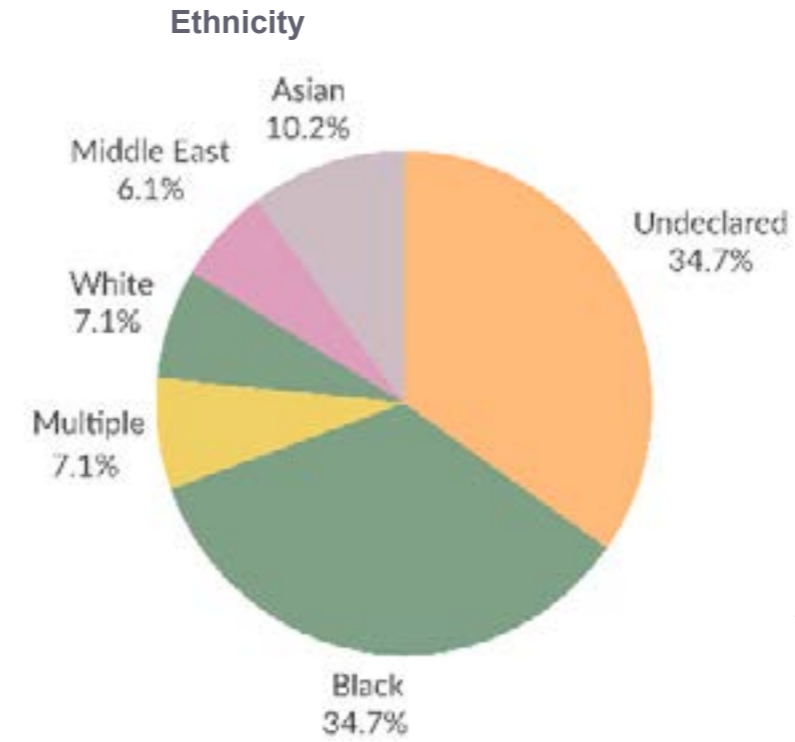
have survived FGM



have survived trafficking



have survived male violence



# OUTCOMES

MamaSuze is also a journey toward independence, which we measure through three key outcomes: a strong sense of identity, a positive motherhood experience, and a feeling of belonging to a growing community. Data from the past two years shows gradual improvement across each of these outcomes.

## IMPROVED SENSE OF IDENTITY



**91%** of women felt a stronger connection to their true selves.

*"I don't think I've been silly like this since I was a child, I feel I can let myself go with you all."*

**86%** of women reported more confidence to express themselves.

*"I'm not a very confident person so I wasn't going to come to this group but it was gentle and I slowly felt braver, thank you."*

**94%** of women with English as an Additional Language said they felt their English improved.

*"When I came here, I couldn't speak a word or understand any English but I am speaking English now and I am so happy about that."*

**73%** of women can now imagine a more positive future

*"I would like to get the right training in the UK. I worked as a junior nurse in Afghanistan. I am doing ESOL at the community centre at Entry Level 1, but I am doing Entry 2 in college and think I will start Level 3 in September."*

*"MamaSuze has reminded me who I was before my life was turned inside out, I now feel I can be that person again and start to dream of a more hopeful future for myself and my children."*

## MORE POSITIVE MOTHERHOOD

**86%** of women feel more able to play with their children after the session.

*"It is so good to have some respite from full-time parenting."*

**82%** of mothers felt their children was less shy.

*"I am a better parent when I have had a break and I feel valued and supported."*

**76%** of mothers felt their children had developed social skills and made friends.

*"I can't believe my child is happy in the crèche without me, this is the first time she has let me go, it makes me feel confident she will be fine at school in September."*





## A BIGGER COMMUNITY



**80%** of mothers have accessed up to three or more new groups and activities for their children

*"I got so much useful information from there - since I had my son."*

**64%** of women are more inclined to pursue college or volunteering opportunities.

*"I have just applied for a healthcare assistant role with the help of the MamaSuze team"*

