

Fadimah and Muhammad* emerge from despair



Fadimah, Muhammad and their 4 children are refugees with Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK. Since 2013, the family has lived in, and paid rent for, temporary accommodation arranged by Lambeth Council. Muhammed works long hours as a self-employed driver to support his family and stay out of debt. He takes care to ensure that his accounts are correctly submitted to all the relevant authorities.

Out of the blue, the family received a letter explaining they need to pay over £60,000 because they should not have been given Housing Benefit. This understandably frightened and upset them.

In despair, and not knowing what to do, they phoned Lambeth AdviceLine. Our AdviceLine Officer spoke with them and scheduled an in person appointment with our GLA* Cost of Living Crisis Prevention Adviser at our Kennington Office. We also offered the facility of interpretation support if required for the appointment and the family explained they would prefer Fadimah's brother to listen in by

phone to ensure everyone understood.

In the appointment CAML's Adviser completed an advice assessment and contacted the Council by phone with clients' permission to speak on their behalf. Following investigation the Council Officer agreed that it appeared a mistake had occurred and that the family did not owe any money. Our GLA Adviser asked that the Council confirm this in writing which the Council agreed.

A week passed and nothing was heard. Muhammad and Fadimah became more and more worried. Our GLA Adviser called the Council's Housing Benefits Office querying where the written confirmation was. Although the new decision had been recorded in the system no evidence of written confirmation was recorded. A week later, Fadimah and Muhammad received the letter confirming no monies owed. The family could sleep easy again.

* Names and some details have been changed to preserve confidentiality

** Greater London Authority