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**Asylum Seeker Mental Health Champions Pilot Programme**

As part of Solace’s plan to enhance access to appropriate and effective therapeutic services for people seeking asylum in the UK, we are looking for organisations who would like to take part in a pilot programme to test the impact of having a Refugee Mental Health Champion embedded within their services.

This pilot is in response to the growing awareness of the health disparities for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Refugees are more likely than the general population to require support for mental health, but are less likely to receive it. The number of people fleeing persecution, seeking sanctuary in the UK and living in Yorkshire and Humber region will continue to increase so it is more important than ever to ensure that mental health services are equipped and ready to provide an effective service. [[1]](#footnote-1)

**The pilot programme**

Solace has provided free training for mental health practitioners since 2022 in an attempt to provide a sustainable way of supporting mental health services to improve outcomes for refugee mental health. It has been completed by over 2,000 people. The feedback from learners was evaluated by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy who then recommended it as a model of good practice[[2]](#footnote-2). **97% of respondents said they felt more confident to deliver their role after completing the training.** Embeddinga Refugee Mental Health Champion into organisations is recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists as a model of good practice which is sustainable and cost effective[[3]](#footnote-3) and at the same many organisations have discussed with us their desire to know more about supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

We would like to invite you to participate in a pilot programme to test the impact of introducing a Refugee Mental Health Champion into your organisation or service. We are looking for organisations willing to embed the learning from the free training and actively support practitioners to continue to develop their knowledge so they can help improve outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees.

NHS mental health services are required to meet the needs of many different populations, all with their own unique needs. Not all practitioners need to be an expert in understanding the world that asylum seekers inhabit or how to work confidently with them therapeutically, but every service should have someone fully equipped to do so and be available as a resource for their colleagues to refer to. This requires more than an individual who has a personal interest in working with asylum seekers, but a whole organisational commitment to make their services accessible and effective for this particular health inclusion group. Our hope is that Refugee Mental Health Champions will generate effective change within existing structures, rather than attempting to create new structures or services.

**The commitment from the organisation / service:**

* Identify an experienced therapist (ideally two so they can work together on embedding their learning) who is delivering therapeutic services directly to refugees and asylum seekers, or has an active interest in doing so. This person should be committed to developing their own knowledge and expertise and then acting as a resource for colleagues.
* Be committed as an organisation or service to learning from this practitioner, reflecting on any changes needed and doing all it can to deliver improvements. Identify an individual in the organisation who will take a lead on this and provide feedback on the impact of the programme.
* Completing an organisational self assessment of accessibility and effectiveness of service for Refugees and people seeking asylum. (Based on the NEYH guidance document for improving practice).
* Allow the practitioner a minimum of one hour per week to dedicate to this work.
* Provide feedback about the impact of introducing the role and any organisational learning

**The commitment from the practitioner**:

* Complete the e-learning courses. (self directed online learning) and reflect on own practice
* Seek out ways to implement the learning from this into therapeutic practice with refugee and asylum seeking clients.
* Offer consultation (and potentially clinical supervision if in a suitable role) to therapist colleagues who find themselves working with refugees and asylum seekers
* Attend an initial kick off meeting plus 4 peer reflection and learning groups throughout the period of the pilot programme. (these will be focussing on identified topics or areas of interest, a discussion of a dilemma or case, and will provide the space to have structured time for reflection and learning.)
* Attend half day training event to develop skills. This will be delivered part way through the pilot, and will be based on needs identified in peer sessions.
* Commit to spending at least an hour per week on the work. This will include the e-learning training, researching local refugee resources, familiarising yourself with current issues in the refugee and asylum world (using resources from Refugee Action, Asylum Matters, Freedom from Torture etc).
* Actively seek to use the various resources available on the Solace website.
* Work constructively with Solace to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the Champions Role and help shape it for the future.
* Participate in evaluation from a personal perspective and also on the impact the programme has had on your organisation / service

**The commitment from Solace**.

* Free access to two self directed e-learning courses which will help develop confidence and understanding of the mental health needs of asylum seekers and how to support them effectively.
* Four peer reflection and learning sessions led by Solace’s Clinical Director, Anne Burghgraef, who has been the clinical lead at Solace since it began in 2006 and is the author and curator of the e-learning courses. She is a Family & Systemic Psychotherapist and a trauma specialist with a wide range of experience in the statutory and voluntary mental health sector as a practitioner and trainer.
* Free access to a half day of training based on the needs identified at the peer reflection sessions. This training will support you to develop your practice within your particular context to meet the mental health needs of refugees and asylum seekers more effectively.
* Certificate of completion when all training and reflective sessions are completed and a contribution made to the programme evaluation.
* Professional skill and career development opportunity as a specialist practitioner in asylum seeker and refugee mental health and consultant/resource to your team/locality.

**Next Steps**

If you are interested in finding out more please complete an expression of interest form using this link: <https://forms.office.com/e/PvxgamtWPP>

There is no commitment at this stage and we will be in touch with organisations who are interested to discuss further.

If there is demand then we will hold an online meeting with interested organisations to answer questions and consider next steps.

1. Mental health Foundation (2024): the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

<https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/2023/humanising-the-migration-crisis/>

British Red Cross Voices Network: Women’s experiences of seeking asylum in the UK. (2022)

Commission on the Integration of Refugees: [CIR\_Report-1.pdf](https://refugeeintegrationuk.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CIR_Report-1.pdf) 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Royal College of Psychiatrists (2024) College Report CR242 – Protecting the mental

health of people seeking sanctuary in the UK’s evolving legislative landscape [↑](#footnote-ref-3)