

solace Celebrating 20 YEARS

surviving exile and persecution

The Solace Newsletter is back after a long hiatus! In this special 20th Anniversary edition, you can find the following:

- **A recap of Solace's 20th Anniversary Celebration**
- **A Solace Client's Story**
- **Updates on our e-learning and video resources**
- **A Spotlight story about our Farsi Men's Group**
- **An introduction to our new Monthly Blog!**



Solace is 20 years old!

During Refugee Week, we were delighted to mark Solace's 20th anniversary with two very special events celebrating our 20 years of service and everything we have learned over the past two decades.

Our first celebration took place at Leeds Playhouse, who generously hosted us as part of their Theatre of Sanctuary and community programme. It was a fitting venue in the heart of Leeds: reflecting the importance of refugees in the city, and the Council's commitment to being a Local Authority of Sanctuary for people seeking safety. The event brought together clients, staff, volunteers, trustees, partners and supporters for an evening of food, craft activities, displays and good conversations.

It was a chance not only to look back, but also to reflect on how Solace's clinical work has grown and developed over the years, and to share our hopes and vision for the future. We also took the opportunity to honour Anne, our Clinical Director, who is celebrating her own 20-year milestone with Solace, having been part of the organisation since the very beginning.

One of the most powerful moments of the evening was hearing directly from someone who has used our service. Their words were a moving reminder of why Solace exists, and of the

difference that our compassionate specialist support had made to her. You can read more about this story later in the newsletter.

Two days later, we continued the celebrations with an online conference focusing on sharing practical insights into improving refugee mental health. We were joined by colleagues from Migration Yorkshire, NHS England, BACP and York St John University, who reflected on the wider impact of Solace's work, the research and good practice in this area and the importance of working together to build more accessible and effective services for refugees.

It was encouraging to see the strength of these relationships recognised, and to hear how Solace is helping to equip professionals across different sectors with the knowledge, skills and confidence to respond well. Feedback from attendees was extremely positive, reinforcing both the need for ongoing practical support and the appetite for more learning and confidence building. Thank you to everyone who joined us, supported the events or has been part of Solace's journey so far.

Shakiba's Story



My name is Shakiba. I am a former doctor from Afghanistan, a mother, a refugee, and above all, a human being whose life has been shaped by both trauma and recovery.

For me, trauma was not only leaving my country. It was leaving behind the life I had built, the profession I loved, the people who knew me, and the certainty that gave structure to my world. When my family arrived in the United Kingdom, many people saw a family that had reached safety. And they were right. We were physically safe. But emotional safety is something very different.

There were days when I felt overwhelmed by exhaustion, chronic pain, anxiety and sadness. For a long time, I was surviving rather than truly living.

I often describe that period as being a moving body without a living spirit. Then I found Solace. And for the first time in a very long time, I felt safe. Not judged. Not rushed. Not treated as a problem. Just safe. Safe enough to speak, to cry, and to be honest.

I can honestly say Solace changed my life. My therapist listened not only to my words, but also to my silences. She helped me understand that people who are suffering are not weak. They are wounded. And wounded people deserve dignity, compassion, understanding and care.

Week by week, conversation by conversation, I began rebuilding my life. I started learning English again. I regained confidence. I started believing in myself. For me, it means that I found myself again, my children have their mother back, and my family has hope again.

Over the past twenty years, Solace has helped people rediscover dignity, confidence and a reason to keep moving forward. They have saved lives by creating safety, connection, and hope where they were needed most.

