

## Welcome to the Solace Newsletter December 2023

This is our final newsletter of 2023 and we have a lot of updates for you again. We have a focus on our group work as well as an article on our work with PAFRAS.

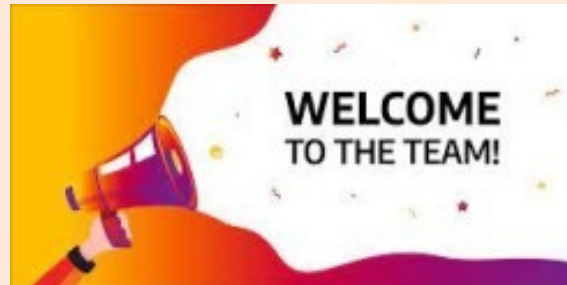
We are also launching our video resources in three languages to help refugees and sanctuary seekers.

We hope you enjoy our updates. See you in 2024!

## We have new team members and volunteers!

We are delighted to welcome new people to our expanding team. We have been joined by Jonathon, Naznin, Talent, Hillary and Simona who are all therapists, Richard who is our Operations Manager and Jodie, Ezana and Yohana who provide our reception cover. Welcome to you all! They have all settled in really well, and are making a big difference to the work we are able to do. They bring a wide array of expertise from their previous roles and training and enhance the services we provide across our team. Solace now has a team of 43 staff and volunteers plus 8 trustees.

*We are looking for more people to join our board of trustees. If you would like to find out more please get in touch with [kathryn@solace-uk.org.uk](mailto:kathryn@solace-uk.org.uk)*



## Helpful resources for Refugees and people seeking safety - Event Launch 14.12.23



Solace has created a suite of 18+ videos available in Arabic, Farsi and English including 6 psychoeducation videos designed to help refugees and sanctuary seekers understand the emotional impact of forced migration. The other videos show ways to cope with the stress and the disturbing effects of trauma.

We have planned to Launch the videos on 14th December at 3.30pm via Zoom.

To sign up to the event click [here](#)

If you can't make we are going to run the event again in the new year. We can also send you the recording

[To access our videos, please click here](#)

## Group Sessions at Solace

When asylum seekers and refugees flee their homes to seek safety, they leave behind their known cultural habitat including a whole matrix of relationships and roles along with their habitual ways of engaging with the world. Whether the journey is alone or with family, long and arduous or swift, the challenge of rebuilding a meaningful life confronts each one. The slogan for Refugee Week in 2021 was 'we cannot walk alone', which also applies to integrating successfully in a new and possibly alien context. Therefore, at Solace, therapy is not just an individual matter, it also involves fostering new and significant connections with others longer term. Without these relationships, it may be possible to survive but not thrive.

Trust for many is an almost insurmountable barrier. Having lived with the threat of persecution or possibly been betrayed by their government, neighbours or family, knowing what is safe and who is trustworthy can be overwhelming. For many seeing an individual counsellor may be the starting point to re-establishing contact, but forming ongoing relationships or some kind of community is essential for all. Thus, at Solace we are delighted to have safe spaces where people can come together to engage in therapeutic group activities, which may involve learning new knowledge and skills, talking, games, bodily exercise or creative activities. Doing these activities together enhances physical and mental wellbeing through 'mirror neurones' and strengthens community.

Next, we have articles from three of our groups. We hope you enjoy learning about them.



## Solace Music Group

The music therapy group is a space where members can come together to explore music-making in a safe and supportive environment. When the weekly group meets, members are encouraged to sing and play on instruments, as they share songs and listen to each other during improvisations and performances. The session is guided by Seb, the music therapist, who accompanies and values every musical contribution by reflecting it back in the music so that everyone feels heard. Seb follows where the group leads the session, ensuring that every member is given a musical voice in whatever way they are comfortable.

One affordance of music therapy is that it enables participants to communicate without the need for common language. Melody, rhythm, and harmony bond group members together no matter their background, and each session brings moments of infectious joy when everyone is locked together in the same groove and creating a unique musical experience. The sessions help to build relationships, reduce isolation and build member's confidence not only as musicians but as functioning members of society with a common purpose.

## "Two Years of Heartfelt Journeys in Our Farsi-Speaking Support Oasis"

By Reza Nemati, Solace Psychotherapist

Embarking on a journey of compassion and connection, our Farsi-speaking peer support group has blossomed over the past two years. Imagine a space where individuals find solace, away from the challenges that weigh them down. Initially uncertain about the level of comfort our participants would experience, we witnessed a beautiful transformation unfold.

Within the walls of our sessions, emotions have danced between joy and profound sadness.

The power of positivity emanating from steadfast members has proven to be a beacon for those grappling with deep distress. Each gathering is an exploration of new topics, a free-flowing river of shared knowledge, and an opportunity for psychoeducation.

The impact of our group reverberates in the feedback we receive. Stories of resilience emerge, with individuals altering their paths from contemplating suicide to embracing newfound hope. The group becomes a lifeline, instilling motivation in those who once felt defeated. Members learn to face their fears head-on, finding strength in unity.

For our participants, this group is more than just a weekly commitment; it's a haven eagerly anticipated. Numerous stories have been shared, weaving a tapestry of diverse experiences. Some join briefly, while others become a constant presence. Our waiting list continues to grow, a testament to the profound connection cultivated within.

