

Solace E-learning for all Helping Professionals



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Acknowledgements for Solace e-learning course

The development of the Solace e-learning course was a communal project that was funded by the UK Home Office in 2021. Course 1, Understanding Refugee Mental Health, was built upon the City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource pack produced in 2017. Anne Burghgraef, Solace e-learning course writer and tutor, took the lead in developing the City of Sanctuary Mental Health Resource pack together with Jeff Morgan, Gill Martin & Gill Newman, all of whom were inspiring and resourceful colleagues. We want to acknowledge the important role City of Sanctuary has in promoting a culture of welcome for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

Our thanks go to Ruth Cooke, who project managed the development of the e-learning course, to freelance editor Kevin Cooke who ensured the text was clear and accessible and to Fiona Lothian, a contributing tutor.

We acknowledge the incredible contribution of the refugees and asylum seekers who generously shared their stories and agreed to be filmed.

For this report, we thank Kathryn Ashworth, Solace CEO, and Richard Orton, Operations Manager, together with Jodie Morrison, Solace Volunteer, for collating the feedback data from the Understanding Refugee Mental Health e-learning course.

Lastly, we express our gratitude to the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) and in particular Andrea Anastassiou, Anna Kennedy and Shanil Rathod from the BACP research team for their generosity in analysing the feedback data and producing this report.

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Executive Summary

Background

Solace is a Leeds-based charity which provides free counselling, psychotherapy and support to the survivors of persecution and exile living in the Yorkshire and Humber region. As part of their work, Solace has developed a range of training and resources for refugees and people seeking safety as well as those who work with refugees and asylum seekers. This includes, 'E-Learning for All Helping Professionals' which was launched April 2022. The E-learning can be freely accessed by members of the public on the Solace website, with NHS staff and Home Office staff also having access through their respective learning platforms. The e-learning consists of two courses: course 1, '*Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health*' (six modules) and course 2, '*Effective Therapeutic Support for Asylum Seekers*' (nine modules). Both courses aim to educate and support those working with people who have been displaced from their country of origin through developing understandings of refugee experiences and by providing practical advice on how to develop their own practice.

BACP was approached by Solace to examine feedback received from e-learning course participants. The examination aimed to evaluate whether the '*Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health*' e-learning (course 1) enhanced understanding of asylum issues and built confidence in professionals to support asylum seekers. The following research questions were developed collaboratively by Solace staff and members of the BACP research team:

- What key learning points enhanced course participants' understanding of asylum issues?
- What effect did the e-learning have on course participants' confidence to support asylum seekers?
- How did course participants intend to make use of their learning in subsequent work with asylum seekers?

Data collection and analysis

As of June 2024, course 1 had been completed by 619 participants. Upon completion of the course, each participant was asked to complete an online feedback survey designed and distributed by Solace. This data was then collated in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Quantitative data was provided by Solace as a frequency (i.e. the number and percentage of participant responses). Qualitative data were analysed inductively, drawing upon qualitative latent content analysis, with themes and categories crosschecked between members of the BACP research team to maintain the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis.

Findings

Research question 1: What key learning points enhanced course participants' understanding of asylum issues?

Analysis of qualitative responses generated two major themes. The theme, 'refugee and asylum seeker experience' was the most prominent and centred around new insights and understanding of the refugee and asylum seeker experience, with the personal stories provided throughout the training viewed as particularly impactful. 'Challenges faced by refugees', the second theme generated, focused on learning about the difficulties associated with the asylum process, such as length and complexity, the minimal support available upon reaching a host country, the barriers and access to support, and the negative portrayal of this group in the UK media.

Research question 2: What effect did the e-learning have on course participants' confidence to support asylum seekers?

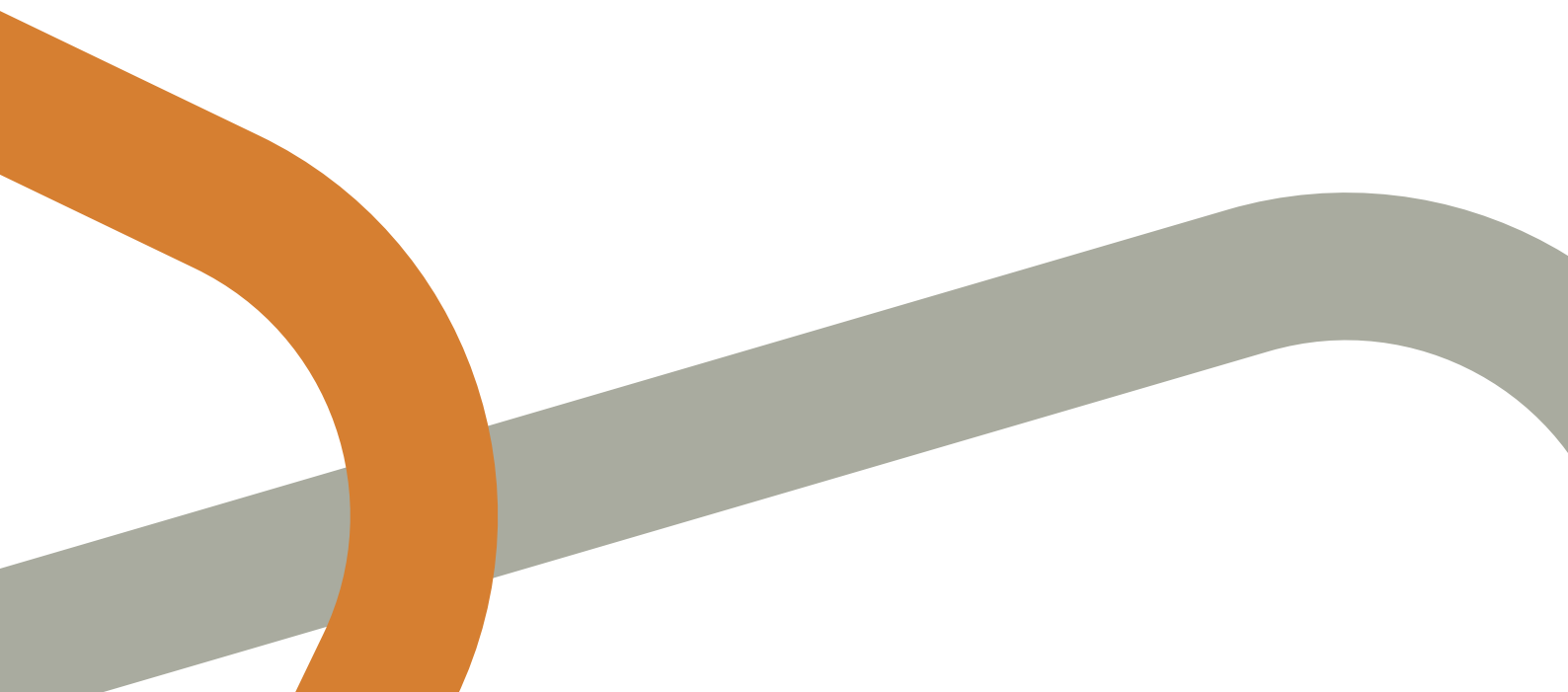
Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data found that completion of course 1 increased participants confidence to support asylum seekers and refugees. Of the 312 participants who responded to the question, 'as a result of the training, how confident do you now feel in supporting asylum seekers in your role?', 97.1% (n=303) indicated an increase in confidence. This was supported by the qualitative responses, which suggested that the increase in confidence was derived from a greater understanding of the refugee experience and the asylum process, enabling respondents to feel better prepared to work with people seeking refuge.

