

Annual Report 2017



CARAS

supporting diversity
challenging adversity

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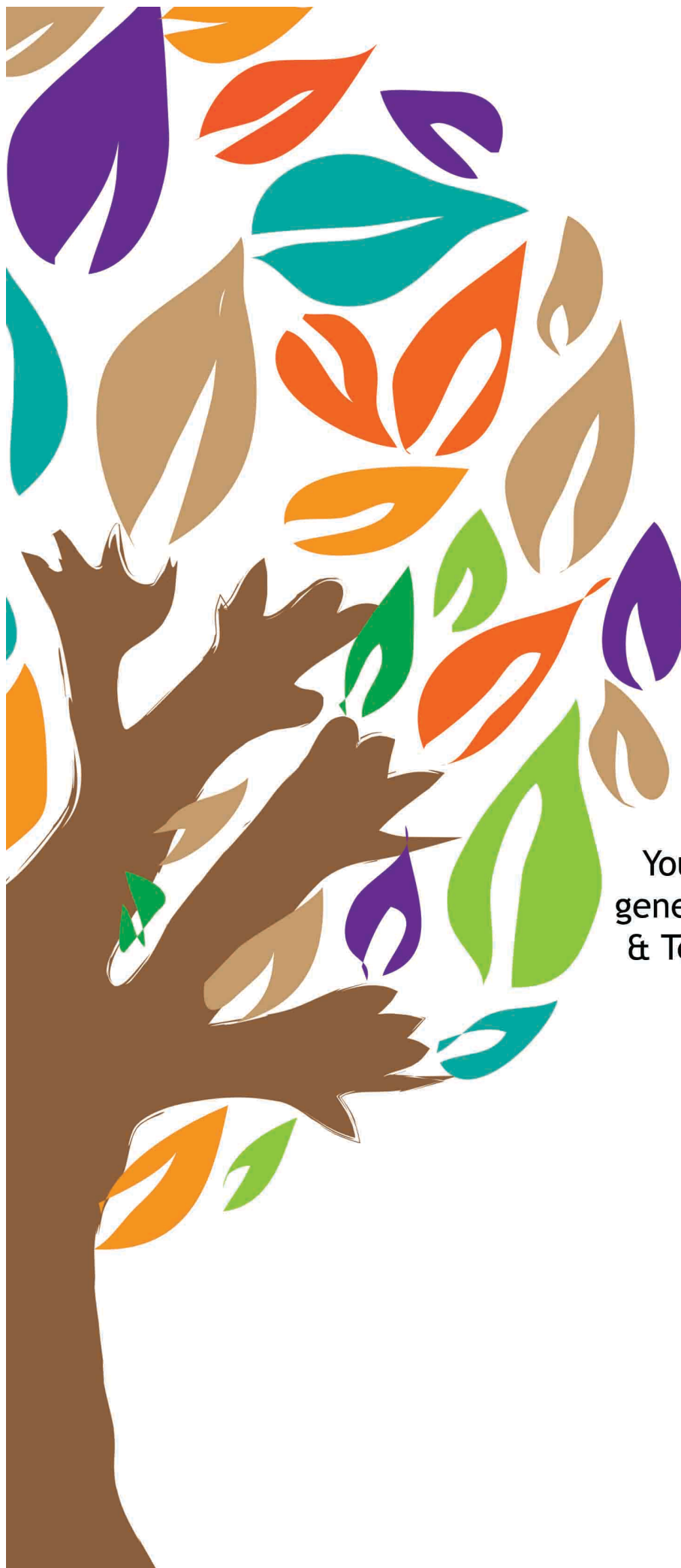
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Charity Name:

Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Community Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers is a registered charity and a private limited company.

Registered Company Number:

6462487 (memorandum and articles of association incorporated on 3rd January 2008; updated by special resolution 9th March 2016).

