

Caritas Bakhita House

2025 report



With thanks to everyone
who has supported us

Caritas Bakhita House is a safe house, and ongoing support service, for women who have been trafficked, and exploited in any way. Opened in 2015, it is part of the Diocese of Westminster and managed by Caritas Westminster.

Our values and principles are drawn from the Catholic faith.

- *Love* is shown in compassionate support and long-term commitment.
- We respect the *dignity* of every individual.
- Our *community* creates friendship and belonging.
- We nurture *spirituality* in creative activities that can bring joy and lift the spirit.

People of all faiths and none are welcome at Caritas Bakhita House.

We depend on the generosity of supporters giving donations and volunteers giving their time to run this unique service for women.



We protect the identities of all the women who stay at Caritas Bakhita House. Although we change their names when we share their stories, all other details are true.

Bakhita House Guests: Facts & Figures

224



women aged 15-70
have stayed
at Caritas Bakhita
House.

18



babies have been
born to women
staying with us.



We have helped
secure prison
sentences totalling

231

years for those who
traffick and exploit
women.

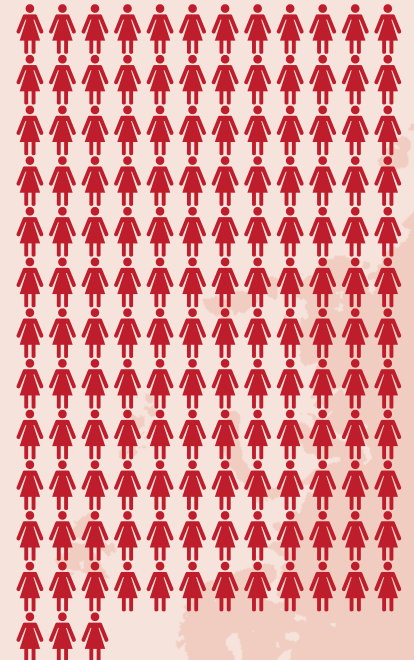
Volunteers
generously donated

1,800

hours this year.
With their support,
our guests were
able to take part in
therapeutic activities
and gain life skills.



Guests have come
from **51** countries



Sexual exploitation 147



Domestic servitude 72



Serious sexual assault 13



Benefit fraud/crime 9



Sham marriages 6



Forced labour 9



Grooming 1

Our tenth anniversary year in review



Karen Anstiss,
Head of Caritas Bakhita House

Dear Friend,

It's been a special year—we're marking ten years since we opened our doors. As you'll discover on pages 4-6, I contacted a guest from each year to learn how their time at Caritas Bakhita House impacted their road to recovery. You can imagine how much it meant that the word that was used the most was 'family'.

It may seem strange that the terrible crimes of trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation have forged a family, but I am very proud. It's an honour to walk alongside each traumatised woman who arrives here to make a new start. Each of our 18 babies have brought new life and hope.

On page 8, you can read about our sensory sessions, which help our mums and babies bond. My colleague, Anna, has had the privilege of accompanying most of them through birth. I am next of kin to many. I'm truly touched that these courageous women turned to us when they felt they had no one else—it's a true reflection of the family we have become.

I want to thank everyone who has supported our guests—volunteers, donors, staff members and the wider team. Most of all, I want to acknowledge the bravery and determination of each woman to persevere and build themselves a new future. You are my heroes!

Karen Anstiss

Karen Anstiss
Caritas Bakhita House Service Manager

Ayesha bravely gave evidence

Ayesha travelled to the UK for an arranged marriage. After moving in with her husband, his mother and brother, she was beaten, strangled, raped, starved and forced to take drugs. Subjected to domestic servitude, she was not allowed to leave the house. Threats were made to kill her family back in Pakistan.

The police brought Ayesha to Caritas Bakhita House to begin her recovery. She went on to give evidence in court over the course of three days—a brutal experience. But having heard the truth, the jury found her husband guilty of multiple charges including rape, and controlling and coercive behaviour with violence. Sentencing will occur in 2026.

"I am sad to be treated like this by someone I believed loved me," says Ayesha. "I am now rebuilding my life."

Women staying at Bakhita House have bravely given evidence to convict their exploiters and abusers on charges relating to kidnap, rape, coercive control, drugs, trafficking, modern slavery and sexual exploitation. Some of the most brutal offenders have been sentenced to 231 years in prison (more details in next year's report).