Research question 3: How did course participants intend to make use of their learning in subsequent work with asylum seekers?

Respondents indicated changes to their underlying philosophical approach to providing support (incorporating holistic and person-centered approaches), employing more active listening and being more mindful of how their refugee clients are experiencing support. Furthermore, through completion of the training, participants reported a change in attitudes, believing that they would be more patient, open-minded and empathetic towards their refugee clients. The theme of 'personal and professional development' also captured participants' aims to learn more about asylum seekers and local asylum services, diversify their support offers and either commence or continue advocacy work.

Conclusion

The findings of this report indicate that the Solace 'E-Learning for All Helping Professionals' course 1 is a valuable training resource for anyone working with asylum seekers and refugees. Through increasing awareness of refugee and asylum seeker experiences, and the challenges they can face, the course is perceived by most respondents to have increased their confidence in providing support. The evidence also suggests that completion of the course has altered respondents' attitudes and approaches to working with refugees and asylum seekers and that many respondents intend to make meaningful changes to their practice going forward based on what they have learnt.



1. Introduction

Solace is a Leeds-based charity which provides free counselling, psychotherapy and mental health support to refugees and asylum seekers across Yorkshire and the Humber. The service also liaises with other agencies and organisations to help meet the often highly complex needs of people fleeing persecution.

Since 2004, Solace has developed wide ranging expertise on how best to improve the mental health and wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers, and is acknowledged as a leading specialist provider of therapeutic services for refugees regionally. Using this expertise, Solace has developed a range of [training and resources](#) for refugees and people seeking safety as well as those who work with refugees and asylum seekers.

This report offers an examination of the feedback received from course participants upon completion of the '*E-Learning for All Helping Professionals*', course 1. Course 2 feedback has not been examined.

1.1 E-learning for all helping professionals

Free '*E-Learning for All Helping Professionals*' was developed by Solace and launched April 2022. The courses are advertised on the Solace website and via their regional and national networks and can be freely accessed by members of the public following the creation of a user account on the Solace e-training hub. Access can also be gained through the NHS Learning Hub (for NHS staff) and on the Home Office Learning portal (for Home Office staff). The e-learning consists of two courses: course 1, '*Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health*' (six modules) and course 2, '*Effective Therapeutic Support for Asylum Seekers*' (nine modules). Each module consists of three phases: (1) a recorded tutorial video containing all of the required learning for the module, (2) text pages which highlight the key learning points from the tutorial video and (3) client videos at the end of each module from people with personal experience of the asylum system. The module content is interspersed with short interactive activities and open response 'questions for reflection', such as 'did you learn anything new?' and 'how might the learning from Module 1 alter your thinking or behaviour in any way?'. Although participants can work through the modules at their own pace, Solace suggest completing one module per week over a 6-week period. These courses aim to educate and support those working with people who have been displaced from their country of origin through developing understanding of the refugee experience and by providing practical advice on how to develop their own practice. Course 1 only is considered in this report.

Course 1, 'Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health', consisted of six modules:

Module 1: The global and UK context of refugees

Module 2: The refugee experience

Module 3: Refugee and asylum seekers mental health and wellbeing

Module 4: Supporting the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers

Module 5: When professional therapeutic support may be needed

Module 6: Special issues for consideration

1.2 Aim and research questions

BACP was approached by Solace to undertake an examination of feedback received from e-learning course participants. The examination aimed to evaluate whether the '*Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health*' e-learning course provided by Solace enhanced understanding of asylum issues and built confidence in professionals to support asylum seekers. The following research questions were investigated:

- What key learning points enhanced course participants' understanding of asylum issues?
- What effect did the e-learning have on course participants' confidence to support asylum seekers?
- How did course participants intend to make use of their learning in subsequent work with asylum seekers?

1.3 Research activities completed

As of June 2024, course 1 had been completed by 619 participants. Upon completion of the course, each participant was asked to complete an online feedback survey designed and distributed by Solace. Feedback was gathered and data collated in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. No demographic data was requested from participants. Please note, for the purpose of this report the terms 'participant' or 'respondent' relate to course participants who completed the survey at the end of course 1.

