



Cornish+Grey
Helping organisations
achieve their social purpose

Follow up research with clients who regularised their status between 2017 and 2019

**For Lewisham Refugee Migrant
Network**

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Executive Summary

1. Background and approach

Cornish and Grey worked with LRMN to design a two stage approach for evaluating the longer term outcomes for clients supported to regularise their immigration status. A telephone survey was conducted in Dec 2021 and in depth interviews in February 2022, before the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

2. Telephone survey

37 people were successfully contacted – including ten who subsequently asked for follow up support with LRMN. 24 (65%) had secured Limited Leave to Remain – one of these identified as an ‘overstayer’ and did not complete the questionnaire. 83% of the remaining (19 of the 23) still worried about their legal status at least some of the time and 39% (9 of the 23) worried about their legal status ‘most of the time’. In the context of the very temporary nature of limited leave to remain (only 2.5 years), this is, perhaps, not surprising. In total, ten people asked for follow up support with LRMN and some of these were at the end of, or past the time limit of their current leave – so in effect, did not have regularised status.

3. Case studies

Four women were interviewed in-depth. All were still experiencing some level of uncertainty - to a greater or lesser extent - over their future in the UK. Three were at the end of their current limited leave to remain and had been in touch with LRMN since the telephone interview. Two of these had submitted another application and were waiting for news of the outcome. The third had been told that the list was full and that LRMN was unable to take on any more clients.

4. Funding context

The different experiences of the women in the case studies illustrate some of the challenges for LRMN within a funding context which focuses on supporting people in crisis (rather than on prevention) and on short rather than longer term funding. LRMN’s current funding for immigration is mainly focused on helping rough sleepers; at least four projects are funded by the GLA. The advice sector is experiencing massive demand for immigration support and there is a shortage of immigration advisers.

5. Findings and recommendations

The key findings and recommendations in relation to the aims of the research are summarised in the table below.

| Key aim | Key findings and recommendations |
|---|--|
| To design and pilot a tool for longer term follow up that LRMN can continue to use in the future. | We would suggest that pre/post outcomes measurement focuses on clients at the start and at the end of their support with LRMN. Longer term follow up evaluation (conducted at some point after initial LRMN support is finished) is only appropriate when funding is in place to offer support again to those that need it, or if it focuses only on those who have secured indefinite leave to remain. |
| To explore the impact that LRMN services have had on clients' lives in the longer term. | While the survey demonstrates short term benefits to securing limited leave to remain (including access to healthcare, digital and financial inclusion), the case studies illustrate the precarious nature of this impact – and suggest that sustaining this impact in the long term involves supporting people all the way to the end of their journey to settled status. |
| To enable LRMN to learn about the effectiveness of its work and areas for improvement. | The case studies in this research illustrate the consequences of tough decisions made when funding is limited and capacity is stretched. Insight into the risk many people experience of becoming undocumented along their ten year journey, and the knock on effects of that (for education and employment, for example) will enable LRMN to consider how it prioritises clients, how it communicates the limitations of its support, and how it can improve signposting to those it is unable to help. |
| To support communication of LRMN's impact for current and future funders and partners. | This research illustrates to funders that immigration support requires long term funding in order to sustain the outcomes for people along their journey to settled status – and thereby realise the social value of their investment. It illustrates some of the costs built into the system through the demands of the ten year route to settled status – both economic (through the cost of repeat applications) and social (through the risks of becoming undocumented). These findings strongly support the recommendation of the recent Justice Together report ¹ that the Home Office 'either reduce it to a five year route or grant five year periods of leave (or both) to reduce the demands on applicants, the advice sector and the Home Office itself'. |

¹ Justice Together (2021) *A Huge Gulf: Demand and Supply for Immigration Legal Advice in London*

1. Background and Research Objectives

Through Lloyds Bank Foundation Enhance support, Cornish and Grey worked with LRMN to design a two stage approach for evaluating the longer term outcomes for clients supported to regularise their immigration status.

More specifically, the aims of this evaluation were to:

- To design and pilot a tool for longer term follow up that LRMN can continue to use in the future.
- To explore the impact that LRMN services have had on clients' lives in the longer term.
- To enable LRMN to learn about the effectiveness of its work and areas for improvement.
- To support communication of impact for current and future funders and partners.

The evaluation was conducted in two stages:

- A telephone survey to pilot questions for long term follow up; and to identify potential participants for in-depth interviews.
- In depth qualitative interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the beneficiary journey through LRMN services, the role LRMN plays in supporting longer term outcomes, and to identify any gaps or areas for improvement.

