



## Welcome to the Solace Newsletter September 2023

It's been a very busy time for us at Solace. We had more content than we could possibly publish for our Newsletter. We are going to save it for the next edition.

In this edition you will read about our e-learning courses; the wonderful work of the HEARTS project and Tony's fundraising efforts to raise money for those clients in need of financial support.

We hope you enjoy reading about our updates.

## Solace Wellbeing Workshop - Asylum Contingency Hotels



Over the last few months one of Solace's psychotherapists had been running a psychoeducational group every Monday morning at one of the contingency hotels for asylum seekers. The group focused on managing emotions, feelings and triggers. The workshop helped group members to learn some valuable skills i.e. changing aggressive reactions to healthier responses. The group members have used this space to share experiences by giving examples and using resources and props that were provided to express themselves.

Group participants at the hotel reported that they have more insight about their behaviour and responses. It has also helped change their thoughts to more positive ways of thinking.

We have also been running a 10-week wellbeing course at Solace. The aim of this course has been to support participants to improve their mental health, reduce stress levels and learn new skills to manage their own wellbeing. Every week different topics were covered, i.e. spheres of control- a concept looking at things in our control, things we can influence and things we have no control over, the fight, flight and freeze response, active listening. We also explored ways to manage physical stress levels and improve sleep by practicing progressive muscle relaxation and Emotional freedom techniques to manage physical and emotional distress.

Participants reported that the course was very engaging and encouraging. They found the learning very beneficial and were able to practice and implement everything they learnt on the course.

Participants also shared that the topics and discussions have really helped reduce stress levels and encouraged self-care.

Members on the course have also stated that these courses should be ongoing as not only do they learn new skills but it provides them more structure and a sense of belonging.

## HEARTS Youth Project



The new HEARTS (Helping Every Asylum seeker and Refugee To Settle) youth project is delivered in partnership with The Children's Society (TCS) and Playhouse Youth. Together the three organisations have provided wrap-around therapeutic and advocacy support alongside a weekly youth group based at and facilitated by fantastic Playhouse Youth staff.

The group started slowly, having ground to a halt over Covid, but gradually built with a number of young people aged 15-25 from Afghanistan, Sudan, Libya, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka; some unaccompanied, some living with families and some staying in hotels. Over the course of the year we have drunk a lot of tea, played board games, got involved in art; drama and music projects; had a residential trip to the Lake District; cooked and eaten together; visited the theatre; celebrated Eid several times and Christmas once; gardening and working on a number of stop-motion animation projects.

The group will restart this September with a new TCS advocacy worker. We are hoping to visit the central library and the University of Leeds this term. The HEARTS project only has funding until March 2024 so our future is uncertain, but we are hoping to support as many asylum seeking and refugee young people as we can.



## Refugee Week Animation

The HEARTS group contributed to a national project led by the International Child Health Group (ICHG) working with refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people to collaborate with them to produce an animation to celebrate Refugee Week 2023 in June.

The idea was to showcase community-led art projects involving refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children sharing reflections on their hopes and dreams, as a means of denouncing anti-migrant racism, hostile rhetoric and policy and building solidarity among health professionals, VCSE groups, and the public to resist and challenge harmful and unjust immigration policy.

Organisations invited the children and young people they work with to draw/paint what their hopes, wishes and dreams are and then they were cleverly converted into this inspiring little animation

[Click here to watch the movie](#)



## Refugee World Cup

Solace made its first appearance at the Refugee World Cup this year, one of Leeds' Refugee Week events. The HEARTS project had a great day competing against adult teams, some of whom were very well practised. We came together with staff, volunteers, young people and family members to put forward a team, some of whom had never previously met, let alone played together! They were fearless and brilliant and made a great effort. We scored one amazing goal by one of our young people and one of our volunteers suffered a sprained ankle playing in goal! We even had young people turning up just to support the team. We were very proud of everyone

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## Two years of the Afghan resettlement schemes

Solace has supported many people from Afghanistan over the years, and more recently has been involved in supporting families who arrived in the UK as part of the various resettlement schemes. The Children and Families team has delivered a range of work to many families across the region, and other Solace therapists have worked in Bridging Hotels and in the community providing much needed support and therapy. These families have many complex needs, and in August to mark the 2nd anniversary of the evacuation of Kabul airport, ITV news interviewed some young people about being separated from their families. .

[Click here to watch the news story](#)

**Our friends at Refugee Council have recently produced a report called 'Afghan Refugees: What happened to the warm welcome?'. It assesses the UK Government's support for Afghan refugees since the fall of Kabul in August 2021. You can read it [here](#)**

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## Development of our e-learning courses

In 2022 Solace created two online courses aimed at people in helping professions understand and better meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. These courses have generated significant interest, and we are delighted that the first course is now available on the NHS Learning Hub as well as via our own Solace website. <https://www.solace-uk.org.uk/new-free-e-learning>

Anyone with an NHS email can now access this material by logging into their account at <https://learninghub.nhs.uk/Resource/37233/Item>

We are incredibly proud of this excellent resource that is based on Solace's learning over the last 16 years of experience of listening to refugees and finding out what is most helpful to them in supporting their emotional health and wellbeing. So far 244 people have completed the first course between them spending almost 950 hours working on the materials.

Our vision is that every mental health service in the country will have at least one practitioner who has completed the training and is using it to make their service more effective and accessible for people seeking sanctuary.