Solace staff and members of the BACP research team discussed and agreed upon the chosen research questions to meet the primary aims of the survey as specified by Solace. Four questions (three qualitative and one quantitative) from the survey were chosen to answer the research questions with the number of responses to each ranging from 234 to 312. Quantitative data was provided by Solace as a frequency (i.e. the number and percentage of participant responses). Qualitative data were analysed inductively, drawing upon qualitative latent content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Kleinheksel et al., 2020). To begin, all responses were coded to condense the meaning within each response. All codes were organised to form categories based on shared content and/or context and a codebook generated containing numerical counts for each category. Categories were then placed into overarching themes and corresponding sub-themes to answer each of the research questions. Finally, themes and categories were crosschecked between members of the research team to maintain the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis.

2. Findings

2.1 Research question 1: What key learning points enhanced course participants' understanding of asylum issues?

Analysis of qualitative responses generated two major and two minor themes focused on the key learning gained from course completion. The major theme, 'refugee and asylum seeker experience' was the most prominent and centred around new insights and understanding of the refugee and asylum seeker experience. For instance, the trauma endured, the impact on mental and physical health, statistics, information on the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the treatment of refugee women and LGBTQ+ issues. The personal stories provided throughout the training enhanced understanding of the refugee experience and were particularly impactful. The corresponding sub-theme, 'UK specific information', noted key learning points which helped increase participant understanding of asylum issues in the UK, such as the support offered by the UK, the attitude towards people seeking refuge and the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

'Challenges faced by refugees', the second theme generated, focused on learning about the difficulties asylum seekers and refugees encounter throughout their journey to seek safety. Of particular note were the challenges associated with the asylum process, such as length and complexity, the minimal support available upon reaching a host country, the barriers and access to support, and the negative portrayal of this group in the UK media. The corresponding sub-theme, 'support needs and resources', pointed to the importance of both practical and psychological support for asylum seekers and refugees and the value of identifying support organisations focused on working with people displaced from their country of origin. Special issues that may require collaboration with specialist services (such as LGBTQ issues and occupational issues) and things to consider when supporting this population were also relayed as new and impactful insights.

Theme 1: Refugee & asylum seeker experience

Table 1. Theme 1: Refugee & asylum seeker experience

Themes	Categories
Refugee & asylum seeker experience	Refugee experience & trauma
	Health impact
	Understanding refugee backgrounds & context
	Statistics
	Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
	Treatment of women
	LGBTQ+ issues
Sub-theme: UK specific information	UK specific information

Theme: Refugee & asylum seeker experience

Participants reported that completion of the course enhanced their knowledge and understanding of refugee and asylum seeker experiences. The trauma that refugees and asylum seekers can endure or have been exposed to stood out and/or surprised participants the most from the course content, with the personal stories highlighted as particularly impactful.

"[I learnt] the actual nitty gritty and often the extreme difficulty of asylum seeker/ refugee experience, particularly what they are fleeing but also the difficulty of being in an alien culture with little support"

"The interviews with individual asylum seekers and how traumatic it is for people fleeing their homes and seeking refuge in the UK"

"How many traumatic events that the asylum seekers can face"

"Truly hearing how asylum seekers risk their lives and how vulnerable they are on their journey to safety is saddening"

As shown, some respondents found the e-learning led to a deeper understanding of the types and variety of traumatic experiences refugees and asylum seekers can face. The impact of these experiences on mental and physical health were also noted as a newfound understanding.

"How little I knew about the impact of being a refugee/asylum seeker on their mental and physical health"

"I have not ever fully considered or grasped the extent of the impact of needing to flee a country on an individual's mental health"

"The impact of the stress of seeking asylum on physical as well as mental health. Many students I work with have health conditions, I am seeing that in a new light now"

These statements reveal that some participants understood little of the mental and physical toll on asylum seekers and refugees prior to engaging in this training, but this course provided fresh and valuable understanding focused on health impact. Furthermore, respondents also reportedly gained insight into the backgrounds and the context of the refugee crisis which helped to aid their understanding of asylum issues.

"The home countries where people come from are so varied – I hadn't realised the amount of places and the reasons people escape"

"Asylum seekers do not want to leave their country of origin but circumstances mean they are forced to do so because they are under threat"

"The personal first-hand stories, containing answers to questions that I never dared ask and helping me develop my empathy in this area"

Several respondents conveyed surprise at the variety of reasons which might cause asylum seekers to flee their country, as well as the number of differences in the country of origin. In addition, as highlighted above, the videos of personal stories were noted as a valuable aid to enhance understanding and develop empathy through hearing first-hand accounts of the trauma, struggles and ongoing issues faced by this group. As the participant exclaimed above, the stories "contain[ed] answers to questions that I never dared ask".

Key learning through statistics, facts, and figures also helped participants better understand asylum seeker issues.

"The statistics related to refugee numbers and torture really shocked me"

"I was surprised by the information I learnt about where refugees are fleeing from and the fact that the richest countries in the world actually offer asylum to a minimal amount of refugees"

"I think the entire program was an awakening in my knowledge of refugees. I thought I would be fairly well informed, but the statistics shocked me"

Participants were surprised by some of the data presented in the course, gaining new and, for some, "shocking" information about the lives and experiences of asylum seekers. Several reported learning unexpected and impactful information about FGM among this population.

"The high levels of FGM within the UK shocked me"

"I was struck with the fact that FGM is a factor in asylum seeking and is still very active in some parts of the world"

"Most impact – FGM and how women in some countries have to obey and have no voice"

Gaining new knowledge is evident from these statements. Learning of the prevalence of FGM for asylum seeking and refugee women was relayed as a shocking and/or impactful insight for many. Relatedly, several respondents highlighted an increased understanding and awareness of how refugee and asylum seeker women are treated.