Registered Charity Number:

1124376 (registered on 6th June 2008)

Registered and Principle Office:

25, Blakenham Road, Tooting, London, SW17 8NE

Charity Overview

CARAS is a local charity working with refugees and asylum seekers in south west London. We work holistically, offering a range of activities to support people to rebuild their lives, gain control of information which affect them, and take steps towards a positive future here in London.

Over the last year CARAS has worked with 315 individuals, from 18 countries and with ages ranging from new-born to 64. We strive to remain welcoming, friendly, and above all to be a place of safety for all who come through our doors.

Objects

- 1.** To preserve and protect the physical and mental health of those seeking asylum and those granted refugee status and their dependants.
- 2.** The provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life of those persons who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances.
- 3.** To advance the education of those seeking asylum and those granted refugee status and their dependants in need thereof so as to advance them in life and assist them to adapt within a new community.
- 4.** To advance the education of the public in general about the issues relating to refugees and those seeking asylum.

The year in numbers...

315
refugees
& asylum
seekers

149 volunteers

113 UCAS

12 immigration
drop-ins, supporting
68 young people
to understand
their immigration
status

58 young people
benefitting from
mental health,
sexual health and
health workshops

100%
of participants
reporting a sense of
empowerment when
sharing their
experiences with
student doctors and
social workers

20 care leavers attending **6**
weeks of cooking workshops,
in preparation for living independently

12 hours per week
of support for
unaccompanied
asylum seeking
children

98 meals
cooked
at group activities

A Message From The Chair

As the current Chair at CARAS, I'm extremely proud of our accomplishments in the last year. We had a large number of changes to key personnel during the year, but continued our commitment to delivering services to our beneficiaries while strengthening and growing our organization.

The Board of Trustees, Managing Director and Staff have all played key roles in strengthening the key areas where we had the greatest needs. Some of the major accomplishments that I am most proud of are:

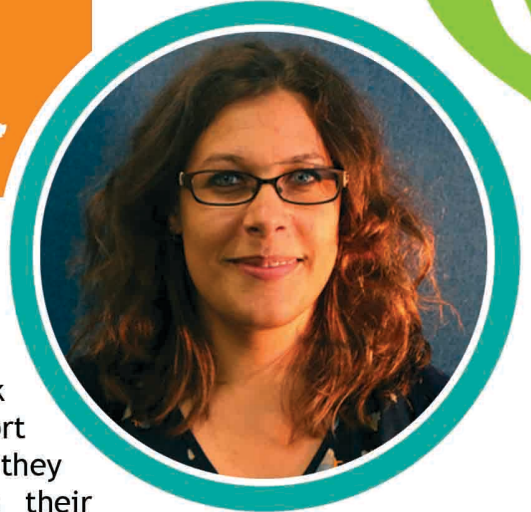
- Expansion of our fundraising efforts to give our organization additional flexibility
- Strengthening our board through the recruitment of a Fundraising Trustee and a new Secretary and Treasurer
- Developing existing monitoring and evaluation practices and framework for our work
- Upgrading our entire IT and Data management systems
- Expanding staff hours spent on support roles such as finances
- Creating an organizational structure and board oversight through the creation of various subcommittees

Having achieved all these goals we are in a strong position to plan strategically, deliver efficient and quality services to our beneficiaries, and expand our outreach into our community.



A Message From The Managing Director

CARAS is a community- it's right there in our name and is what everyone talks about when they talk about coming here. I have heard volunteers talk of the friendships they have made here, the support they feel they get, and pride in the difference they know they make by playing an active role in their community; I have seen young people's feedback which talks about what they learn and what they need but also always references their new friends, the kindness that they experience here, and how it feels to be part of the CARAS family; and I know what it feels like as a staff member to come to work in a place that actively strives to work in partnership with our beneficiaries, supporting them to reach their own goals and striving to improve the systems that can be so difficult to navigate.



We also know that we are making a difference-it's not just a friendly place to be, we can see the change taking in place in people from week to week and we can track this through various measures. For example, we know that in the last year, we saw over 300 refugees and asylum seekers including 113 of some of the most vulnerable children. We know that we helped 19 to get school or college places; that everyone who came to our English classes demonstrated an increase in their English level; and that 80% could identify a wider social network after being part of our groups.