Ten years. Ten lives. Ten voices.

Since Caritas Bakhita House opened 10 years ago, as many as 224 women have found safety, sanctuary and support to recover and rebuild their lives.

Here, ten women—one from each year—share their experiences.



2015 *"I had no idea if anyone would help me."*

Rohini was our first ever guest at Bakhita House. She travelled from India to Qatar to become a domestic worker and support her three children. On arrival, her employer sexually assaulted her. She had no money—no way to escape. The family eventually brought her to the UK. When she tried to escape, another man sexually assaulted her. She eventually got away after asking for help in a local supermarket.

"I had no idea who could help me, or if anyone would help me. Then I went to Bakhita House. You assisted me to learn English, to find housing and reconnect to my family. For this, and the life I have now, I am grateful."

Rohini now has a part-time job and reunited with her children four years after leaving Caritas Bakhita House.

2016 *"I truly believe that without Caritas Bakhita House, I wouldn't be here today."*

Natia came to the UK from Georgia to escape political persecution. A family friend offered to help her, but instead forced her into work as a domestic slave. Her passport and medication were confiscated. She was forced to cook and clean. She was sexually assaulted and beaten. She was told if she confided in anyone, her mother and father would be harmed. After one year, she escaped and became homeless on the streets until a charity referred her to Caritas Bakhita House.

"Living at Caritas Bakhita House changed my life completely. When I arrived, I was broken and frightened. I didn't believe I could ever feel safe or whole again. But the care, love and compassion I received helped me to heal."

"The team gave me more than shelter and support. They gave me dignity, strength, and a reason to live. I will carry their kindness and faith in my heart for the rest of my life. I truly believe that, without Caritas Bakhita House, I wouldn't be here today."

Natia is safe. She has a partner and a child.

2017 *"I am now a qualified nurse."*

When Folake was 14, her father brought her to the UK from Nigeria. Her step-mum was verbally abusive towards her and made her get up at 5:30am to clean the house and look after her step-siblings. After school, she would attend homework club then return home to continue her chores until midnight. Weekends were more cleaning and caring for her younger siblings. She was not allowed to go out unaccompanied. A family friend

then sexually assaulted her. When Folake confided in a teacher, the police intervened and recognised her to be a victim of trafficking for domestic servitude.

"Caritas Bakhita House played a significant role in helping me to rebuild my life. Through their various services, such as accommodation, counselling, charity volunteering and physical therapy, I gradually regained stability and direction. I am now a qualified nurse and my life has greatly improved. I am grateful to Caritas Bakhita House for creating a safe space for me to grow and achieve my goals."

Folake is working as a nurse and living independently.

2018 **"I cherish every moment spent at this wonderful place."**

In 2016, Dua's parents arranged for her to marry an older man, who would pay her family. On the day she was due to marry him, Dua fled to Italy. When she called her parents in Albania, they told her that she had brought shame on the family and, if she returned home, they would kill her. She has had no further contact with them. A month later, her boyfriend sold her to an Albanian man, who sexually exploited her. After 18 months, he brought her to the UK. The exploitation only ended when she escaped.

"The first thought that comes to my mind is FAMILY! Not the kind bound by blood and obligation, but the one built by you—by trust, compassion, belief and love. No words can describe how wonderful it is to have someone who believes that, with support, you can rise and shine again. I cherish every moment spent at this wonderful place."

Dua lives with her husband and two children. She has a degree and is working full time.

2019 **"I will forever carry with me the care, love and support we received."**

Sinag had to leave her home in the Philippines when a family member sexually abused her. She applied for a job as a domestic worker in Kuwait, where she worked long hours for no pay and little food. She ran away and was promised a job in Dubai, where again she was exploited. The family brought her to the UK. A woman helped her escape

and found her housing with friends. She then became pregnant. When the father of her child left her, she was referred to Caritas Bakhita House.

"My son and I stayed at Caritas Bakhita House for two years. During our stay, we received not only shelter, but also support, understanding and encouragement. The staff were always ready to listen and help in any way they could. This environment allowed both me and my son to feel secure, heal and rebuild our lives step-by-step. I will forever carry with me the care, love and support we received."

Sinag is in a stable relationship. She is pregnant for a second time and working part-time.