"The gender issues of asylum-seeking girls and women impacted me the most, learning about the violence and attacks they may endure"

"More women between 15 and 44 suffer death, disability and mutilation as a result of sexual violence than is caused by cancer, malaria, and traffic accidents"

These extracts demonstrate key learning for some participants about the treatment of women and the additional difficulties and traumas they might endure.

Lastly, a small number of respondents relayed newly gained and surprising knowledge specific to LGBTQ+ experiences.

"Those claiming asylum on the grounds of sexual orientation are more likely to be rejected"

"Refugees fear to speak about their sexual preferences because of discrimination"

"The type of evidence being used to support cases involving LGBTQ asylum seekers, and the often-poor outcomes for those cases"

For some participants, this information was key to improve their understanding of this sub-group of asylum seekers and refugees, a group who face further, and often overlooked, discrimination.

Sub-theme: UK specific information

Information specific to the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK emerged as a sub-theme, with all but two comments reflecting a negative perspective.

"The UK is one of the few European countries which has unlimited detention, thus perpetuating months of anxiety and insecurity. This surprised me a lot"

"The creation of an increasingly hostile environment in the UK is neither cost-effective nor efficient, but ideologically cruel"

"The efforts that the UK institutions put towards ensuring that asylum seekers get the protection they need stood out for me"

The first two comments suggest a sense that refugees and asylum seekers are treated unfairly and poorly in the UK. However, the third statement implies a positive view referring to the protection of asylum seekers. These comments reflect a diversity of opinion within the participant group which suggests a balance of knowledge and perspectives within the content of the e-learning modules.

Overall, theme 1, 'refugee and asylum seeker experience', indicates key learning from the completion of course 1 centred on new knowledge and understanding of the past and present experiences, trauma, health impact and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

Theme 2: Challenges faced by refugees

Table 2. Theme 2: Challenges faced by refugees

Themes	Categories
Challenges faced by refugees	Asylum process
	Lack of support
	Barriers & Access Issues
	Media representation
Sub-theme: Support & resource needs	Working with refugees
	Learning about local resources, support services, & agencies
	Special issues, considerations, & circumstances

Theme: Challenges faced by refugees

Key learning focused on the difficulties and challenges asylum seekers and refugees face throughout their journey and resettlement was evident. When asked about the most surprising or impactful learning from course 1, the asylum process itself was a dominant response.

"The impact of the length and difficulty and coldness of the asylum-seeking process on the mental health of asylum seekers"

"How difficult the asylum application process is, and how they have to wait such long times, during which time they can't work, and have no choice about where they live"

"The lengthy process of applying for settlement for an asylum seeker and not being able to work in the meantime, left feeling bored and not able to integrate"

These quotes highlight that participants had a better understanding of the length and complexity of the asylum process, a process asylum seekers must go through to attain refugee status. In addition, respondents gained insight into the impact the process can have on mental health, and the conditions enforced upon asylum seekers preventing them from building a life in the UK and integrating into society.

Lack of support options available for refugees and asylum seekers was also noted as new learning.

"The little support offered when receiving letters for bills, documents and access to services"

"That during awaiting outcome the very limited access that is available for support and education"

"The amount that asylum seekers are given by the government is much lower than I had ever imagined"

"People are taken wherever in England with no choice or say. Very little financial support is provided"

Many participants were previously unaware of the level of support available to asylum seekers, with a general consensus that support was lacking across different sectors, for instance, housing, finance and education. Linked to a lack of support, participants also commented on learning about some of the barriers and access to support issues encountered when arriving to a new country.

"The barriers people face when seeking asylum in the host country such as access to information, language barriers etc."

"Level of issues faced and the need to prove themselves at every turn"

"How difficult it is to access the appropriate help"

These quotes provide further evidence that the e-learning has increased respondents' understanding of the barriers and access issues that asylum seekers face. Participants have learned that the difficulties this population contend with are not limited to the journey when fleeing their home, but extend beyond that through encountering further issues, barriers and limited access to appropriate support once they have reached a host country.

A minor but learning point of note within 'challenges faced by refugees', related to media representation of asylum seekers and refugees. Some participants felt misinformed and manipulated by the UK media.

"How media can negatively portray asylum seekers"

"The reality of the issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers. They are often reduced to being seen as a 'problem' in the media"

"My ignorance struck me. The narrative you hear about asylum seekers is far removed from the reality. It makes me feel that I have been manipulated by the rhetoric that others are giving out"

This training provided clarity on the realities for asylum seekers and refugees which were believed to be misrepresented in the media. These statements imply a newfound understanding of further barriers and issues faced by this group through discrimination and stigma perpetuated by the media.

Sub-theme: Support & resource needs

Completion of the e-learning provided fresh insight into the support needs and resources available to asylum seekers and refugees.

"They need help and welcoming people to help them settle and lighten the load of leaving one's country"

"The most important support people receive can be practical everyday things that seem minor but may make the difference between the asylum seeker feeling overwhelmed and anxious or feeling able to cope in the present"

"The need to try and support people into language learning ESOL and the need to volunteer. To try and do something that will occupy and involve"

"The high levels of stress among asylum seekers struck me and made me realise how important it is to offer them psychological support"

Support needs, both practical and psychological, were identified by respondents as valuable information. *"Helpful suggestions relating to the practical and physical support"* was stated as a standout learning from course completion. Additionally, learning about local resources, support services and the agencies available to refugees and asylum seekers were noted as beneficial for signposting.

