

# Caritas Bakhita House

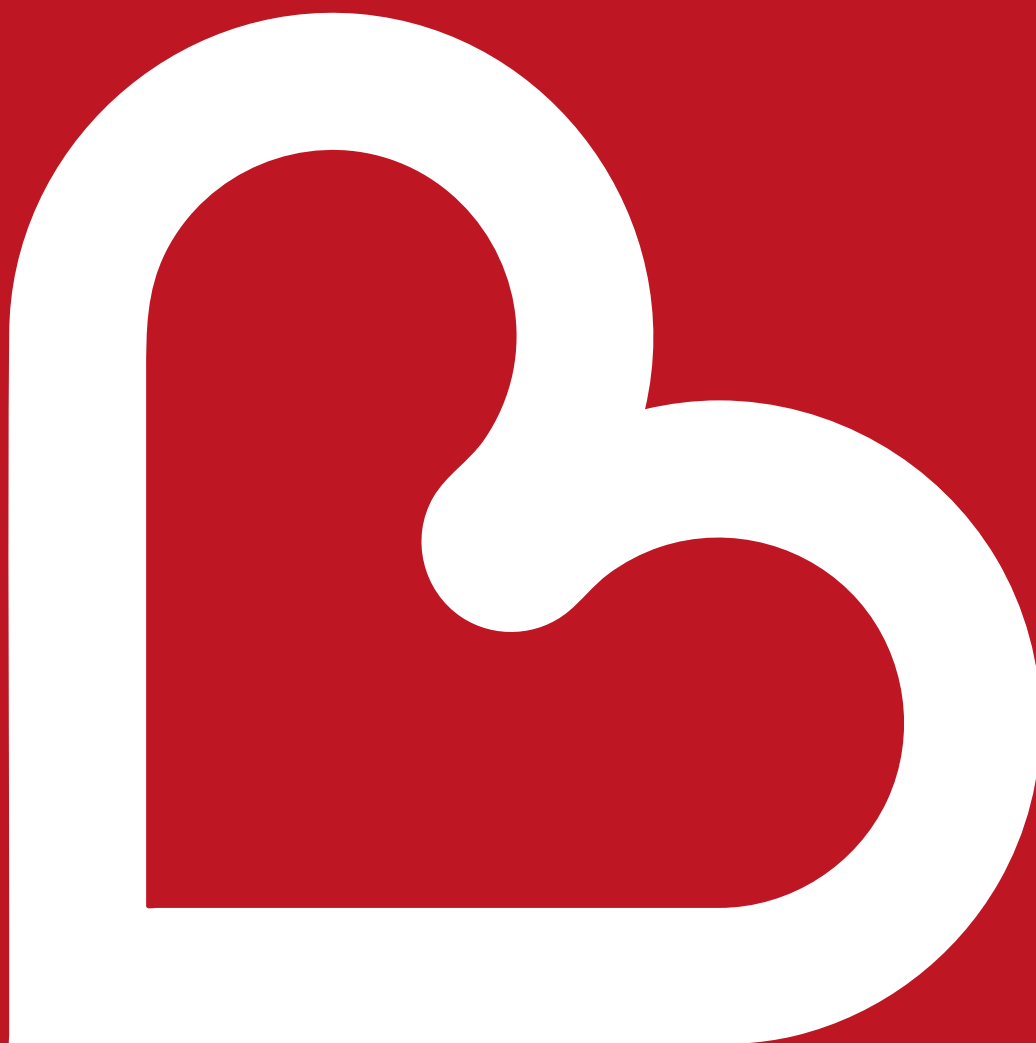
## 2019 End of year report

*Caritas Bakhita House is a safe house for women who have been trafficked, sexually exploited or forced to live in slavery. Opened in 2015, it is owned by 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.*



# A year in review



Karen Anstiss, Bakhita House  
Service Manager

*Dear Friend,*

I'll begin as I always do with a big thank you. Caritas Bakhita House is now in its fifth year and I'm very grateful to everyone who supports our work – from our incredible volunteers who now give us over 2,000 hours of their time each year to all those who donate so generously.

In 2019, we passed an important landmark. By bravely giving evidence against their traffickers, our guests have helped secure sentences totalling more than 100 years in prison. On page five, you can read about one woman's journey through the gruelling process of giving evidence in court. Nine months after her arrival here, she was ready to move on. She got a job and she now lives independently.



For others, the journey takes longer. Last year, several of our guests moved on after needing longer-term support. Two had extremely complicated legal situations. Sadly, they faced becoming homeless without Caritas Bakhita House, but they are now safely housed.