**You can access the courses by clicking here**



## We have new interpreters!

Here is Azam with our newest interpreters at their induction.

In the photo is Peter who is our first local English interpreter. He was really excited about the diversity in Solace, here is a part of his email to us about the session,

*"What a lovely way to spend a morning with you all today! The atmosphere was just so wonderful and friendly and I found the session entertaining, engaging and above all most useful. It was so great to meet so many people from so many different places around the world.*

*I am very grateful for this opportunity and will do my very best to do things in the proper way, even though I fully realise I have a great deal to learn and that this is a very different type of role to the ones I have been used to in the past. I really hope that I can be of use to you and your clients in this most desperately needed work."*

**Click here to access information about how we work with interpreters**



## Fundraising for Solace's client emergency fund

One of our therapists Tony is taking on a mammoth challenge in order to raise much needed funds for our client emergency fund. On 23rd September he is going to swim the length of Crummock Water in the Lake District. A distance of 2.5 **miles!** He has set up a just giving pagewhere anyone who would like to donate can contribute towards the fund. The money is used for buying small items that make a big difference to our clients. Examples have been providing money to buy food when someone was without any, a cricket bag so a client could join in with his local team, a small fridge to store medication in a shared house, and occasional taxi fares when someone has struggled to leave their house to come to their appointment or to attend a group. These small items help preserve dignity, and promote self esteem and are a practical expression of Solace's aim to help people feel welcome and safe.

**Please click here to donate if you can**

## A message from one of our clients

*'Hello to all at Solace. I am sending you this letter to express my thanks to Safaa (my therapist) and everyone. I am in good health at the moment, but 2020 to the end of 2022 is the worst time for me. I have been incarcerated in prison for a long time, I am sick, I have covid, I am quarantined, I have life pressure, I am shunned by people in the community and society, I don't have friends to share everything with in life.*

*I feel I am slow, I feel I have not integrated and caught up in society, that makes me don't know what to do. I stay in my room every day, I don't want to be in contact with anyone, maybe I'm used to life in prison. I have no money, I have no clothes, and I still face the fact that I cannot stay in this country. There are many things that I really want to share with Safaa and your colleagues, now I will just write briefly to say that my thoughts, motivation, confidence, memory, myself have felt better when I met Safaa at Solace, you guys encouraged me, you took the time to talk to me. You give me positive comments, for that I am very grateful to you, and I promise you I will do useful things for society, contribute to this country, especially is to build better myself every day. I have many plans for the future. I have thought to write a letter to you in the most sincere way. I would like to say thank you to Safaa, thank you to the person who called to remind me to schedule an appointment, thank you to the people working at Solace'.*



### Solace Monograph 9: Therapist's experience of working with Asylum Seekers in the context of asylum- seeking processes in the UK

Therapist's experience of working with Asylum Seekers in the context of asylum- seeking processes in the UK

In this paper, ex-Solace therapist Avin Partivian explores the impact of the UK asylum legislative context upon the process of psychotherapy and the mental health of psychotherapists. Based upon analyses of in depth interviews with practitioners, and informed by the research literature, three key themes were identified.

First, given the impact of external factors including the instability and erratic nature of seeking asylum, therapists tend to extend the therapeutic framework to work more flexibly, with ongoing attention given to managing the boundaries of the work.

Secondly, the goals of therapy and therapeutic process were adjusted to prioritise the need for safety and respond to the changing circumstances.

Third, the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship were impacted by an exaggerated power differential between therapist and client but for both it could lead to an overwhelming powerlessness.

Therapists often felt the need to be transparent and to disclose their own thoughts and feelings about the asylum system that impacted their clients' wellbeing rather than taking a 'neutral' stance. The paper concludes by exploring implications for effective therapeutic practice with asylum seekers.

[You can read the monograph by clicking here](#)



## Report on Mental Health in Migration Crisis

Small boats' are rarely out of the UK news these days with politicians arguing about the best way to handle the 'refugee crisis'. An excellent report published recently by the University of Cambridge, which Anne Burghraef, Solace Clinical Director contributed to gets beyond the rhetoric to open up a broader understanding of the issues. It puts the UK's response within the broader European context and demonstrates the economic benefit of giving asylum seekers the right to work, which can be accessed via this link

[Mental health in a migration crisis - policy brief \(cam.ac.uk\)](https://www.cam.ac.uk/press-releases/2018/09/12/mental-health-in-a-migration-crisis)

Solace is very pleased to draw upon our knowledge and experience to influence public policy.

## Training: Working with Interpreters in a Mental Health Setting

**Trainer: Azam Imani**

**Friday 29th September 10am - 12.30pm on Zoom**

If you work or volunteer in a mental health or wellbeing support practice, and may need to use interpreters for patients or service users with limited English language, this course will benefit you.

Recent feedback:

*I wanted to get in touch to say a huge thank you for your training in June and July. The feedback from staff is brilliant. They've said the training itself was so relevant and many have already been able to put learning into practice. All have spoken about your facilitation style and how fantastic you were and how you made the training come to life. We will not hesitate to recommend this training.*

\*\*\*Please note this course is funded by the Leeds office of the ICB for the benefit of people living in Leeds – Your organisation must be based in Leeds to register a place.\*\*\*



**Click here for more information and to book**