"I was not aware that there were a lot of relevant agencies that work with asylum seekers, [I will] inform others of relevant information"

"[I will] further investigate local support networks to signpost people seeking asylum"

"[I learnt] the importance of working holistically and having a knowledge of local resources"

These statements illustrate that the participants valued being given information about support services to help refugees and asylum seekers, and recognised the importance of these available services. For some, they had little previous knowledge of the support services available to asylum seekers, however through completion of the course, awareness has been raised.

Other key learning points were related to special considerations and circumstances.

"I found a lot of content in [course 1] module 6 – special considerations shocking and harrowing but very useful to know"

"All of the 'special considerations' shocked me – it seems as there are such high levels of special considerations, more time could be spent on this"

"Special issues of consideration filled me with horror as the traumatic events that happen in the countries of origin for asylum seekers was laid before me"

Participant comments reflect a depth of learning related to special considerations and circumstances. Repeated use of the word "shock" reinforces the impact of this learning. Furthermore, understanding additional factors to take into consideration when working with asylum seekers and refugees was deemed as crucial information, with one participant declaring its importance so great that "more time could be spent on this" during the training.

To conclude, theme 2, 'challenges faced by refugees', suggests key learning points focused on the challenges, barriers and issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. In addition, learning more about specific support needs, what is currently offered and services available was noted as valuable information.

2.2 Research question 2: What effect did the e-learning have on course participants' confidence to support asylum seekers?

Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data found that completion of course 1 increased participants confidence to support asylum seekers and refugees.

Table 3 shows that 97.1% (n=303) of the 312 participants who responded to quantitative question, 'as a result of the training, how confident do you now feel in supporting asylum seekers in your role?', indicated some increase in confidence after completing the e-learning. 2.9% reported that they remained 'not very confident, but have some understanding of the issues involved', with 0% stating not at all confident/no increase in confidence. Of the respondents who experienced some increase in confidence, 19.9% were quite confident, 44.5% were confident, and 32.7% felt very confident that they had gained enough understanding to support asylum seekers. This means a high percentage felt confident or very confident (77.2%) in supporting asylum seekers within their professional helping roles. These results indicate that completion of the e-learning increased confidence in working with and supporting asylum seekers for the majority of the participant group.

Table 3. Impact on confidence to support asylum seekers as a result of completing e-learning course 1 (n=312)

As a result of the training, how confident do you now feel in supporting asylum seekers in your role?	% of participants	number of participants (n)
Not at all confident	0.0	0
Not very confident, but have some understanding of the issues involved	2.9	9
Quite confident that I have enough understanding for my role	19.9	62
Confident - I feel I have enough understanding to offer some support	44.5	139
Very confident - I feel I can help to make a positive difference to the wellbeing of an asylum seeker needing support	32.7	102

Qualitative responses analysed support the aforementioned results and suggest that increased confidence to work with asylum seekers was derived from a greater understanding of the refugee experience and the asylum process.

"I will feel more confident working with asylum seekers in the future and feel better equipped to understand the difficulties they face"

"I will be more confident in knowing about the issues that may have impacted this client group and more aware of the process they have to go through"

"I will be more understanding, patient and also confident of how my mentee is going through life"

Participant statements suggest that confidence to work with refugees has been enhanced through gaining insight into the past and present experiences of refugees. Confidence was acquired through being able to understand and "*relate to these [experiences] more*", which clearly demonstrates the value gained from increased knowledge and understanding of the refugee experience.

Not only did an increased understanding of the refugee experience enhance confidence through greater awareness, it also created, for some, a feeling of being better prepared to work with and support people seeking refuge through feeling more equipped to support mental health needs, identify risk and to signpost to appropriate services.

"I will have more understanding for those clients who are refugees and feel more equipped to help them with their mental health"

"I will be able to help refugees more regarding mental health because I've got a greater understanding of their experiences"

"I feel more confident in my knowledge which will support with identifying risk, support needs so that the asylum seeker can be signposted to the right support intervention and/or any urgent referrals made on behalf of the person"

Other responses demonstrated an increase in confidence through future actions.

"I will look to start taking on Asylum Seeking and Refugee counselling clients"

"The course will allow me to confidently attend an interview for Welfare Support Officer for [a care support provider]. It has given me understanding of local organisations and their provisions, and has given me up to date knowledge of the asylum process and contributing global factors and UN resettlement programmes"

Statements such as these clearly demonstrate an increase in confidence through feeling prepared and able to provide counselling to refugees and asylum seekers, and to seek out new employment working with a greater variety of clients.

To summarise, participant responses point to an increase in confidence to work with and support asylum seekers and refugees through completion of the e-learning.

2.3 Research question 3: How did course participants intend to make use of their learning in subsequent work with asylum seekers?

The analysis revealed two themes and two corresponding sub themes. Theme, '*approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers*', captures the various ways in which participants believed their client-facing work would change based on their enhanced knowledge of the asylum process and the effect it can have on the mental health of asylum seekers. This includes changes to their underlying philosophical approach to providing support (incorporating holistic and person-centered approaches), employing more active listening and being more mindful of how their refugee clients are experiencing support. Furthermore, through completion of the training, participants reported a change in attitude (sub-theme) believing that they would be more patient, open-minded and empathetic towards their refugee clients. The analysis also produced the theme of '*personal and professional development*', which captures participants' aims to learn more about asylum seekers and local asylum services, diversify their support offers and either commence or continue advocacy work. Finally, a sub-theme of 'working with others' emerged, in which respondents reported that they would alter their approach to working with interpreters, share their learnings from the course with others and recommend the course to their colleagues and trainees.