In 2019, two of our guests gave birth and we welcomed two more babies into the world. With your support, their first home was a safe, warm and caring one.

The atmosphere at Caritas Bakhita House is warm, welcoming and friendly. On page six, you can read about the power of Uno, the card game, to bring our guests together. You can also discover how pampering sessions, organised by some of our volunteers, help women regain some of the self-esteem that has been taken from them.

On page seven, my colleague Aisling explains how we enabled a group of guests to visit Edinburgh. This overnight visit helped develop our guests' confidence and self-belief. They experienced wonderful hospitality from some of our friends and supporters.

I can't finish without saying again how important your support is.

Thanks to you, we can offer trafficked and exploited women a safe place to live as they begin their journey of recovery. At Caritas Bakhita House, they have their own room – their own space – as well as the chance to cook, eat and socialise together. And there are members of staff here 24 hours a day to listen and help.

Raising the funds to run Caritas Bakhita House is an on-going challenge. Without you, it would be impossible. Every gift we receive makes a difference, and helps a woman who has lived through the worst abuse and exploitation to heal mentally and physically, and to find laughter, friendship, kindness and care.

With thanks,

*Karen Anstiss*

**Karen Anstiss**  
Caritas Bakhita House Service Manager

# Bakhita House Guests: Facts & Figures

117



women aged 15-68 have stayed at Caritas Bakhita House.

8



babies have been born to women staying with us.

By giving evidence in court, women at Caritas Bakhita House have helped sentence their traffickers to a total of

102.5



years in prison.

Volunteers generously donate

2,000

hours a year.



They do everything from interpreting to running classes for our guests.

## Guests have come from 38 countries:

Afghanistan	1
Albania	15
Bangladesh	1
Brazil	3
Bulgaria	2
Cameroon	1
China	4
Czech Republic	3
Ethiopia	5
Gambia	1
Ghana	1
Georgia	1
Grenada	1
Guinea	1
Honduras	1
Hungary	3
India	2
Indonesia	1
Jamaica	1
Kenya	2
Liberia	1
Mali	1
Mauritius	1
Moldova	1
Morocco	1
Nepal	1
New Zealand	1
Nigeria	9
Poland	4
Philippines	4
Romania	23
Sierra Leone	3
Slovakia	1
Sri Lanka	3
Thailand	2
Vietnam	9
United Kingdom	2
Zimbabwe	1

## Exploitation faced:



**Sexual Exploitation** 77



**Domestic Servitude** 37



**Serious sexual assault** 8



**Sham Marriages** 6



**Benefit Fraud/Crime** 2



**Forced Labour** 2



**Unknown** 1



# Strength. Courage. Self-belief.

*That's what it takes to give evidence against abusers who have tried to strip you of all these qualities.*

**Evidence from our guests has helped convict traffickers and sentence them to a total of more than 100 years in prison.**

In Spring 2019, a woman we're calling Daria arrived at Bakhita House. She had been trafficked into the country and then forced into the sex trade. Daria was rarely allowed outside and threatened with violence if she did not comply with her traffickers' demands.

Nine months later, she left us having given evidence that helped to convict them. She had a job and she was ready to live independently.

It's an incredible journey, especially when you consider what Daria went through giving evidence. Remarkably, she seemed to gain strength from it.

When Daria first arrived, she'd been robbed of all confidence in herself and others.

She had only basic English, but she started taking English lessons here at Caritas Bakhita House. She improved fast and, a few months after she arrived, she felt ready to start work. We arranged a job in a restaurant for her.

As the weeks went by, Daria lived with the knowledge the trial was drawing closer. The police worked with her.

And then came the day when she had to walk into the courtroom.

She gave evidence for three days, protected by a screen.

You'll understand how important it was for her to come back to the peace, safety and warmth of Caritas Bakhita House at the end of each day. In contrast to the courtroom, no one here would ask her questions. She could choose how much or how little she wanted to say.

After the trial was concluded and her traffickers were sentenced, Daria needed time to recover. We then began talking about the next steps. Daria thought she might need supported housing but, in the end, it wasn't needed.

Having survived the trial, Daria gained strength and confidence. She got a new job and decided she was ready to live independently.

Daria's time at Caritas Bakhita House not only enabled her to help convict her traffickers, but also helped lay the foundations for a future free from exploitation.



# “When we show love without judgement, it makes a remarkable difference in peoples’ lives...”

**For the past two years, Stephanie has been one of a group of volunteers who organise regular pamper evenings for the women living at Bakhita House. She explains how a little pampering can be part of a journey of recovery and healing.**

“A manicure. A facial – these might sound like small things, but they can provide a huge boost to women who have lived through dark times, filled with desperation and pain.