2020 **"At Caritas Bakhita House, I celebrated my birthday for the first time."**

At 16, Oana ran away from her home in Romania and the stepfather who had abused her from the age of nine. A woman, who said she would help her, then sexually exploited her on the streets. After being arrested by the police, the woman and her husband trafficked Oana through Europe and, eventually, sexually exploited her in the UK. When she attempted to run away, they hunted her down and kidnapped her. This was reported to police. Oana's exploiters took her to a police station to say she was safe, but she bravely took the chance to ask for help.

"When I arrived at Caritas Bakhita House, I was frightened. A staff member took me to the dining room and I had dinner with all the guests and staff. It was so nice. It was like a family. At Caritas Bakhita House, I celebrated my birthday for the first time in my life and received my first ever present. I learned I can build my own life! Now I have a job, a safe space to sleep, and I'm free to take my own decisions."

Oana works, lives independently, and returns to tend to our garden on a regular basis.

2021 **"Thank you"**

Priya left India believing her husband would care for her and their children. However, she was kept in an 'honour'-based abuse situation from 2006. She was kept in domestic servitude and sexually assaulted. She eventually escaped with one of her three children and went to the police.

"Bakhita House taught me a lot of things that helped me in my life. I learned English, how to use public transport and attend appointments on my own which helped with my confidence. Staff supported me to find a job and I have been working there since. Thank you, I am very happy!"

Priya now has a home, a job and a grandchild.

2022 *"There is love throughout at Caritas Bakhita House."*

At 19, Chiamaka was forced into a sham marriage with a 40-year-old man, who abused her for years. When she was eventually able to escape, she discovered she was pregnant. Desperate to provide for herself, she was offered help to find a job in the UK by a woman from her village. Chiamaka travelled from Nigeria with the promise of secure employment, but she was forced into sexual exploitation. After running away, she slept on buses for weeks before someone helped her get to hospital.

"Caritas Bakhita House is a safe haven. I was supported in ways I couldn't have imagined. This is where I had my first-born and I was treated like a human being. There is love throughout at Caritas Bakhita House. Every time I visit, I tell my friends that I'm going to my family home because I am part of the family."

Chiamaka lives independently and is studying so she can go to university when her son is older.

2023 *"Staying strong empowers you."*

Hanh met a man through her local Vietnamese community at a vulnerable time. She had recently left her husband and children. At first, their relationship was normal. Then he began trying to sexually exploit her. He made threats to kill her and her children if she left him. He burnt her passport and took control of her children's passports. He changed the PIN on her phone so she could not contact anyone. To escape him, she jumped from a first-floor window. She was found to have two fractures to her spine, two burn marks, a bruised neck, severe bruising around the eyes, multiple 'historical' stab wounds and bruising to the body.

"My first day I knew I could rest as I had found freedom. Through my stay, I became creative—

to enjoy art, music and drama. I choose to cook for me and others, and found happiness and freedom for myself. I learnt it was important to be strong as a woman, not only to recover, but also self-develop and learn about life, so not to make mistakes in the future. They showed me staying strong empowers you."

Hanh now has a job. She sees her family on a regular basis and often visits us.

2024 *"When I arrived, I had no happiness inside of me."*

Mariama left her home in Guinea when a family member in the UK asked if she would like to come on holiday. On arrival, she was told she would be a servant. She was expected to cook, clean and care for three people. She never received any form of payment. She was shouted and screamed at if her work was not to the required standard. She did not have a key to the property and could not come and go freely. She was provided with food. However, she was often not allowed to eat at the same time as the rest of the family or in the same location.

"Caritas Bakhita House is a family house. It was the first safe place after my exploitation. When I arrived, I had no happiness inside of me, but they supported me to feel better and to find a new home and job. The teachers were so good I can now speak English and go to college. They made me want a new and better life. They made me a new person."

Mariama now lives independently. She attends college and works part-time.

2025 *"Here, I found a family!"*

Marcela met a man in her home country, Brazil. He told her that he loved her and would care for her if she came to the UK. But the promises of marriage and a happy family life never materialised. Marcela was forced to be a domestic slave—cleaning, cooking and providing sexual gratification. He controlled every aspect of her life. He abused her physically, sexually and mentally. He did not allow her to leave the house.

"In the worst moment of my life, when I didn't have any way out, I found help at Caritas Bakhita House. I feel loved and protected, ready and strong to overcome my trauma. I don't have words to describe how great is the help that I receive. Here, I found a family!"