Theme 1: Approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers

Table 4. Theme 1: Approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers

Themes	Categories
Approach to supporting refugees & asylum seekers	Utilise greater understanding of refugee experiences & impact of asylum process
	Utilise greater understanding of the impact of mental health
	Will employ a holistic approach
	Will employ a person-centred approach
	Will employ active listening
	Be more observant/mindful of how client is feeling/coping
	Employ more cultural awareness & sensitivity
Sub-theme: Attitudes towards refugee & asylum seeker clients	More patient
	More open-minded
	More empathy/understanding

Theme: Approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers

Participants believed that their future work with refugees would be informed by increased knowledge acquired through the e-learning. This increased knowledge took two predominant forms, the first being greater understanding of the asylum process.

"I just feel I have a greater knowledge around the processes of asylum. I will feel in a better position to listen and respond appropriately"

"Heightened awareness that the current asylum system itself causes considerable anxiety and trauma"

"I will be more aware of what some people may have been through in order to gain refugee status in the country and give them more time to support with whatever it may be that they need"

As demonstrated by these quotes, some participants lacked a thorough understanding of the asylum process prior to completing the training. Consequently, respondents indicated that the course content provided them with a newfound appreciation for how the asylum process can affect refugees and asylum seekers, which, in turn, would place them in a “*better position*” during their future client-facing work.

Second, participants reported that going forward their work would be informed by their increased knowledge of specific mental health needs.

“I will take to heart the PTSD/suicide notes and try and apply those when/where necessary”

“Improving support groups to help in reducing depression in the living environment of asylum seekers”

“Adopt more holistic proven methods to reduce immediate stress/panic attacks etc”

Participants cited increased cognizance of the impact of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, panic attacks and depression on asylum seekers and refugees. Responses indicated that the training heightened awareness that refugee clients might be experiencing these conditions and symptoms, leading to more focus on addressing these issues in the future as part of their support offering. In addition, the e-learning appeared to give participants a newfound appreciation for the complex interplay between refugee mental health and other challenges and needs.

“It has developed my understanding of the hardship asylum seekers can face and I will consider this within my formulation of their mental health”

“Increased level of empathy. Heightened awareness of possible extent, amount, and intersectional nature of previous traumas”

As indicated by these statements, the training gave participants a greater understanding of how mental health needs compounded, and were compounded by, other challenges that refugees might face. For some participants, this knowledge made them more likely to prioritise mental health when providing support to refugees.

“I will work on making sure we put our young people's mental health needs first”

“[I will] Consider mental health as a priority”

Respondents also indicated that completing the training could result in changes to their underlying philosophical approach to working with refugees and asylum seekers, with some participants indicating their intention to work in a more holistic manner.

"I will continue to support the homeless asylum seekers that we work with. I better understand how important it is to assist with small issues such as directions, calling to make appointments and helping people to understand letters, for example"

"I have to make sure that I fully understand and be very sympathetic to what they have gone through and to make sure that all their needs are met through providing a safer environment, education, assisting and explaining to them their legal papers in order to make them feel welcome"

"I really did not understand the type or levels of barriers faced by asylum seekers even in just not understanding the value of money and road signs, and the impact this has on their day-to-day and mental health which can then impact them in interviews and the outcome of applications/decisions"

These extracts all refer to an increased appreciation for how everyday issues, such as understanding directions, making appointments and comprehending legal matters can compound to impact the wellbeing of asylum seekers. Consequently, participants indicated their intentions to support refugee clients as whole individuals rather than addressing separate concerns in isolation. To this end, respondents also expressed their intention to incorporate a more person-centred approach.

"I will listen more to individual asylum seekers and analyse situations according to individuals"

"I will try to make them relieve stress, treat them in a person-centred way, empathetic, support in all aspects"

In their future work, these participants state that they will aim to ensure their support is guided by the individual through focusing on "analyse(-ing) situations" and understanding priorities from the perspectives of their refugee clients while remaining "empathetic" to their needs and concerns. This person-centred approach also extended to heightened sensitivity of cultural needs, how clients appear to be coping during support sessions and making a conscious effort to actively listen to clients.

"[I will] be more mindful of cultural things such as eye contact and the use of thank you."

"Always be observant and be able to tell when an asylum seeker is overwhelmed"

"I will be more sensitive to the trauma and journey asylum seekers have had. I will be more curious and aware of their presentation"

"I will hold in mind the different experiences a client may have had. I will try to create a space where they can share about their culture and consider how western communication and norms may vary from theirs"

"Actively listen and don't make assumptions."

Taken in tandem, these extracts suggest an intention to move towards being more "mindful", "sensitive" and "observant" of how an asylum seeker or refugee client might be experiencing support. This is achieved through an increased awareness of the importance of active listening, the impact of cultural factors and an awareness of a client's "presentation". Essentially, as indicated by the last statement, these respondents were pledging to be led by a refugee clients' individual needs and experiences, rather than "making assumptions".

Sub-theme: Attitudes towards refugee and asylum seeker clients

A change in attitude toward asylum seekers and refugees emerged as a sub-theme. For instance, some respondents pledged to be more patient.

"I will be much more open to exploring the client's story at their own pace and doing what I can to make them feel heard and supported"

"I feel I will be patient with the needs and appreciative of how far the person has come"

"To be kind and show empathy and to be patient"

These responses indicate that the training has equipped participants with the ability to be more patient and comfortable to progress support at the refugee client's pace. The intention to be "much more open" was echoed by other participants who intended to be more open-minded.

"[I will] have an open-mind when supporting asylum seekers due to their experiences"

"I won't believe everything I hear about asylum seekers. I feel I can actively challenge some of the negative talk I hear"

As stated, the ability to be more open-minded stems from participants' increased awareness of the experiences of asylum seekers. Thus, the information provided on the course has enabled this change in attitude and way of working. Moreover, echoing a trend toward commencing refugee advocacy amongst participants (discussed further in the following section: *Personal and Professional Development*), the second response indicates the participants' open-mindedness will extend beyond their own critical thinking (*"I won't believe everything I hear"*). Completion of the e-learning has empowered some participants to *"actively challenge"* others in their inaccurate perceptions and assumptions of refugees.