We also worked on 87 no of cases to access legal representation across a range of issues including immigration, housing, education, and age assessment.

And we've been working hard to share our knowledge with other professionals, groups and organisations- we have hosted 3 social work students and 4 medical students on placements looking at the mental health and well-being of young refugees and asylum seekers, access to services and understanding of rights and entitlements; and we have run sessions on refugee health and mental health for 90 people. We've also been busily sharing our work in order to support calls for papers, present at events in the Houses of Parliament, and ensure that for a small charity our voice is loud!



There continue to be significant challenges: the number of unaccompanied children accessing our services grows year on year, the housing crisis pushes the poorest out of London and makes renting in London precarious, and those with the least control in their lives continue to suffer the most from austerity and the active creation of a 'hostile environment' for all migrants.

We stand firm in our desire to have a society that is safe and welcoming to all refugees and asylum seekers, and are proud of our contribution to this. Thanks to everyone who is part of the CARAS community- all of us have a role to play, all of us matter, all of us can bring about change together.

Financial Information

CARAS has a reserves policy with a target range of 16-20% of the charity's annual expenditure. The policy is due to be reviewed in June 2017.

We are currently in the process of diversifying our income streams to achieve greater stability, sustainability and flexibility. Our fundraisers and fundraising working group are working hard to raise our profile, increase community giving and create a range of events throughout the year. We have also increased our income through teaching and training, working in partnership with Kingston and St George's University.

In the financial year of 2015-2016, we had a turnover of £240,745, and held reserves of £13,917. Our accounts were audited by Audrey Pereira of SRLV Accountants.



Funding

We are grateful to all who have supported us during this period. The majority of our funds came through grants and we would like to extend our thanks to Sir Walter St John Educational Charity, Henry Smith, Jack Petchey Foundation, The Ettegui Foundation, People's Postcode Trust, Sports Relief, Wandsworth Grant Fund, Wandsworth Community Fund, and Youth Opportunity Fund, and to the London Community Foundation who have supported us through a range of applications.

In addition, we receive generous funding from private individuals through monthly donations; we are also extremely grateful to all who have supported us through our online Christmas appeal, through hosting their own events, marking significant life-events with collections for us, and through taking on sponsored challenges. We also extend our thanks to Abel and Cole who have gifted us a weekly donation of fresh fruit and vegetables at the value of £40 per week.

Eleanor Brown

Egle Banelyte

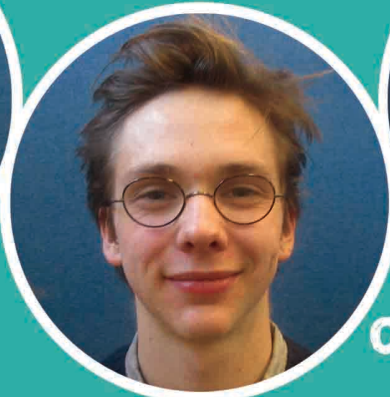
Molly Abraham



Our Team



Pete Target



Etienne Berges



Carrie Mc Alinden

We also said farewell to Jenny Love, Alexa Sidor and Anna Rudd, all of whom shaped our work during the years they were with us, and each leaving a strong legacy.

Trustees

CARAS has been guided and supported by a highly committed board of trustees who bring a wealth of relevant knowledge and experience to the organisation. Amir Ahmed, Ladan Hall, Chris Hands, Rick Hood, Helen Gribble, Sue Stevens, Heidi Jenkin, Rosie Spiegelhalter and Jess Thomas all served during this period.

Mudassar Ahmed, Katherine Harvey, Zara Hosany and Shirley Hodgson have resigned their positions. We extend our thanks to each of them for their support and guidance.

