
The Sisters Not Strangers Coalition
A manifesto for you and us



"This coalition is a place of empowerment and respect... what we lost, when going through the asylum system, we have found here."

- Tandrima

Who are we?

We're a UK-based coalition of groups that support asylum-seeking and refugee women, and we came together to campaign against destitution and other inhumane asylum policies. You can find a list of our current members on the last page of this manifesto.

We dream of a world where all women who seek asylum are seen as women, as neighbours, as mothers, as colleagues, as activists - *as sisters, not strangers.*

We hope that this manifesto will inspire you all, especially women who have sought asylum here in the UK. As you flick through, you'll find quotes from some of the asylum-seeking and refugee women in our coalition, voices that are frequently unheard or ignored.

Led by experts

"We are speaking from experience. We want people to hear us."

- Olivia

"I want a space where my contribution will make an impact - where I can challenge, and not feel compelled to just accept decisions that are made or suggestions that are proposed by others."

- Tandrima



Charities don't provide enough opportunities for genuine leadership by people with lived experience. We think it's high time that changed.

In our coalition, there are women who have personal experience of the UK's asylum system and women who don't. But we believe that leadership by those who have sought asylum is crucial to real change.

Discriminatory stereotypes create an unjust asylum system – stereotypes where people seeking asylum are seen as outsiders who can be deprived of basic human needs, as victims who cannot act for themselves. When organisations fail to support asylum-seeking people to lead campaigns, they end up strengthening these stereotypes and, therefore, maintaining the unjust asylum system.

That's why this coalition is led by asylum-seeking and refugee women - the experts. And women with an impressive skill set too.

The women without personal experience have committed to actively supporting asylum-seeking and refugee women to lead. As Agnes emphasises, *"There is a need and a place for different people in our movement. So we're really glad to have these women by our side, fighting with us for the changes we want to see."*

Feminism for all women

We acknowledge the different struggles that asylum-seeking and refugee women face because, for example, of their immigration status, nationality, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or language.

As Audre Lorde said: *"I am not free while any woman is unfree."*

Our coalition is a safe space for all of our asylum-seeking and refugee sisters. We love you and accept you, and we will always strive to be as inclusive as possible when we campaign.

We also commit to being fearless, to calling out deep-rooted inequalities, like poverty, racism and sexism, that cause the injustices faced by asylum-seeking and refugee women. We will say it how it is.

"We are sisters. Lean on me."

- Agnes



Wellbeing

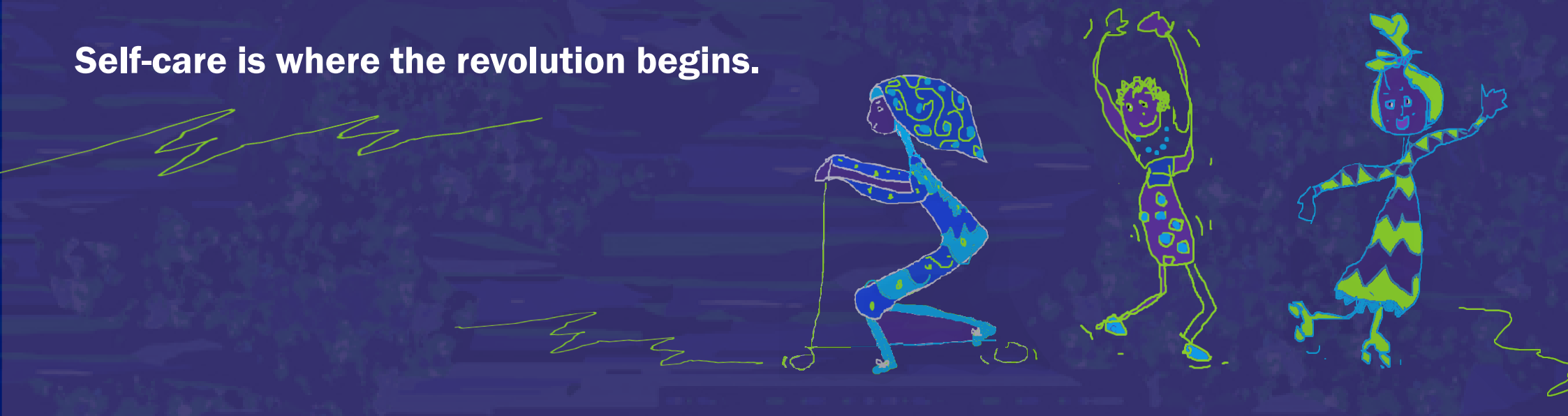
"Here there is love for each other."

- Gloria

At the heart of our work is a commitment to care for ourselves and for one another - because the women in this coalition are human. We're mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters, painters, writers, binge-watchers. Believe it or not, we have responsibilities, skills and interests beyond campaigning. And there's only so much we can do in one day. As Elsie helpfully reminded us, you need *"to know when to sit down and rest."*

We also understand that if we want to have the energy to make long-term change, our wellbeing must be a priority - not an after-thought but a value that runs through all of our work from the very beginning.