2. Stage 1: Telephone survey

2.1 Methodology and sample

Five LRMN volunteers conducted follow up calls with people who successfully secured immigration status with the support of LRMN between 2017 and 2019. If at any stage of the call the client seemed upset or distressed or in need of further support, their details were passed to LRMN for follow up. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would be interested in taking part in an in-depth interview with a researcher – over telephone or Zoom.

Volunteers had most success getting through when they rang using an app which showed the call as coming from the LRMN office. 37 people were successfully contacted, of whom:

- 24 (65%) had secured Limited Leave to Remain – one of these identified as an 'overstayer' and did not complete the questionnaire.
- Five had secured Indefinite Leave to Remain.
- Five had secured British Citizenship - three of these mentioned that they had secured citizenship status in 2021 rather than the year on the LRMN records – presumably because they had been supported by LRMN through more than one application.
- One with refugee status/humanitarian protection.
- One with an EEA residence card.

- One whose status was unknown – they were waiting for the outcome of their application for indefinite leave to remain.

34 of the interviews were fully completed. The demographics of 32 of these respondents were as follows (demographic data had not been filled in for two of the respondents):

- Five men, 27 women
- Seven - 18 to 34 years, 23 - 35 to 59 years, and two – 60 to 74 years
- 18 Black African, 3 Asian, 6 Caribbean, 2 Hispanic/Latino, 2 Arab, 1 other
- 10 Nigerian, 3 Cameroonian, 4 Ghanaian, 4 Jamaican, 1 Ugandan, 10 other

88% (30/34) were still living in London, including 10 in Lewisham and 6 in Greenwich.

2.2 Summary of findings

| | Number | % (small sample size) |
|--|--------|-----------------------|
| Registered with GP | 34 | 100% |
| Access to internet at home | 32 | 94% |
| Access to computer/laptop/tablet at home | 30 | 88% |
| Receipt of benefits | 29 | 85% |
| Secure housing situation | 23 | 70% |
| In paid employment FT/PT | 19 | 56% |
| Education | 10 | 29% |
| Activities in the community | 9 | 27% |

(NB these figures are slightly different to those reported in the earlier Power Point presentation which included two incomplete interviews ie. people who answered 'rather not say' in answer to all of these questions and then withdrew from the interview.)

2.3 Building a life in the UK

In relation to the extent to which they felt they'd been able to build a life for themselves in the UK, all 34 respondents completing the survey were registered with a GP, 32 (94%) had access to the internet at home, and 30 (88%) had access to a computer/laptop/tablet at home. 29 (85%) were in receipt of benefits, and 23 (70%) described their housing situation as secure – though some said that their housing was not suitable e.g. to meet the needs of a disabled child or size of family. One woman was suffering back pain from sharing a bed with her children.

2.4 Employment

Nineteen (56%) were in part time or full time employment. This included a man who said he had got a job in October as a Loads and Aeroelastic Engineers with Stirling Dynamics having graduated from university with a first class honours degree. Although the questionnaire did not ask about voluntary work specifically, one further person mentioned to the interviewer that they volunteered at a food bank. In the subsequent depth interviews, another person mentioned that they had volunteered while waiting for regularisation of their status suggesting that it would be useful to include a question specifically about voluntary work next time.

2.5 Education

Ten (29%) were in full or part time education. This included a person who mentioned that she was studying English and Maths at London SE college in Greenwich while working part time. Answers to the open ended questions suggested that a significant proportion of the remainder were keen to have further education and training but were finding their limited leave status a barrier. One mentioned that she could not afford to pay non-UK fees, and a couple mentioned being interested in university courses (which would exceed the length of their current leave). All those mentioning the type of careers they wished to pursue through further education and training were looking to pursue careers in caring professions eg. childcare, nursing and social work.

2.6 Activities in the community

Nine (27%) took part in creative or sports activities in their community. Barriers to take up included: poor physical health (one mentioned that she had sickle cell anaemia, another that he had problems with his legs), absence of childcare and Covid. We would recommend that any subsequent follow up survey includes a question about caring responsibilities (for a child, older or disabled person) since it would be useful to know for funding applications how many people are in informal unpaid carer roles as well as formal volunteer roles.

2.7 Attitudes to life in the UK

In relation to how they felt about their life in the UK, just two said they did **not** feel safe and three (the same two plus one more) said they did **not** feel part of the community. For one, not feeling safe was very much tied up with her housing situation being unsuitable for her two young children – she did not mention any safety concerns in the neighbourhood.