Experts By Experience

Our teaching and training work has been supported by a group of people who previously gained support from CARAS projects and are now keen to use their experiences to influence change. Through sharing their stories, they help increase the knowledge of professionals in other services, and raise awareness of the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by refugees in London. This group unanimously says that this work helps them to feel empowered, and to know that positive change is possible.

Our special thanks for this invaluable contribution go to Eyorusalem Abraham, Rama Abdulrahman, Husna Ali, Istarlin Kalif, Shukria Kalif, Mizo Mputo, Nasro Musse, Julienne Nsaka, Habtom Okube, and Meryem Redie.



Activities

CARAS works on three main themes: supporting people to feel confident to use English, improve their English language skills, and access the opportunities they need; creating social opportunities to enable people to feel a sense of community, belonging and safety; and advocacy and casework, working with people to understand their current situation, take steps towards overcoming challenges, and feeling greater control in their lives.



“CARAS is good class because it is the same as family and it is friendly”

“I like to learn English and I like enjoying English Class. I like to have a lot of friends”

ESOL

ESOL is an essential component of all that we do, consistently identified by beneficiaries as their most pressing need.

Gaining confidence and ability in English is the cornerstone to establishing a successful life in the UK, whether it be used for achieving well at school, finding secure employment, or understanding your neighbours and starting to make friends. Everyone needs it, and our aim is to run as many enjoyable, welcoming classes as possible. This will be an expansion priority for the coming year, with our new intergenerational daytime provision offering one way to reach more people.

“English at CARAS is great because you meet lots of people from around the world and it’s a supportive environment”

“CARAS is very nice and very good because they work to help people. I love so much CARAS!”





Women's Drop-in

Women's drop-in is a safe, welcoming female-only group that is led by the needs and interests of the group. They have done a wide range of things, including having regular conversations about parenting, cooking together, celebrating, learning English, taking a yoga class, and doing drama sessions.

During this period, 44 women benefitted, along with 15 of their children.

25 languages are spoken in this group!

Last year, we saw increases in confidence in English for all attendees, as well as 90% describing an increase in their social networks and their feeling of belonging as a result of coming to this provision.

Anita's Story

When Anita first came to the woman's drop-in, she had one person she saw as a friend. She was very lonely, and had recently moved to a different part of the borough where she felt even more isolated. She was bringing her children to school in Tooting every day, and was frustrated at how difficult it was for her to talk to their teachers and understand how to support them at home.

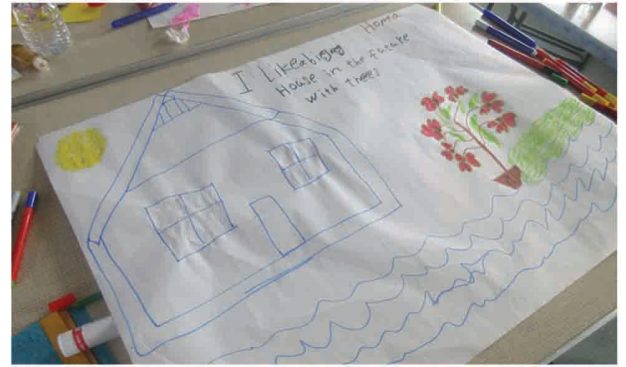
She knew some basic English, but would speak very quietly, would often be affected by nervous laughter, and always tried to ask her friend to speak for her. She has been attending the drop-in for over a year and is visibly more confident. She no longer asks people to speak for her, but always tried to express herself. She comes twice a week to classes at CARAS and has 'a lot, a lot' of friends.

She is now able to be much more proactive at seeking support and taking action in areas of her life that she finds difficult. Her next step is to work with volunteers at 'Problem? No problem!' to practice what she wants to ask her children's teachers.

Problem? No Problem!

Advocacy support has always underpinned work at CARAS: most people need opportunities to check that they have understood letters, are confident to attend appointments, and can make well informed decisions about what they would like to do.

We aim to support people to work through their problems themselves, gaining a full understanding of what is happening, and building their confidence to take affirmative action. In this way, we see many cases at an early stage and can work with people to prevent crisis. This also allows us to dedicate appropriate time to the few cases that are at crisis point, or that are extremely complex.