**95%** of women reported having made new friendships

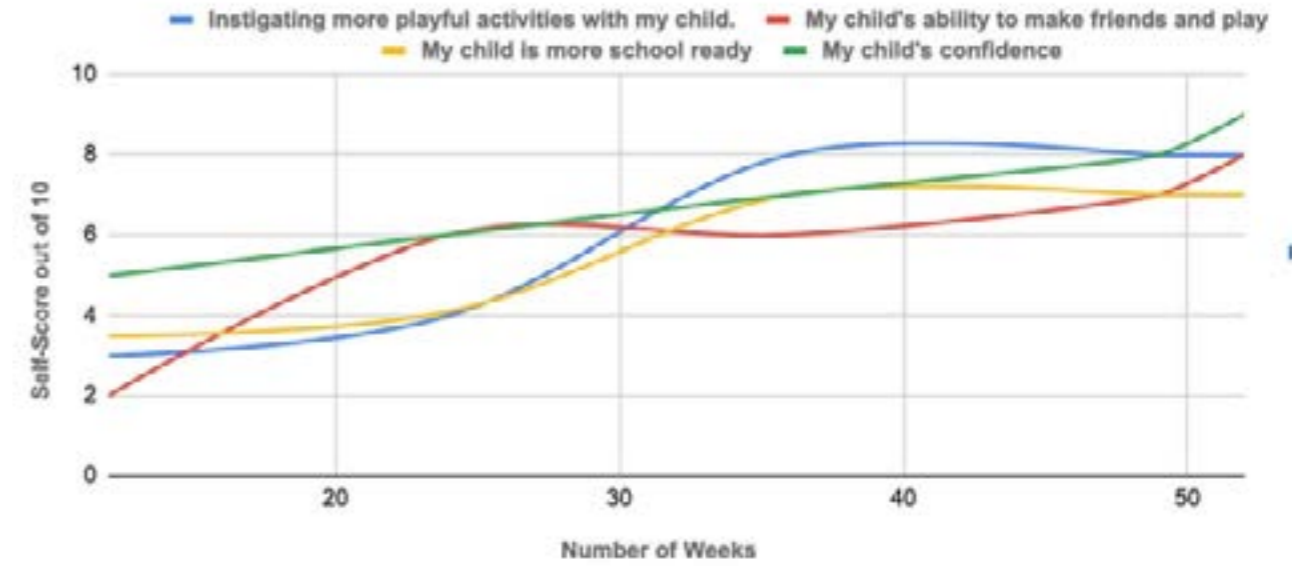
*"I didn't have friends in this country until MamaSuze, I couldn't trust anyone but now I can't wait to come to the sessions to catch up with my friends."*

**86%** of women reported that their loneliness had decreased

*"The RedCross gave me two tickets to Wimbledon and I am going to give one to my new friend. It will be good for her to have a day away from her problems and for me to have company."*



