

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS

THE IMPACT OF BIHR'S 2022-2025 HUMAN RIGHTS SUPPORT PROGRAMME WITH UK COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY GROUPS

"This was an incredible opportunity and working with the BIHR team has been really insightful and useful – we have learnt a LOT!"

- Anonymous, Co-design 2024



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**The Baring
Foundation**

**The British Institute
of Human Rights** 

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This is a summary report. You can [find out more about our Community Programme 2022-2025 on our website](#), including details of all partner organisations and the difference it has made, or you can scan this QR code.



About the programme

The British Institute of Human Rights (BIHR) is a charity **working in communities across the UK to enable positive change through the practical use of the Human Rights Act (HRA)**. We work with people to provide the information they need to benefit from their rights; with community groups to advocate for social justice using human rights standards; and with staff across local and national public bodies and services to support them to make rights-respecting decisions. This enables us to call for the development of national law and policy which truly understands people's experiences of their human rights.

The HRA aims to help create a culture of respect for human rights in the UK.

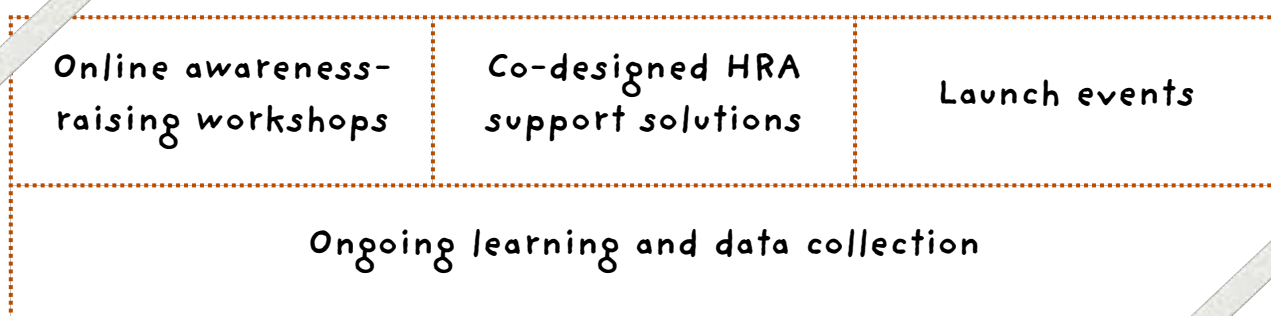
Yet more than 25 years on we have not yet achieved full implementation of this important legislation, where:

- duty-bearers feel confident in their ability to consider the HRA in their decision-making, and
- rights-holders understand their rights and can speak up where they feel these are not being met.

PROGRAMME AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

With funding from the Baring Foundation, from 2022 to 2025 BIHR has sought to create positive change for small UK-based community and voluntary groups (CVGs). Our support aims to **increase the knowledge, confidence, and resilience of CVG staff, volunteers, and people they support to recognise how the HRA protects them, and to build CVGs' capacity to challenge and influence decision-makers they interact with to meet their HRA legal duties.**

Our programme activities have consisted of:



Call to action: a message from BIHR's CEO



Sanchita Hosali,
CEO of BIHR

This **funding period began at a time when there were very real threats to the HRA from the previous UK Government.** BIHR has been a key actor in the work to mobilise CVGs and the human rights sector more broadly to campaign for the protection of domestic human rights law. We have **connected often unheard voices in this debate, supporting the building of solidarity across a range of issues and sectors to speak up.** The **landscape has shifted three years on,** and scrapping the HRA is no longer on the table.

However, this is likely a temporary situation; hostility and division continue to rise and anti-human rights sentiment will undoubtedly re-emerge as a key issue in the next General Election.

As civil society, **we must learn from the last five years,** where we have had to build CVGs' capacity and confidence to speak up for the HRA whilst simultaneously defending it. Now, there is an **urgent need to build on embedding the HRA specifically, and human rights generally, into the work of CVGs to deliver the direct impact for people across a range of issues.** This work is also important in **ensuring that we will not once again be forced into defensive mode without the tools, skills, confidence and evidence** to meet the challenge in the coming years.



"Despite the progress we have made in bringing these rights home, it also must remind us that our work is far from done."

- Lord Ponsonby, Human Rights Minister, Human Rights Day 2024

"Now, more than ever, supporting Human Rights Act advocacy is vital to protecting the rights and dignity of those who need it most. Across our communities, people—especially refugees, asylum seekers, and other marginalised groups—are facing growing challenges in accessing justice and securing the rights they are entitled to."