Problem? No Problem! is open to all, and has supported a wide range of ages, people from diverse countries of origin, and with many and varied queries. These have ranged from having support to register for a student Oyster card, to finding pathways out of debt, to assistance with asylum appeals and court appearances.

All of this work has the potential to be life-changing as it places information in the hands of the person who will be affected.





Youth Support

Activities for young refugees and asylum seekers include our weekly youth club, a place of fun, friendship and finding your feet; the Saturday drop in which remains our most popular provision, combining all our youth services in one place; study group; ESOL; and a range of workshops, trips and casework support.

**85 ESOL classes
for young people**

48 Saturday Drop-ins

2 residential trips

**23 successful
college applications!**

“ My favourite time at CARAS was the trip we did outside of London when we visited a small village in Norfolk. We had an amazing and brilliant time. The place had a beautiful garden and gigantic nice parks.

In the morning, we made breakfast together like a family.

Everyone was feeling happy and ate together as well. After the food, we went to the park to play volleyball and different activities.

Every night we made a campfire and had fun with each other, it was a fantastic time. ”

Natsnet, 17



Youth Council

Youth Council is our new forum, led by and for young people. This group is self-selecting and is made up of young people keen to influence the services that affect them. They manage their own budget, gather feedback from the wider group, and have been spokespeople for CARAS. We would like to expand this model so that all of our beneficiaries actively contribute to how we are run.



Intergenerational Activities

Some of our activities are open to all, something we feel is important in recognising the need for community, and in working efficiently. Our visiting work is also open to all, offering one-to-one targeted support for agreed periods of time, working on pre-agreed goals. We also run Family Activity Days for parents and their children in the holidays

Teaching & Training

Teaching and training continues to be an important strand of our work, helping to share knowledge and experience about what it may mean to be a refugee in London, and how services can adapt to better include them. We work with social work students from Kingston University, both at undergraduate and graduate level; and with medical students at St George's University Hospital. In addition, CARAS has contributed to a range of reports and events, presenting to the Young Fabian's Society in the Houses of Parliament on 'The Refugee Crisis: what is really happening?', and contributions to a House of Lords enquiry on the rights of unaccompanied children. We are proud to play a role in this work, influencing change in the professional practice of social workers and medical professionals, and contributing to discussion, debate and feedback that can ultimately impact on government policy.

**11 partnerships
delivering
70 workshops!**

Partnerships

The Grange; Polka Theatre; Theatre 503; Border Crossings; Kazzum; Transition Town Tooting and Tooting Community Garden; Become (previously the Who Cares Trust); Coram Children's Legal Centre; Team Up; Civil Service Fast Stream.

All of these groups have contributed hugely to our work, allowing us to bring in specialisms in drama, sustainability and environment, immigration, rights and entitlements, sexual health, mental health and fundraising.

News!

The Chickpea Sisters are becoming independent after funding for support and development from 2013 to 2016. Their reputation has grown and they now regularly cater for large events all over London. We wish them the best of luck in their new venture!

Working in Partnership 'Rooting in Tooting'

From 2015-2016 we ran our first partnership with local group, Transition Town Tooting.

They brought huge local knowledge and connections, an enthusiasm for being outdoors, and an undefeatable attitude. Working with them, we were able to build on our learning from time spent at The Grange, a beautiful rural retreat in Norfolk. We knew that green spaces, active involvement in growing, and time spent creating things that others can benefit from had meaning beyond the immediate moment and we wanted a way to do that here.

Rooting in Tooting saw the creation of an array of garden benches, vertical planters, a compost bin, and flower beds, all of which make a very visual statement about us and our work- refugees have a positive contribution to make, we are outward looking, and we want to share the improvements we are making. The project gave young people the chance to share their skills- many were already comfortable and confident in building and designing, and a large number had also had experiences of growing and harvesting. Many memories and connections were shared during this phase, with lots of time spent in sunshine working in companionship.