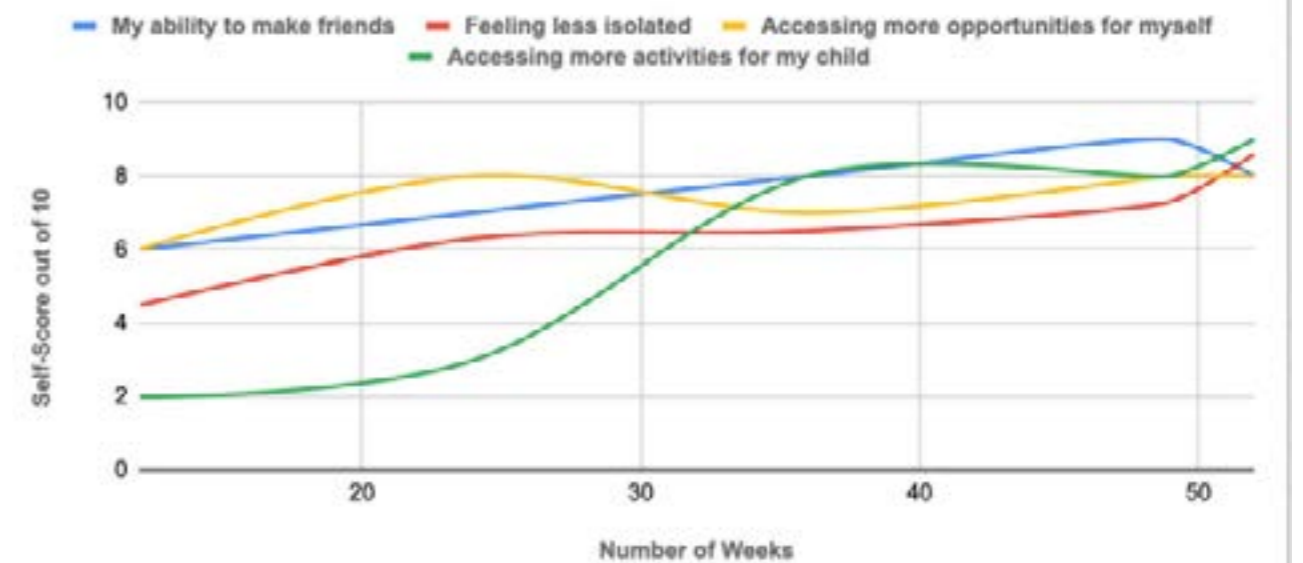
### More Positive Motherhood



### A Stronger Sense of Identity



### A Bigger Community



## AMINA'S STORY

### Finding myself, my voice and my hopes again.

Amina (aged 28) arrived in the UK in 2021 from Afghanistan, where she was a qualified nurse. In 2022, she and her little sister were invited to a Women's Day event where they met the directors of MamaSuze. This encounter marked the beginning of a transformative journey that significantly impacted Amina's sense of self, and future aspirations.

When she first joined MamaSuze, her English proficiency was minimal which made daily interactions and adapting to life in the UK extremely difficult. Through the support and activities at MamaSuze, Amina's English skills have improved.

Among the many activities offered at MamaSuze, dancing has become Amina's favourite. "Thursdays are very special, I love all the activities but I dance for the first time here and it's so enjoyable for me. I only dance here and I would love to dance more."

The most significant transformation for Amina has been her increase in confidence and

also self-esteem. "In 2021, I had such low confidence. I was very shy; it was very hard for me. But now I am happier. I am proud of myself - lots of new confidence. I can talk with new people and I am sure my future will be positive."

The friendships, positive experiences and memories have become a source of comfort during difficult times and had a lasting impact on her well-being. "I have made some good memories here. When I am sad about my people in Afghanistan, it helps to think about the dancing, painting, and the positive women in this group. That's why I don't miss any sessions; I want to attend every week. The ladies always make me happy and laugh."

Amina is determined to rebuild her career in the UK and give back to the country that welcomed her. She is currently studying ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) at the community centre and is progressing to higher levels. She recently applied to be a Healthcare assistant at UCLH and she hopes to work as a nurse in the NHS as soon as she can.



## CAROLINA'S STORY

### Becoming a braver, stronger mother.

Carolina (aged 29) moved to the UK from Nigeria in 2010. She received her papers and worked her way up to becoming a supervisor at a coffee shop. Despite suffering from endometriosis and high blood pressure, she became a mother a year ago.

After her partner left, Carolina described how "I didn't leave the house for 7-8 months. I was scared to go to the buses." MamaSuze played a crucial role in helping her regain her confidence. "It pushed me out of that and I gained the confidence to take the bus."

"I remember the first day, when I had to introduce myself to the group and I thought 'this is not me - I don't like talking.' But they just encouraged me and ever since then, I feel more confident to talk there and in other places too." She was able to make strong friendships which offered her companionship and advice. "I am an introvert and like to make friends but didn't know how. Now I have some really good friends, one who calls me every day and we talk."

Carolina's son, born prematurely, initially struggled in social settings, "I had to stay there all the time with him." With the gentle, supportive environment at MamaSuze, he gradually became more comfortable around other children, "once he saw other kids he settled down and became very attached to a particular crèche worker." MamaSuze also signposted Carolina towards managing her parenting challenges. "I learned about applying for child benefits. I have gained a lot of things information-wise." Carolina found joy and solace in the singing workshops - rediscovering a lifelong passion. "It's something I have always loved in my home country and now here."

Unlike other local groups, MamaSuze provided Carolina with activities and support tailored to her needs as a mother. "MamaSuze carries the mother and the kids unlike other groups. They always bring so many different things and we exercise, play games, and after a week of stress you feel relaxed. I know I have to travel from Ilford but it is worth it and the travel money is paid back to me, thank god."



# SHAZIA'S STORY

## Being part of a supportive community.

Shazia (aged 27) had a wonderful childhood in Pakistan. But seven years ago, she moved to the UK after marriage, only to find herself trapped in a highly abusive relationship with her husband's family.

She discovered MamaSuze through a friend who was living in safe accommodation with her. She found the group welcoming and warm, with lots of engaging activities, "all my stress just disappeared." This was in stark contrast to another support group, where the leader ignored participants, the group was disengaged, and the atmosphere cold. "I love spending time with Annabel. She does a lot of great activities and I have a fun time - all the activities are very good, very lovely."

Over the year, Shazia experienced many positive changes, the most significant of which has been the reduction of her isolation and the sense of belonging to a community. She met many women with similar experiences, which helped her feel less alone in her struggles. Listening to other women's stories gave her courage and perspective. She realised that

many had endured hardships from a young age, which, in turn, made her own challenges feel more manageable. "Every woman has a different story. When you are alone and struggling you think your case is different to others and it's hard. But you go and listen to all of their stories and it gives you so much courage."