“Our evenings begin with a shared meal. This gives us the chance to chat and get to know each other.

We then offer a pamper package – women are free to choose some, all or none of the treatments!

“As volunteers, we are by no means experts in beauty. But I take the same level of care to paint the nails of the women at Bakhita House as I do my own.

“As I’ve seen, when we show love without judgement, it makes a remarkable difference in peoples’ lives. I believe our pampering sessions help women take back a little of their self-esteem – an important step towards healing and recovery.

“I volunteer at Bakhita House because I can see the tangible difference these pamper sessions are making and I feel blessed to be a small part of something so huge.”

# “Life is not all about pain, greed and destruction, but about sharing good times with new friends.”

**Most of us have played UNO at some time or other. Here at Bakhita House, it’s more than a card game – it delivers the best medicine of all.**

Since we opened our doors in 2015, we have welcomed women from 38 countries, aged between 15 and 70. Look around the table most days and there isn’t a language that everyone speaks or an experience everyone has in common – except being trafficked, exploited and abused.

This isn’t a connection any of us would want, so when our guests arrive, we find positive ways to bring them together as they start their new journey – forging a life of their own after exploitation.

Eating together and playing UNO is part of our solution.

Uno needs no language. Those who at first cannot speak in English quickly learn numbers and colours. They become part of a group that is learning to laugh again.

Through playing UNO, they discover life is not all about pain, greed and destruction, but about sharing good times with new friends who are moving forward.



Laughter has always been the best medicine and if we can help our guests to laugh again, we can allow them a vision of what is possible – a life that includes freedom, laughter and friendship.



## Feeling the warmth of real hospitality...

**Many of our guests have had little say over the way they've lived their lives. They've been kept against their will in places they don't want to be, doing things they don't want to do. As Aisling, a support worker who works at Caritas Bakhita House explains, starting to make choices is part of the healing process.**

Now our guests are free, we want to help them take control of their lives. A first step might be suggesting an activity they'd like to do while they are with us.

One night, we were sitting around the table when one of our guests suggested a wine and cheese evening or a trip

to Edinburgh. Another woman said, "I've always wanted to go to Edinburgh". There are nods around the table.

"Not so easy," I think to myself "But... my family live in Scotland". And so the planning began.

And a few months later, everything was organised. We had free train tickets. Food for our journey. A presbytery to stay in. Sleeping bags! And a plan for our two days.

Here are just some of the memories I treasure – walking around Edinburgh as a group. It's such a beautiful place and our guests were delighted with everything.

That evening, a family friend was our host. All the women were made so welcome. My dad cooked a lovely meal for everyone. We sat around the table together – chatting and laughing.

The next morning we walked up Arthur's Seat. One of the women suggested taking their sleeping bags and posing for photos. It was a moment to remember!

The whole trip was an amazing adventure for a group of women who were understandably low on confidence and self-esteem.

When you have been treated like you're nothing – less than nothing – being treated like a friend and an honoured guest is very valuable. It helps heal the hurt.





## A precious gift...

**We're so grateful to our volunteers who generously give us more than 2,000 hours a year. Thank you!**

Some of our volunteers have been giving up their time – and sharing their skills – for years. Others are with us for a shorter amount of time, but still make a significant contribution.

In 2019, Charlotte – a Law student – spent a week with us and shared her impressions afterwards.

*"Across a single week, I was involved in everything from helping guests in cookery classes to accompanying a guest to an interview at the Home Office. The mixture of wellbeing, language and legal support offers a remarkable opportunity for guests to begin to integrate back into society. I feel extremely honoured to have taken part."*

Vlad is typical of some of our longer-term volunteers in that he's turned his hand to many things. He first joined us three years ago as an interpreter – he'd heard we needed Romanian speakers.

He now also offers guests Maths and budgeting lessons. Guests have completely different levels of knowledge – one has gone on to study Finance at university, but others have only basic numeracy and they need to gain skills for an independent life.

Volunteers do so many different things – from organising events and doing talks to raise awareness of our work, to running classes and accompanying our guests to appointments.

### Tears

*Where is life going?*

*We don't know.*

*Sometimes rain and sometimes sunshine!*

*Birth and death whatever may be;*

*One day we will make the connection.*

*We forget our pain and it goes and never to return.*

*It will be far away forever and ever.*

## 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](mailto:helenbright@rcdow.org.uk) or you can visit [www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/bakhita-house.php](http://www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/bakhita-house.php)

Tel: **020 7798 9353**

Donate Online: [www.rcdow.org.uk/donate](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/donate) and select **Bakhita Initiative**

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