This project has now been extended into a more ambitious second phase- Gardens of Refuge, funded by Aviva.

Volunteer Story

“When I came to CARAS, I knew I wanted to build my skills in working in this sector. I was worried about how I would fit- I had worked in big corporations and wasn't sure what it would be like to work in a small charity. What I found was a wonderfully supportive place where volunteers are treated professionally, supported to develop their skills, and listened too. I have found friends, my confidence has grown and CARAS has been a wonderful stepping stone for me. I talk about CARAS to everyone- being here makes such a difference to the refugees and asylum seekers who come every week, but it has also made a difference to me.”

Volunteers

Linn Aakvik, Michelle Abankwah, Rama Abdulrahman, Belqis Abdul Alim, Daisy Abboudi, Martin Adams, Nadia Afework, Rabab Ahmad, Drakshan Ahmed, Naima Ahmed, Kirsty Allan, Isabel Allende, Maria Alphonso, Elaine Amoah, Christopher Arms, Sena Aydin, Luke Baghdadi, Vikram Balan, Yassie Banietemad, Ashoo Basson, Emma Beadle, Gemma Bending, Sophia Benedict, Mbeng Peaceful Bih, Tom Bockett, Emily Bowyer, Lindsey Brown, Hodan Buhari, Denise Cain, Sophie Campbell, Mariana Campos, Dan Carter, Michael Casey, Ronnie Chiu, Purween Choudhury, Resina Chowdhury, Andrew Chudiak, Michael Comba, Patrick Conlon, Raphaelle Conte, Susan Cooper, Kim Critchell, Vicky Crome, Ellie Cusack, Sima Daudi, Jema Davies, Hannah Delahunty, Altea Del Grosso, Marzia Di Lena, Alex Donaghy, Katie Dunne, Sarah Edwards, Katie Fernandez, Mary Fisher, Nora Gamkrelidze, Charles Gaw, Michou Gerits, Rosie Gibson, Samara Goeieman, Chelsea Grant, Massimo Gregg, Lidia Habteghiorghis, Imogen Ham, Grace Harris, Josh Harris, David Hopkinson, Katy Hughes, Lara Iannelli, Lucy Ismail, Olivia James, Alexandra Jenkins, Dorothy Jarman, Abigail Johnson, Nicole Jowett, Ellie Karlake, Elaine Kelly, Alice Kestell, Shukria Khalif, Nusrat Khurram, William Kilner, Kaeli King, Jessie Kirk, Camille Koutoulakis, Sophie Lawrence, Chloe Lianos, Priyanka Lindgren, Ana Lisica, Habtom Okube, Lydia Parnell, Doug Macmaster, Kate Manning, Chiara Mappelli, Marion Marougi, Sarah McGain, Keith McGuinness, Kai Ming Man, Hafso Hassan Mohamed, Yumna Mohamed, Faviola Morales, Roger Mortimer, Rima Musa, Iman Nafi, Aisha Nahmmacher, Alison Newberry, Laura Newlyn, Katri Nevalainen, Lauren Ng, Irene Odur, Jessica Oglethorpe, Kwasi Owusu-Ankomah, Alison Palmer, James Phillips, James Pickard, Jemeela Quraishi, Hannah Rae, Lizzie Radford, Katri Rasmussen, Feodora Rayner, Francesca Reed, Szilvia Remenyik, Norman Riley, Chiara Rocci, Avalon Rousseau, Anne Salter, Hana Sandhu, Laura Saunders, Karen Scott, Argurjana Smith, Gabriella Smith, Ursula Smith, Rosie Spiegelhalter, Dave Stannard, Sharmin Sultana, Jenny Teasdale, Tharshika Thayalacumar, Helen Thompson, Jenny Tzoumaki, Heather van Silver, Marianna Vassiliades, Jeni Walker, Mohamed Wardere, Thomas Waterfall, Rabi Wilson, Alexis Wolf, Charles Whitehead, Tarinda Williams, Natalia Wyroda