Self-care is where the revolution begins.



Action

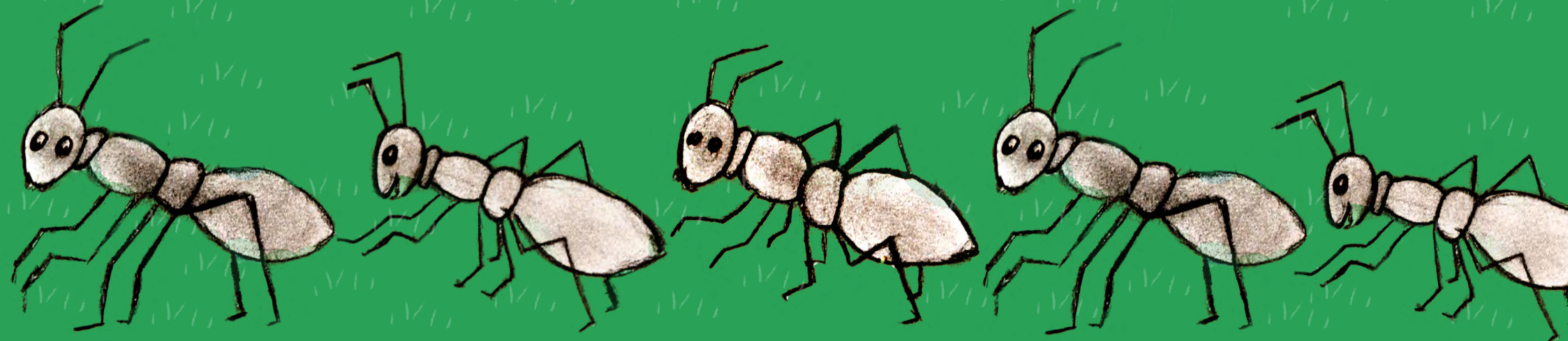
"We need to stand up!"

- Gloria

We do stuff. Talking is good but doing is better.

We are committed to campaigning against inhumane asylum policies. But as the hostile environment shifts around us we need to keep it fresh. So we will try to be creative with our actions and not be afraid to try new and different approaches.

At the same time, we commit to being inclusive. We will listen to the interests and needs of refugee and asylum-seeking women, so that we can involve as many as possible in our campaigns, whether they're extroverts or introverts. There's something for everyone.



Hope

"There is a way out at the end of the tunnel."

- Bosede

Changing the system means changing attitudes, dehumanising and discriminatory attitudes that have been around for far too long about people in desperate need of a safe refuge.

We know the fight for a fairer, dignified asylum system is a long one; a lot of us have been in it for a while. But as Wangari Maathai reminds us, *"There are opportunities even in the most difficult moments."*

So we will stay hopeful. And until we get there, we will celebrate our achievements along the way. All those small changes are part of the journey.

"You need to believe in what you're doing and that change will come."

- Loraine

Unity

We recognise that our power to change things comes from collective action.

That's why there are different groups in our coalition. It's also why we want to work with other organisations in all four nations of the UK, across different sectors, and as part of a movement towards justice for refugees and people seeking asylum.

"We are here, learning from each other. There is strength in that." - *Elif*

"Together we are strong. We have each other." - *Agnes*



"I believe in women's rights. Every woman. Everywhere."

- Ibtissam

"Change has taken place not outside but within me. And I now feel able to transfer that inspiration to other women."

- Mariam



Members

The current members of the Sisters Not Strangers Coalition:

- Development and Empowerment for Women's Advancement Project, Sheffield
- Women Asylum Seekers Together Manchester
- Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group
- Women for Refugee Women, London
- Refugee Women Connect, Liverpool
- Oasis, Cardiff
- Women with Hope, Birmingham
- Swansea Women's Asylum and Refugee Support Group

And the sisters that represent those groups:

- Agnes Tanoh
- Alice Coles
- Bosede Oluwole
- Comfort Etim
- Elif Erdem
- Elsie Mlambo
- Eunice Manu
- Gloria Adusu
- Ibtissam Al-Farah
- Jacci Peach
- Jeni Williams
- Loraine Masiya Mponela
- Mariam Yusuf
- Olivia Namutebi
- Priscilla Dudhia
- Tandrima Mazumdar

Keep in touch

If you want to write to us, we'd love to hear from you:
sistersnotstrangers@gmail.com

Follow our work at: www.sistersnotstrangers.com

Please share our manifesto and join the conversation about our movement using #SistersNotStrangers on social media.


A Woman is
Like
a teabag
You
never know
How
Strong
She is
until she
gets in
Hot water.
#SNS
#Peace
#Love
#Unity