Marcela is learning English and taking part in therapy to overcome her recent trauma.

Meow! It's time for Marley's news round-up

I have had a busy year, paw-trolling and greeting new guests as they arrive at Caritas Bakhita House. I spent time every day with the two new babies. They are purr-fect! We painted their hands and feet recently. Their pawprints aren't like mine.

I attended paediatric First Aid, earning a life suPAWT certificate! I have read the new Care Standards guide. It's paw-fessional purr-actice for our sector. And there was a pet's blessing for me and my furry friends at a church. Purr-fect. I am also in a 2026 Cats calendar. What an honour to be Mr May and Mr December! Please keep raising awareness and supporting Caritas Bakhita House. We need you. Love Marley (meow) xx AKA The furry heart of Bakhita House



Building the bond between mums and their babies



The first 1,000 days of life are a time of extraordinary growth and development. Over a million neural connections form every second, laying the foundations for lifelong health. The women at Caritas Bakhita House are recovering from trauma, so it is so vital to support perinatal and infant mental health.

In our sensory and developmental play sessions, we transform our quiet room into magical dreamscapes—projecting oceans and galaxies, and recreating the sounds of nature. For example, water play and the sound of waterfalls create a soothing and relaxing environment for mum and baby, and start to inspire as early as possible the growth of their imagination. For mothers, it's important to recover a sense of wonder, awe and playfulness, which can be lost through exploitation.

Our sessions offer a fun way for mothers and babies to gently learn about and explore their senses, and build and strengthen through play a strong feeling of trust, security and safety, which is so important after trauma.

The healing power of art

When I arrived four years ago, as the new art tutor, I could see that art was important. Caritas Bakhita House is filled with paintings, wood-engravings, batik and intricate beadwork. These artworks bring joy, colour and brightness. They breathe a much-needed sense of optimism and hope.



Perhaps the most spectacular project that the art group has undertaken was the Eagle star quilt, which now belongs to Cardinal Vincent Nichols. On paper, it looked easy enough, but as we progressed it became apparent that we didn't quite have the skills to complete it. Fortunately, there were two women staying in Caritas Bakhita House who had exceptional needlecraft skills. With immense patience and skill, they wove the eight segments that form the quilt together to create something quite spectacular. It was a proud moment for all the women when they saw their work on display in The Jesuit centre in Mayfair as part of a three-week exhibition.

Many of the women who come to Caritas Bakhita House bring with them a sophisticated skill-set. Part of my role is to tune into some of these skills and to balance them with new ones.

Does art matter to someone who has been trafficked? Can it make a difference to a person whose life has been turned upside down? Creating and making things has huge benefits. It's a way of telling people about ourselves. It is fun and, dare I say it, it can also heal.

A mountain to climb

My passion is combatting violence against women and girls, which I try to do in my day-to-day work and by raising funds, including my hare-brained idea to trek to Everest Base Camp in Nepal for Caritas Bakhita House.

I believe Caritas Bakhita House should serve as a model for how to provide a person-centred, trauma-informed response to women. I was moved by the dedication of their team and the welcoming atmosphere.

With the support of our fabulous team of Nepali and Sherpa guides, as well as our yaks, we had a really strong trek up to Dingboche. Though four members either turned back or were medically evacuated due to illness, we pressed on and finally reached Everest Base Camp, perched up at 5364m. The next morning, I was evacuated for medical treatment. While I was sad that I could not trek back, I was thrilled to have completed the core challenge.

Lucy McAuley, Regional Safeguarding Lead in the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team.

Getting back on the bike



At the age of 79, Caritas Bakhita House supporter Simon John, this summer completed his solo cycle pilgrimage from Walsingham to Lourdes. He started the journey of over 1,000 miles in 2023. That first ride ended suddenly when Simon was hit by a school bus. He was later admitted to hospital, where doctors discovered a serious resulting pulmonary embolism. Two years later, he got back on his bike and finally completed the remaining 400 miles to Lourdes, raising funds along the way.

THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS!

If you would like to find out more about Caritas Bakhita House, or to make a donation, please contact **Helen Bright** via email on: helenbright@rcdow.org.uk or you can visit <https://caritaswestminster.org.uk/bakhita-house/>

Tel: **020 7798 9353**

Donate Online: www.rcdow.org.uk/donations and select **Bakhita Initiative**

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