2.8 Current immigration status and concerns

The stage 1 telephone interview did not ask people about their current immigration status specifically, since LRMN's concern was that this would be too intrusive/undermine trust. However, given that limited leave to remain is only 2.5 years and the follow up calls were with people between two and four years after LRMN records show that they had been supported, it is not surprising that 83% (19 of the 23) people contacted whose records stated that they had secured limited leave to remain still worried about their legal status at least some of the time and 39% (9 of the 23) worried about their legal status 'most of the time'. (As noted in section 1.1 above, the 24th person contacted pulled out of the interview). Six of the 23 people spontaneously mentioned that they were in the process of renewing their status/re-applying and a number were keen to have LRMN's help either to re-apply or to help them navigate other issues related to their paperwork – eg. one woman said she had reapplied online in January 2021 and the Home Office said they had no record of her application, and another who said she'd reapplied but was having problems with convincing her employer of her right to work because her previous leave to remain had expired in December 2020. In total, ten asked for follow up support with LRMN and were later contacted by the LRMN admin team to discuss further support. This included people who were looking for advice/support around housing, benefits, education or access to the

Windrush compensation scheme – as well as people looking specifically for immigration advice.

3. Stage 2: In depth qualitative interviews

3.1 Methodology and sample

Twenty of the 37 people contacted at stage 1 agreed to an in-depth follow up interview. The initial plan was to use the responses to stage 1 to select a representative sample with a spread of gender, age, employment status, nationality and ethnic group.

However, while 18 out of the 20 people agreeing to an in-depth interview had said that they were happy to be interviewed in English and had shared an email address, only four people responded to an email inviting them to take part in the research at a time convenient to them.

These four respondents were:

- All women – with a spread of nationality (Cameroonian, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Jamaican) and ethnic group (three Black African and one Caribbean).
- Three whose records stated they had limited leave to remain and one whose records stated she had indefinite leave to remain – all from 2019.
- Two in their late 20s and two in their late 40s.
- Three with children under 18 and one whose son had just turned 18.

None of these respondents thought they had used LRMN's services outside immigration advice, although a couple did mention having received emergency supplies of food and baby clothes/nappies. One of the interviews was conducted over Zoom and three were conducted on the telephone.

3.2 Overview of immigration status and relationship with LRMN

These four case studies illustrate the challenges of conducting follow up interviews with people with temporary immigration status when there is no funding in place to guarantee support to the end of their journey to settled status.

All four women were still experiencing some level of uncertainty – to a greater or lesser extent - over their future in the UK. Three were at the end of their current limited leave to remain – so only one, in effect, was living with regularised status. She had secured indefinite leave to remain in 2019 so had until 2024 to pass her Life in the UK test and apply for citizenship – though she was intending to do so later this year, and hoped to have LRMN's support again to do so (see case study 1).

All three of the women at the end of their limited leave to remain had been in touch with LRMN since the telephone interview in December. Two of these, both in their late 20s with small children, had since submitted another application and were waiting for news of the outcome (see case studies 2 and 3). The third, a woman in her late 40s, had been told that the list was full and that LRMN couldn't take on any more clients (see case study 4) – and not surprisingly, was extremely angry and upset.

In the context of the very temporary nature of limited leave to remain (only 2.5 years), this research has demonstrated that long term follow up calls will include a good proportion of people who are at the end of or past the time limit of their current leave so the primary purpose of follow up calls needs to be to offer continued service user support not to gather feedback on services – and suggests that LRMN should not conduct any more follow up calls until it has the funding in place to be able to offer people the continued support they feel they need. The telephone survey had a good success rate getting through to clients because they used an app showing the call as coming from the LRMN office and it is likely that many former clients answered because they were in need of follow up support.

3.3 Case studies

Case study 1 – indefinite leave to remain

The woman who had secured indefinite leave to remain was in her late 40s with two daughters aged 8 and 25. She was referred to LRMN in 2019 from Project 17 (where she had been referred from Enfield Council Homeless team). She had been in the UK since 2012 and her situation was unsafe. She and her daughters were experiencing domestic violence and her husband was using her insecure status as a threat:

“My husband called the Home Office and withdraw the marriage settlement... He says he’s going to pull the carpet from underneath our feet”.

“We were stuck and we didn't know where to turn. Just imagine having a biometric card, no recourse to public funds, no money coming in. We can't feed our self. I can't feed my children. We are going through abuse. And it was horrible.”

When she was referred to LRMN they ‘took the matter in hand’. She felt that they really understood her situation and stepped in to help. She described LRMN staff as ‘professional’ and ‘warm’, always treating her with respect and being clear and open in their communications.