Finally, respondents also spoke of increased empathetic attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers.

"I now have greater knowledge and understanding of AS (asylum seeker) experiences, so will strive to show greater empathy"

"I will be much better able to understand and empathize with asylum seekers' struggles, which in itself is a very positive change"

As addressed throughout this section, increased understanding of refugee and asylum seeker experiences and *"struggles"* provided by the training have resulted in participants feeling able to work with their clients in a more empathetic and compassionate manner.

Overall, theme 1, 'approach to supporting refugees and asylum seekers', illustrates how participants' intend to change in their approach and attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees in their future work. These changes stem from greater understanding of experiences which placed respondents in a better position to support this client group through change in practice, greater cultural awareness, and a desire to be more patient, open-minded and empathic.

Theme 2: Professional and personal development

Table 5. Theme 2: Personal and professional development

Themes	Categories
Professional & personal development	Continue learning about refugees
	Learn about local services to signpost
	Develop new services to offer to refugees
	Advocacy
Sub-theme: Working with others	Will share learnings with others
	Will change working practices with interpreters

Theme: Professional and personal development

Participants indicated that the training had compelled them to engage in further personal and professional development in relation to working with refugees and asylum seekers. For example, some participants expressed their intention to continue learning about the experiences of this client group.

"I will be a lot more empathetic towards my customers, and use the training as a springboard to continue to develop my knowledge and understand of Refugee and Asylum Seekers mental health"

"It's given me a good framework to help develop my training and make sure I cover everything that's needed."

"I am going to learn more about Asylum seekers"

As relayed, some participants viewed the training as a "springboard" or "framework" to embark on further learning related to the experiences and/or mental health of refugees. Thus, the e-learning could have an educational impact beyond the content directly contained within the course, if it serves to inspire curiosity in practitioners and a desire to learn more about asylum seekers and refugees. An intention to learn more about local refugee services was also evident.

"I would be more aware of the services that could support and the rights of the person"

"[I will] further investigate local support networks to signpost people seeking asylum"

"[I will] research local support for asylum seekers and refugees for signposting purposes"

These quotes provide further evidence that the training inspired some participants to learn more about how they can provide optimal support to refugees. In addition, as addressed in the previous theme (*Approach to Supporting Refugees*), these extracts also provide further support for the argument that the course has encouraged a more holistic approach to refugee support. This is demonstrated through repeated references to "signposting", indicating that participants have a newfound appreciation for the value of organisations and services working together to support refugees as whole individuals, rather than addressing one need or concern in isolation. To this end, some participants also reported that they would diversify their own support offers.

"[I will] incorporate breathing exercises and grounding exercises into sessions"

"I will take this information with me, particularly how to plan and organise activities for asylum seekers and refugees around body orientated therapeutic approaches"

"I work at a university. Based on the information in this course on the isolation of asylum seeker and refugee experience, it would be interesting to see whether we would be able to run public education events that are accessible to asylum seekers"

The first two extracts suggest that participants intend to incorporate more body-oriented therapeutic exercises into their work with refugees, providing further evidence that participants have a greater understanding for the value of addressing mental health and wellbeing (as discussed in the previous theme: *Approach to supporting refugees*). The third extract draws on a participant's increased understanding of the impact of loneliness and isolation on refugees, and their desire to address this via accessible public-facing events.

Finally, participants also expressed their motivations to either pursue, or continue, refugee advocacy activities.

"I would advocate for more services that support individuals from refugee populations"

"I aim to be an asylum seeker champion in my team - educating others, advocating for patients who are asylum seekers, signposting for support and formulation their difficulties"

"I am thinking about a change of career to work purely in this area!"

As addressed previously in this section, these extracts suggest that the e-learning will benefit refugees beyond merely increased knowledge gained from the content within the course. Specifically, these quotes indicate that the training has resonated with some participants to the extent that they now feel compelled to "advocate" for and/or "champion" refugees. Moreover, one participant felt inspired to dedicate their career going forward to supporting asylum seekers and refugees.

Sub-theme: Working with others

Participant responses also indicated that their work with others would change after completing the course. Specifically, some of the respondents relayed an intention to share their learnings with their colleagues and/or recommending to colleagues enrollment on the training.

"I will share what I have learned with fellow volunteers in my organisation and encourage them to sign up for the course and will aim to implement what the lessons I have gained an understanding of."

"I will share with colleagues and help to raise awareness and understanding of the issues impacting their wellbeing."

"Recommend colleagues to register as many new staff have little or no experience of asylum seekers or the process of asylum."

Several participants were motivated to either recommend the course or share what they had learnt as they believed that their colleagues had little understanding of the asylum process and/or the experiences of refugees. This suggests a need for courses of this nature to fill the perceived gap in both knowledge and experience amongst practitioners. It also provides evidence of the acceptability of the course amongst respondents, as they found the content helpful enough that they believed it would be worth recommending it to their coworkers and trainees.

Finally, a new and important consideration for future work with interpreters was evident.

"I will also be more mindful of the role of the interpreter during interviews. I will be mindful of cultural/gender/language/ethnic differences and what this could bring to the interview space."

"[I will start] using interpreters differently"

"[I will start] talking in 1st person to the interpreter"

"The impact on the interpreter [stood out]"

Participants suggested that the course had given them an enhanced understanding of the role of interpreters, resulting in a want to be more "*mindful*" of interpreter interactions and changing their approach when working with interpreters, such as switching to speaking in the 'first person'. This provides evidence that course completion provided actionable change through teaching participants how to improve communication with refugee clients which can ultimately enhance their offering of support.