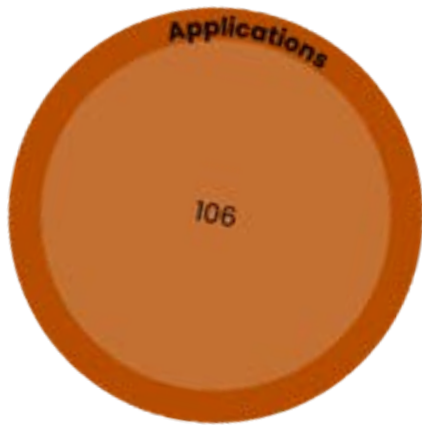
- Awesta, Workshop 2024



Our reach



We received 106 applications from CVGs and were able to offer 30 unique instances of support



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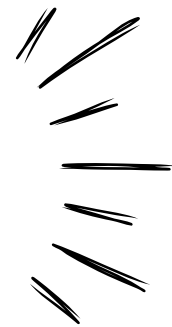
We partnered with CVGs across 4 UK nations



people attended an awareness-raising workshop



10 new co-designed human rights advocacy tools



THREE Human Rights Day celebration events (online and in UK Parliament)

The most highly represented groups were self-advocacy and migrant support



KEY IMPACTS:

Awareness-raising workshops

The first of our two main support offers involved BIHR offering **free online 90-minute human rights workshops to CVGs as a bespoke introduction to HRA advocacy**. The workshops cover the legal duties of the HRA, relevant rights according to the needs each group, and stories of HRA advocacy on issues that matter to attendees. **This is the beginning of the human rights journey**, providing the opportunity for CVG staff, volunteers and members to learn about their human rights in an interactive way. It **builds knowledge, confidence, and capacity to address social justice issues** affecting their communities using human rights.

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

We delivered workshops with organisations working across a range of causes including **asylum and immigration support, health and disability, self-advocacy, domestic abuse, poverty, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller rights**.

CVGs ranged from **informal peer support groups** with very little access to funds for this kind of assistance to **established charities with annual turnovers of over £500,000**. Workshops took place with CVGs from **all four UK nations**. Accessibility was also a consideration, with six workshops delivered in **Easy Read format** and one with **British Sign Language interpretation**.

The **human rights principle of universality** underpins BIHR's community work, as we are open to working with any groups where they can utilise the HRA. This has not only allowed us to **support a vast array of CVGs**, but to **foster solidarity amongst diverse communities**.



"Attending the human rights training workshop was an enlightening experience that equipped our team with the basic knowledge and tools needed to advocate for justice and equality for Romani and Traveller communities. This invaluable training will empower us to champion human rights and foster positive change for all." - The Traveller Movement, Workshop 2024



BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CAPACITY

Our evaluation of this activity has shown that **even introductory human rights capacity-building support** in the form of awareness-raising workshops has brought **important immediate and long-term benefits for small CVGs** to begin to **tackle the social injustices** they experience:

- Many participants had never learned about human rights before, either as part of a formal training course or by learning about it on their own (48% in 2023; 34% in 2024).
- Participants reported improvements to their understanding of the HRA (2.8 to 4.3 out of 5 in 2024) and their confidence to use it (3.2 to 4.1 out of 5 in 2024) in their interactions with public services.
- Participants said they were more likely to use human rights to challenge decisions about someone's individual access to services (33% in 2023, 40% in 2024).



"I will now use human rights on a daily basis."

- Anonymous Survey, Workshop 2023

Long term impact

Awesta is charity advocating for better housing, mental health and education services for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. They successfully applied to receive a BIHR human rights awareness-raising workshop in April 2024.

In March 2025, they told us how the workshop had increased their organisation's awareness of the HRA, helping them to **better understand how the legal framework can be used to support** the communities they serve, particularly **refugees, asylum seekers, and women-led businesses**. They gave examples of **advocating for refugees' right to work** ("we became confident in using human rights-based arguments to challenge policies that prevent asylum seekers from accessing employment"); **protecting housing rights** ("using the knowledge gained from BIHR, we have helped them understand their rights and challenged landlords or local authorities when necessary"); and **empowering women entrepreneurs** ("by applying human rights principles, we have strengthened our advocacy for fair access to funding and support, ensuring that these women can build sustainable livelihoods").

KEY IMPACTS:

Co-designed HRA support solutions

Our second support offer involves building **programmatic partnerships** with CVGs to identify key concerns which can be mapped to the HRA rights and duties; and then **co-developing tailored support solutions to integrate HRA advocacy into their work** tackling issues affecting their communities.

TOOLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

This part of the programme sees CVGs working with BIHR **more intensively** to support **longer-term social change** using a human rights-based approach. Using the 4 Ds model (**discover, define, develop, deliver**), we worked alongside **10 CVGs** to co-develop a wide range of advocacy tools to support communities in their interactions with public services.

Each unique resource **combines legal information about the HRA with the lived experience of CVG staff and members**, with bespoke formats and designs to ensure the final product is **relevant, practical and impactful**. Digital versions of the human rights support solutions are accessible via BIHR's website, to be used and shared by our partner CVGs and others.

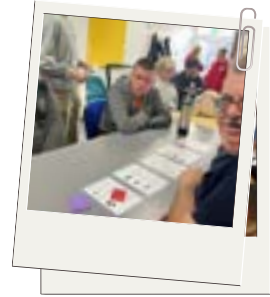
“Working with the BIHR... has resulted in a fantastic new resource for our families with disabled children. This project will make a huge difference and the impact of the work that has been achieved will help so many more families in the future.” – Parent and Carer Alliance, Co-design 2024



EQUAL PARTNERS IN CO-PRODUCTION

Co-production is at the heart of this offer. By living the values that underpin human rights law, of treating people with **dignity, fairness, respect, and amplifying their voices**, BIHR's co-design work is about more than creating resources. It is about **building positive relationships with CVGs** that enable those resources to **make a sustainable difference to people's lives** where **rights are respected, protected and fulfilled**.