“I think they are professional and they work up to the highest standard. They tick all the criteria that's required. They help you. They support you. They call you. As soon as they hear anything or get any information, they let you in on it. It's really good. Really, really good.”

“They're helpful and they're there for the people. They're not for themselves. They don't have pride. They sit with you one to one, they talk to you, if there's anything that you're going through they say to let them know if they in any way they can support you more. I've recommended a few people to them!”

“They treat everyone equally. Whether you're black, you're white, your poor, your rich. They do. They treat everyone equal. They don't specialise. And that's what I love about them.”

She was very emotional about the experience of securing indefinite leave to remain for her and her daughter in 2019 – and clearly felt very grateful to LRMN staff for their role in helping them secure it.

“Oh my God. When we opened the envelope: ‘Your application has been received and it has been successful and you both have indefinite leave to remain’. Oh my God! I was so happy. My daughter was overwhelmed because she started crying.. It was close to Christmas and that I would never forget. It was 2019 when we receive it. That was a Christmas gift for us.”

She said that having settled status had made a huge difference to her life and the life of her daughter. Before, she had been unable to get a paid job and could only volunteer (she had a volunteer role at a local college). Having settled status had opened up opportunities for her and her daughter. She was now studying for exams online from home (level 3/GCSE equivalent) in order to qualify as a teaching assistant. She was receiving the training from Twin Employment and Training, accessed through the job centre. She hoped eventually to get a job at a children’s nursery.

“Oh my God, you can have every opportunity, you can go on training, you can do your job, you can happily work getting the wages, and you don't have to be worried looking over your shoulder about immigration - to be honest with you, God, that was very stressful. It took a lot of us mentally and emotionally... Now my daughter can have a really good life.”

Case study 2 – in process of applying for limited leave to remain through LRMN

One of the women who had recently submitted a second application through LRMN had initially been referred in 2018 from Citizens Advice Bureau. She has sickle cell disease, was pregnant, had recently lost her dad (a retired pharmacist) and – despite being in the UK since she was a small child (arriving in 2005) - had no recourse to public funds and was in severe financial difficulty. LRMN made her feel looked after. In particular, she felt that Sylvia was ‘there for her’ throughout the whole process.

“When I called, I was like ‘What do I do?!’ And the lady I spoke to said, just come in, just sit down, let’s talk... She was so supportive, she gave so much advice.”

“The hospitality, as well. I remember when I first came into the office, I was given pampers and wipes which I was not expecting at all. For me, hospitality goes a long way. It’s not just about the services. It’s making you feel included in something.”

Securing limited leave to remain the first time made a huge difference to her. Most significantly, she was able to register at university (she is in her second year at UEL studying for a Social Work course) and receive a Personal Independence Payment (PIP). She has good internet access which means she can access her course online.

“What difference has it made?! I’m mentally, emotionally, physically much, much better. When I was pregnant, literally, my thought was just constantly, how am I going

to feed my child? Since 2018 and now, I'm in a much much better place and I really wouldn't have done it without LRMN."

She and her mum have just (since the initial follow up telephone call) applied with LRMN's help again. She found the application process more straightforward this time because she was familiar with the process and Sylvia had told her all the documents she needed to bring – so it just took a couple of hours in total. She thinks it's important that LRMN support people along their full journey, if they can.

"I think sometimes (support services) kind of penalise people for doing too well: 'Oh, you know, you're on your feet now you're doing too well', but that person might actually need help. That's exactly what happened to me because I was OK, getting on my day today, when it came to paying for it, I literally only have student maintainers loan coming in and I'm privately renting as well. So it's like, okay, how am I supposed to pay for this? And I have a three year old to look after. The more you get up the ladder in life, the more problems and financial struggles, so I think, if you can, it is important to be there for the first time, but if it's possible and if there's the space, if you can help out someone that needs the services again..."

LRMN's on-going support has increased her connection and loyalty to the charity – and has been part of her inspiration for studying social work.

"I literally always recommend LRMN – and say if they're not able to help. They'll be able to point you in the right direction."

(When did your inspiration for studying for social work come from?)

"Honestly speaking, I think it kind of had something to do with me getting help from you guys. I've always kind of had this thought of going to uni and becoming a social worker, but I think after I went through you guys and I got helped, I thought, do you know what, I need to help other people."

Case study 3 – in process of applying for limited leave to remain through LRMN

The other woman who had recently submitted a second application through LRMN said that this was her third application in total. A family member had helped with her very first application (about 2014), but when she came to apply again in 2018, this person was no longer around, having since moved abroad. She had tried to apply by herself but couldn't 'because I don't know anything about immigration or law' and 'I couldn't afford it'. She also said that she was £10k in debt – and it sounded like this was a debit incurred during that first application process.