Shazia also noticed significant growth in her self-confidence and improvement in her English language skills. She went from being shy and unable to speak up, to confidently interacting with others both inside and outside the group. She attributes this growth to the community support found in this group. "I learned a lot of this when I started this group. I didn't have confidence when I joined because of my past experiences. But when I joined I met a lot of ladies and grew in English and self-confidence. I am not shy to talk with people or ask questions now..."

In addition to emotional support, Shazia has valued the practical assistance, especially in the ongoing custody battle with her husband's family. The facilitators have offered help with letters and referrals which has been vital. "This is a very big thing when you are going through a hard time. You feel better with this support."

As her time with MamaSuze nears its end, Shazia reflects on the profound impact the community and facilitators have had on her life. "Annabel, Susanna and Catherine, they are all amazing. All the women are so strong, they listen to you, they give you confidence. We only have three more sessions left but all my life I will be missing this group."



# OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH HACKNEY MIGRANT CENTRE

**For 17 years, the Hackney Migrant Centre has been providing vital immigration, welfare and health advice to migrants in the community. We facilitate monthly creative workshops for their service users.**

"When we began this project we were excited to begin a partnership but a little nervous as hundreds of people come through HMC's doors for legal support. How could we engage them in our workshops?"

We were astounded by the impact this project had. Every session we were asked two or three times when we would be returning and if we could come more often. Many participants returned every month. We are delighted with the projects success."

*Annabel Rook, Director, MamaSuze*

"The people I have worked with at Hackney Migrant Centre have taught me so much about what a creative community is. They truly share the space, their practical knowledge and collaborate with each other as if we all grew up on the same street."

*Sarah, Sewing Workshop Facilitator*

"Our sessions have enabled people to find joy and relaxation in what may be a stressful experience of waiting for legal advice. During a drama workshop a participant commented that being with other people brings them such joy. Singing together is a huge release for the sympathetic nervous system, where we store our trauma. While singing, 'I can see clearly now', one participant began to cry. This sparked a beautiful moment of other participants soothing them and holding their hand as they sang."

Our arts and crafts sessions affected people in a different way, these spaces felt extremely relaxed, they encouraged conversation and focus. There was an intergenerational aspect to them, young people and old, working gently together. Mothers with young children were also able to have a break, as their little ones could join the craft table while they were receiving advice.

The sessions at Hackney Migrant Centre have been a joyful, community building experience. I have felt extremely grateful to be part of such a beautiful project."

*Frankie, Trainee Facilitator*

"It's quite incredible how uplifting these sessions are, our service users are not only making new friends but are also learning new skills and becoming more confident in their abilities. One of the returning participants requested that we have MamaSuze sessions every day."

*Charlotte Buckley, Director, HMC*



"Sometimes my stitches are good. Sometimes they are bad. Like this life really..."

*Sewing workshop participant*



## OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Going forward, our goals are to:

**1. Make MamaSuze a more sustainable CIC by focusing on fundraising for:**

- A Manager to support administration, allowing the directors to focus more on strategic tasks such as creative workshop planning, fundraising, and outreach.
- Training and employing more facilitators, particularly those from the Global South with lived experiences of gender-based violence and displacement.
- Develop our advisory board with women from the community.
- Renting office space for two days a week.

**2. Expand our reach to more displaced women and children, particularly among the 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers currently in the UK.**

**3. Strengthen partnerships with other London organisations, as we are currently doing with Hackney Migrant Centre.**

**4. Encourage and facilitate more advocacy and campaigning for our participants, ensuring their voices are heard.**

**5. Evaluate next steps** including whether and when to transition to becoming a charity or Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

**6. Develop more longer term** creative projects with our artists.



# OUR TEAM



# THANK YOU

To all our FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS, to our amazing partnership organisations, to our funders and private donors for believing in us.

Also a big thank you to Islington council and the wonderful team at Highbury Roundhouse, who are so welcoming to us every week.

But mostly we want to say thank you to our participants, the women who come to our groups, who make our community strong and show us the true meaning of courage and resilience.

We're very proud of what we have achieved so far and very excited about our future plans.

*Annabel Rook & Catherine Milne  
Co-Directors and Founders.*

# OUR SUPPORTERS



*Report compiled by: MamaSuze & Mita Pujara Associates  
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