CVGs felt that they had been **listened to and fully involved** in the co-development of their human rights support solutions, generating a **sense of empowerment and pride** for those involved in the process.



"Our work on this project has opened up other avenues for us to explore, and in light of this no ask was too big (or strange) for the BIHR team. They really held our members interests at heart and worked with us to make sure that they were included in the process and that their voice was at the centre of our Game. This has allowed our members to see themselves within the final resource, generating a sense of pride; motivation to want to do more; and eagerness to share our work." - Cwm Taf People First, Co-design 2024

Long term impact

ATD Fourth World is a human rights-based anti-poverty organisation. We partnered with them in 2023 to develop a human rights guide with young people, and delivered an awareness-raising workshop with staff in 2024.

In March 2025, ATD Fourth World said **their involvement in this programme had supported them to see the practical value of the HRA** in community-based work. **"We have definitely been speaking about it more, both in staff meetings and also when interacting with the general public... The Human Rights Act can be a very powerful tool to ensure respect for people in my community."**

However, they stressed that **funding and resources remain a barrier to fully implementing the HRA in their work** and said they would **benefit from additional support** to share the tool they created more widely.

Communities influencing change



Supporting communities is one of BIHR's strategic aims, as is **experience-informed policy change**. Nowhere do these two aims come together better than on this programme. The **collaborative partnerships we have forged can at once build human rights knowledge amongst CVGs and also enrich national policy and influencing work as we amplify lesser heard voices**.

Our work to connect communities to national influencing work has included:

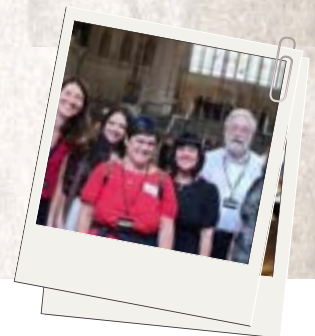
- **inviting CVG members to join BIHR's [RITES committee](#)**;
- **delivering training for new MP caseworkers** in 2024, informed by our experiences of HRA community work;
- **involving CVG members in policy evidence and submissions** through formal evidence and meetings, ensuring genuine examples of human rights concerns, accountability, and positive practice are heard.

Human rights in action

Pembrokeshire People First (PPF) is a self-advocacy group run by and for people with a learning disability and/or autism. In 2022, they were invited to the launch of some Easy Read postcards co-created by Warrington Speak Up and BIHR.

Later that year, the **UK government published a consultation about repealing the HRA.** With support from BIHR, **PPF instructed a solicitor** to write to the Justice Secretary because their **consultation did not support people with a learning disability** to take part. **As a result, the UK government made changes** to their national consultation process. They published an accessible version of the consultation and extended the deadline for a further six weeks, **enabling disabled people (and others) to take part** and be heard.

The Bill to scrap the Human Rights Act was abandoned, with disabled people's real life examples of the importance of the HRA being quoted by parliamentary committees, MPs and Peers.



Looking ahead

BIHR would like to thank the Baring Foundation for dedicating much needed funding to this important work which empowers communities across the UK to embed HRA advocacy across their work.

It is clear from our work that the **demand for practical human rights support is high** – in 2023 we received almost 2.5 times as many applications versus spaces, rising to more than 4 times as many applications versus spaces in 2024. What's more, the importance of BIHR's support being **offered for free** has been highlighted by partner organisations, who are operating under immense strain to provide vital support to marginalised communities.

The value of the HRA

The community groups supported by BIHR over the past three years have consistently told us about the **transformative power of the HRA** in enabling them to secure positive change. We also know that many of our partners are **keen to continue with their human rights capacity-building journey**. Across BIHR's work, we see people learning about human rights for the first time, and having a better grasp of these important legal standards can **highlight areas of need beyond the original focus** of the work. Additionally, some groups expressed that they would have enjoyed more time to work with BIHR and additional support to **use their knowledge in practice over the longer term**.



“A key takeaway from our engagement is that the time allocated for the project was not sufficient to fully explore the complexities of these critical issues. Members have strongly requested that this initiative be extended and repeated to ensure deeper engagement and sustained impact.”

– Bomoko NI, Co-design 2024

“When we took part in the community programme, it was fantastic. It felt a little bit like going to this amazing banquet, but it also felt like we had to leave early because the timescale felt short to be developing a human rights tool.”

– ATD Fourth World, Co-design 2023



HUMAN RIGHTS ACT ADVOCACY HAS THE POWER TO UNITE AND EQUIP COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY GROUPS WITH THE ESSENTIAL TOOLS THEY DESPERATELY NEED TO TACKLE THE SOCIAL INJUSTICES THAT AFFECT THEM ON A DAILY BASIS, BEYOND THE COURT ROOMS.

BUT THEY NEED SUPPORT TO USE THE LAW.

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