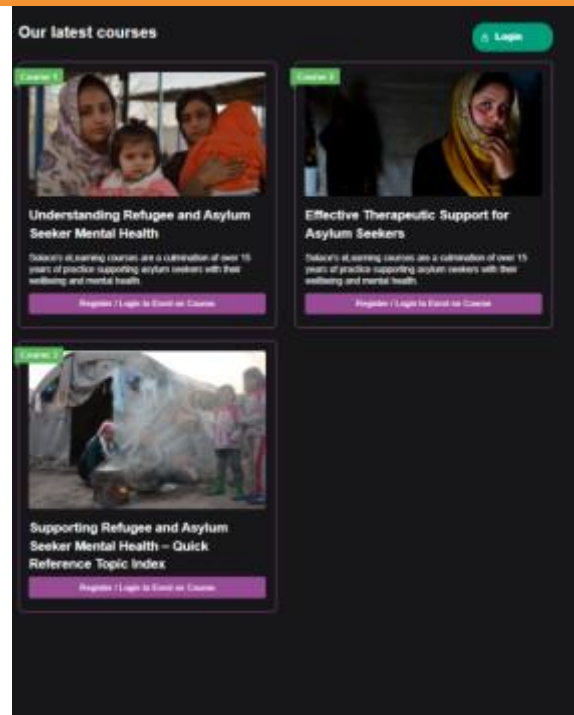
I am proud that my story is now one small part of that twenty-year journey. - **Shakiba (Solace Client)**

We have updated our e-learning and video resources!

More than 3000 people have completed our e-learning course and we have just updated it and added a 3rd course which provides a quicker way to access the information which individuals will find most helpful.

The aim of our training is that “practitioners throughout the statutory and voluntary sector have sufficient levels of understanding and confidence to provide accessible and effective mental health and wellbeing support to asylum seekers wherever they live throughout the UK.

Practitioners who are not mental health specialists are able to provide effective trauma informed care with sensitivity to the unique context asylum seekers live in.” It’s very exciting to see people signing up from all over the UK as we intended this to be a helpful resource for anyone who wants to develop their confidence or knowledge.



Alongside this is our fantastic suite of video resources available in multiple languages providing a range of psychoeducational information supported by a number of techniques and exercises which our clients have told us they find useful. They were created so that people would have some very practical resources they can access wherever they are in acknowledgment that refugees are moved from one area to another and often can’t access the support that they need for their mental health and wellbeing. They are also very useful for professionals who may feel limited in what they are able to provide themselves.

We are in the process of creating language specific pages to make it easier for people to find what they need and would find most helpful.

Please take a look and share the information as widely as you can. Feedback so far has been very positive and we are keen for the videos to help as many people as possible.

You can find these resources [here](#) or by scanning the QR code below:



Spotlight on the Farsi Men's Group



This weekly group has been running since 2021 facilitated by one of our therapists Reza, whose first language is Farsi. The group came about because therapists at Solace noticed how depressed and vulnerable Iranian men were, particularly those who were separated from their families. Group members have shaped and developed how the group operates and built up powerful connections between them as they have shared and supported each other.

Farsi-speaking men told us that being able to speak openly in their first language, within a group of people who share their cultural background and lived experience, has been deeply important. Over the past year, 22 men have taken part, with many attending week after week—often for more than 30 sessions—which shows how much the group matters to them.

"Trust inside here leads to trust outside, out there. I can see how it was possible again."

In a recent feedback session, men described the group as *"the only time they are able to talk openly,"* and spoke about moving from *"isolation and depression towards being normal again."*

Another described how he was able to start rebuilding meaningful relationships again because he experienced a safe and trusting environment within the group. He said;

"Before I came, I was always inside my own thoughts. Here, I see others going through similar things, and it helps me feel calmer."

Solace Monthly Blog



We were very pleased to launch our monthly blog series back in April. This is part of how we want to go beyond our direct therapeutic work to help others to better understand, respond to, and support people seeking safety in the UK.

As the series of blog posts grows it will reflect a wide range of ideas and views on the realities of working with people who have experienced trauma, displacement and ongoing uncertainty, alongside stories about the lived reality of some of the people we support.

Recent articles explore topics such as the limitations of traditional psychological models when applied to refugee experiences, reflections on the impact of the hostile environment, and a summary of our professional papers written over the last few years.

Sitting alongside our training provision, the blog is another way aim is to contribute to a wider understanding of refugee mental health and improve the quality of support available.

If you haven't already, we encourage you to explore the blog, which can be [found here](#), and share it with others who may benefit. It is shared monthly on our social media. Links to all our social media can be found below.

[Bluesky](#) | [Facebook](#)