When asked about her situation the first time she approached LRMN for support in 2018 she got very emotional – explaining that she and her children were going hungry and she was unable to pay her rent.

"The person who took care of me was Sylvia. I won't forget Sylvia. I was going through hell, if I can say that, because I had a newborn, my daughter... (she breaks down and carries on through tears). Sorry. We couldn't eat, we couldn't pay the

rent... even my son he didn't have clothes to wear. Then Sylvia said we'll give you some food and clothes to go home. She said that it's okay - it's going to be okay. She was so nice... My income is £500, the rent is £950. So I was like, what can I do with this income? 500. I can't pay the rent or nothing. (She recovers slightly). Anyway, it's now in the past."

She said that with LRMN's help to secure her status in 2019, 'everything started going well for me'. She started to receive Universal Credit, was able to pay the rent and get her son into a nursery place near her work – which in turn, and with her daughter going to a breakfast club, meant she was able to work more hours, earn more money, and pay off more of her debt each month.

She is currently working as a health care assistant in a care home (for rehabilitation) and studying for NVQ level 3 which she completes in April. She has previously applied to Greenwich university to do nursing but has been told she needs indefinite leave to remain. She said that the repeat applications were very stressful because the time between them was so short. Her limited leave to remain had run out in August 2021. When she had gone back to LRMN she said that there was a short waiting list but she didn't have to wait too long. Her employer is keen to have the paperwork sorted but is being reasonably understanding about the wait as she is a long term employee - she has been working there for 5 years. She is looking forward to the time she can apply for indefinite leave to remain.

"Maybe next time I will be able to apply for indefinite leave to remain. I will be happy to be honest because it's very stressful,. Two and a half years is nothing."

Case study 4 – in process of applying for indefinite leave to remain without LRMN

The woman (late 40s) with limited leave to remain who had been told by LRMN that the list was full and that they couldn't take on any more clients felt extremely let down. LRMN had helped her to apply for limited leave to remain in 2015 and 2019 – and she said that her experience on both these previous occasions had been extremely positive. She was full of praise for Andrew Jordan, in particular, who she said had gone 'the extra mile'. Her second application had been straightforward, only taking an hour or two because she was already in the system. She was upset and angry that LRMN had not been able to support her along the full journey – particularly when it felt like the final hurdle and she was an existing client. She blamed 'new management' and said that she did not want anything to do with LRMN again and would not recommend them to others in the future.

"I was so upset with them... She just told me, that they are fully over booked and they are not taking new people. And I said to them, I'm not a new client, it's just a renewal... If this is the way she works, it's really bad because it's just a renewal, it's not a fresh application. I was on the family route, I've got two British children. So it was left for them to do the last bit for me. It was just something straightforward, they just have to help out with the online application that was it. And then they decided not to do that. Why they did that, I don't know."

She said that she had a lot to cope with, caring for a son with severe disabilities who had just turned 18 – and had turned to a friend for support instead. She had just submitted the application for indefinite leave to remain to the Home Office and was waiting anxiously for the outcome since the decision would be life changing.

“With the indefinite (leave to remain), I’ll have come to a closed chapter. I can move on. Life becomes very easy for me. Life becomes extremely good for me.”

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the context of the very temporary nature of limited leave to remain (only 2.5 years), this research has demonstrated that long term follow up calls will include people who are at the end of, or past the time limit of their current leave. These people will be living with deep uncertainty rather than in the temporary comfort of a more regularised status and are likely to be looking for support with a new application. Unless LRMN is able to offer people the support they feel they need, as one of these interviews shows, there is a danger that they will have their trust in, and goodwill towards LRMN, completely undermined.

On the basis of this research, we would say that LRMN and its funders have a duty of care to consider what the support pathway for people using its immigration service looks like in the longer term - and how this can best be managed and communicated to clients. Any follow up with people who secured leave to remain for less than 3 years should be centred on the needs of the user, not on the needs of LRMN or its funders - and we would not recommend conducting any more follow up calls to people whose leave to remain is likely to have come or be coming to an end unless LRMN is in a position to offer follow up support.

We would suggest that there is a strong argument for looking for ways to support people through subsequent applications to sustain the benefits of the initial support/first application. Two of the respondents here suggested that a repeat application should be less costly than a first application and without knowing the details of LRMN’s operational and funding model, this makes intuitive sense to us.