

CASE STUDY: YWCA Scotland: overcoming structural barriers

Empowering Pathways Programme for Women (EPW)

Structural barriers arise due to the ways things are organised, norms and practices which are an accepted part of life; as well as the patterns of inequality in a society to do with income, employment, education and so on. These patterns favour some groups of people more than others. This case refers to barriers affecting a women applying for asylum.



Being equipped with relevant knowledge and understanding of the system is key to overcoming structural barriers

R has complex issues and experiences multiple obstacles (including long-term health problems) to the building and re-building of her life. When R first participated in one of our EPW outreach programmes she was new to both Saheliya and YWCA Scotland. She was also relatively new to the Glasgow area. R had fled from a domestic violence situation and persecution relating to her LGBTQ status. This was a very difficult, emotional and mentally stressful time for her.

R said that she had been given the support and learning to fully understand that the gender-based violence she had experienced was not her fault, she felt stronger, and in her words 'more empowered' to stand up for herself. R stated that the Human Rights aspect of the Empowering Women module had been a great source of support to her as she understood not only her human rights, but also the conversations and statements that were presented to the judge regarding her claim.

She said she spoke with confidence and certainty at the hearing - something she said she would not have been able to do 'a few weeks ago'. I am very happy to say that she was granted her leave to remain in the UK. Since then, R has already gone on to volunteer with her local Councillor, she is now a member of the SNP now and is registered as a delegate and gave a motivational talk to police, political representatives and council members in Falkirk. She has successfully took up a Board position with an NHS department. She has spoken in a Parliamentary committee meeting as a witness for BAME LGBTQ concerns and is looking forward to starting her new life in Scotland.

R was in the process of seeking legal asylum, and at the point I met her she was working with her legal representative to collate and gather evidence to support her claim in court. Whilst we were working together she was issued a date to attend court for her asylum claim to be heard. Obviously she was extremely nervous, but thankfully her claim was granted R was ecstatic to share this news with the group, and she mentioned that much of the EPW learning supported her through the ordeal.

R said that due to participating in our programme she understood what the legal representatives meant when they used terms such as 'absolute right' and 'qualified right'. She said that having this knowledge empowered her to understand the proceedings and what was being argued for/against and when she had to address the judge she used listening and "hear me" skills that we had discussed as part of the programme. She found her voice!