To conclude, theme 2, 'professional and personal development', showcases a newfound desire to develop skills and knowledge to work with, support and advocate for refugees and asylum seekers.



3. Conclusions

This report aimed to evaluate whether course 1, '*Understanding Refugee and Asylum Seeker Mental Health*', e-learning provided by Solace enhanced understanding of asylum issues and built confidence in professionals to support asylum seekers. Findings evidence key learning focused on the experiences and challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees, and the support needed for their health and wellbeing. Insights and knowledge gained from this course have increased participants' confidence in working with this group, with participants also reporting several ways in which these new insights might impact their future practice when working with people who have been displaced from their country of origin.

3.1 Key learning points

Enhanced understanding of asylum issues was gained through course material focused on the refugee and asylum seeker experience, past and present, and information about the asylum process and challenges faced by this group. The trauma and impact on physical and mental health were considered key learning, with surprise and shock relayed in relation to statistics provided and the treatment of women within this group. The many barriers and issues when accessing support were also noted as important learning, with the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and a mistrust of the media reflected upon negatively. The significance of both practical and psychological support, and the importance and location of organisations focused on supporting this population, was considered valuable information. Finally, special issues and considerations specific to the asylum seeker and refugee experience was found to be a new and impactful insight. Of particular note was the impact of the videos of personal stories. These personal insights led to a deeper understanding of the types and variety of traumatic experiences refugees and asylum seekers might have endured, thus enhancing understanding of asylum issues.

3.2 Confidence building

Completion of the e-learning was found to increase confidence in working with and supporting asylum seekers and refugees for the majority of the participant group. Qualitative responses analysed suggest that increased confidence was derived from a greater understanding of the refugee experience, past and present, and the asylum process. Enhanced understanding created, for some, a feeling of being better prepared to work with people seeking refuge, feeling more equipped to support mental health needs, to identify risk and to signpost to appropriate services.

3.3 Potential impact on future work

This examination of feedback found that e-learning participants reported a change in approach and attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees, and the intention to alter their approach when working with others. Through gaining insight into the experiences of this group, participants believed this training had altered their approach, placing them in a better position to offer support through increased cultural awareness, resulting in a desire to be more patient, open-minded and empathic, and to actively listen to their clients. Knowledge gained throughout the course stimulated participants to learn more about asylum seekers and local asylum services, and how to diversify their support offers, in addition to either commencing or continuing advocacy work. Participants also intended to adapt their future work with interpreters. Lastly, findings suggest a commitment to share learnings from the course with others and to recommend this e-learning to colleagues and trainees.

3.4 Implications and recommendations

The findings of this report indicate that the Solace 'E-Learning for All Helping Professionals' course 1 is a valuable training resource for anyone working with asylum seekers and refugees. As one participant exclaimed:

"I have been working with asylum seekers now for just over 1 year and this is the first piece of training that has introduced me to asylum seekers' mental health and understanding it"

Statements such as this, in conjunction with the expressed desire to share learnings from this course with colleagues and to recommend it to others, points to a perceived gap in training focused on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees, a gap which can be addressed by this e-learning course. These intentions also evidence the acceptability of the course content among course participants.

The powerful impact of the videos of personal stories shared throughout the training were of particular note in the participant feedback. These videos provided context, elicited emotion and prompted empathic understanding of the trauma many asylum seekers and refugees experience, demonstrating their value within the course content.

The intersectional nature of experience was also highlighted through informing participants about the treatment of women, FGM and LGBTQ+ concerns among the asylum seeker community. These insights were deemed as a fresh perspective, thus implying that further education on the intersectionality of asylum seekers and the impact on their experiences and challenges would be of value.

Finally, through raising awareness of resources and services available to asylum seekers and refugees, this training highlighted the value of organisations specifically focused on supporting people displaced from their country of origin. One participant proclaimed the value of Solace as an organisation and the important work being carried out:

"How vital it is to have refugee support agencies that provide a combination of practical help and advocacy as well as mental health support. Well done to Solace. You are needed nationwide!"

This training has heightened appreciation and recognition for support services and has encouraged participants to learn more about what can be offered within their location.

A thorough analysis of the feedback data was completed, however, limitations within the data must be noted. No demographic data was obtained meaning comparison across different characteristics and demographics within the participant group could not be examined. In addition, the research questions were chosen after the creation of the survey, as opposed to the survey being developed specifically to answer the research questions, consequently the analysis could only be conducted on the most relevant data available. A final limitation concerns the use of self-report data to measure impact on future work. Specifically, this data only represents what participants intend or wish to do going forward as opposed to changes they have actually actioned in their work.

The findings from this report therefore suggest the following recommendations for course development, provision and future evaluation:

1. Commission a full evaluation of the e-learning courses to more fully understand how to develop the content to further meet the aim(s) of the training. This could include: a revised feedback survey to ensure that specific research questions can be answered fully and analysis can be completed to include affirming and critical perspectives on the course content and learning outcomes, gathering demographic information with appropriate informed consent to use personal data for analysis and reporting, and conducting follow up data collection with course participants to identify what changes, if any, they have actioned in their practice due to completing the course.
2. Harness the impact and value gained from personal story videos to enhance understanding of the diversity of refugee experiences and to promote empathy in those completing the training. This could be achieved through the inclusion of more client videos, longer and more in-depth videos and/or reflective exercises which directly relate to the content within the films.
3. Participants were particularly impacted by the 'Special Issues for Consideration' module, citing, for example, gender issues such as FGM as particularly resonating with them. As such, this module could be developed further and/or more content from an intersectional perspective (which explores how refugee/asylum seeker-status might interact with other forms inequality or disadvantage) could be threaded throughout the course.
4. Consider the development of sharable resources upon course completion to facilitate the sharing of information with colleagues and trainees. Ensure resources are accessible and understandable for different audiences.

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