As the group's guide, my aspiration was to create a familial bond among us. The exchange of wisdom during each session has transformed our gathering into an extended family. We listen patiently, offer empathy, and share the mosaic of our lives – both bitter and sweet.



Quotes from our members echo the sentiment of a shared journey:

- *"It was very effective, and I'm very satisfied. I hope it can continue."*

- *"This is an opportunity to learn something new and change my mood when I come to the group."*

- *"It has changed my life. I really enjoy being in this group."*

- *"Your management has been excellent, and it has been very effective for me."*

- *"By participating in this group, people's hearts become calm. It means their hearts are in harmony with each other. It creates a special tranquillity."*

- *"I used to think I was healthy, but I did have some pains... Sometimes it would impose hardships on me, like fear, fear of darkness. But with the solutions I learned in these sessions... I can now easily walk in the darkness. I mean, I can sit and enjoy my coffee there with complete peace. I'm eagerly waiting for Friday to come."*

In essence, our Farsi-speaking group has become a sanctuary, fostering camaraderie, learning, and healing. It is a testament to the transformative power of shared experiences and the resilience that blooms when hearts unite.

# Solace Wellbeing Group

By Sarah Middleton, Solace Art Therapist

This December we have come to the end of our third Solace wellbeing group. The group provides weekly practical mental health support for asylum seekers living in contingency hotels across Leeds. The group celebrates integrative working of Solaces therapists' large scope of specialisms as well as external professional expertise.

Reflecting service user feedback, themes included: Implementing change, supporting others, compassion focused therapy, art therapy, suicide prevention, connecting with the community, trauma processing and stabilisation, UK culture and conversation and therapeutic group support.



The feedback received has been really encouraging and we look forward to continuing to develop the group further in 2024. *"Attending the group has helped me to relax and feel calm." [The group has helped] "To remove my distress and find a way to deal with my problems"*

What have you learnt that you didn't know before?

*'How to react when I suspect someone is feeling suicidal'*

*'How to manage my aggression and feel calm'*

What can you take away from the group?

*'hope for the future, to never give up and the value of humanity'*

*'That I am not alone in this journey called life, what I suffer from others do too'*

**We would like to give a special thank you to our volunteer, Mahshid. She's been a great support to the wellbeing group which also includes her Farsi speaking skills.**

## Other Solace groups

Solace continues to offer other group sessions. We have our weekly Stress Management Group with Nick and the Women's Wellbeing sessions with our volunteer Janet. Deborah, another volunteer runs Yoga sessions and Sarah from Fall into Place leads a Drama group. Our therapist Hernan runs a Parenting group in Arabic for resettled refugees.

Please contact Solace for more information about our groups. T. 0113 8246796 E. info@solace-uk.org.uk

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## Our close relationship with PAFRAS



by Anthea Kilminster (Clinical Services Manager, Leeds)

The Leeds Lifeline Project began in 2021, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and brings together a strong working partnership between Solace and PAFRAS. The original aim was to provide a seamless partnership of professionals, which allows all staff and volunteers to play to their strengths, avoid duplication, learn from each other's expertise and work together better for the benefit of the asylum seekers in Leeds who experience the benefits of wraparound care.

We have found that people in distress will try and get help from lots of different people, creating a strong risk of duplication of work, or creating more work from constantly asking partner organisations what is happening. Both partners believe that mental health support and practical support are complementary.

*Clients often bring their practical problems to therapy sessions and this can be a real barrier to full engagement in the therapeutic process. Similarly, PAFRAS workers can engage more fruitfully in their work with clients when their mental health has been stabilised by therapists.*

Clients have begun to see our organisations as one, and understand now the skills and knowledge that can be accessed from each one. This ensures that each professional can play to his or her own strengths in supporting the client. Solace therapists are best placed to provide emotional health support and PAFRAS staff provide advocacy, legal advice and liaising with Home Office agencies.

Since the start of the project, 39 out of 43 clients showed improvements in psychological wellbeing measures. There have been numerous examples of how the PAFRAS drop in at Solace has provided valuable information to enable clients to access education courses, help with housing and work.

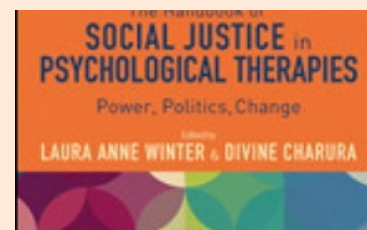
PAFRAS and Solace professionals have regular bi-annual skills share sessions. The last one took place in October 2023 when PAFRAS was able to explain crucial information about current Home Office dispersal, re-location and accommodation issues. They were able to explain to Solace professionals the appropriate wording required in mental health assessment reports in order to help clients to find the most suitable accommodation and area of location.

Solace also provides professional clinical services to PAFRAS colleagues such as clinical supervision and reflective practice groups.

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## Solace publications and contributions to influencing mental health policy for refugees and asylum seekers

On 27.10.23, *The Handbook of Social Justice in Psychological Therapies: Power, Politics, Change* (eds) Divine Charura and Laura Winter was published which included a chapter by Solace clinical lead Anne Burghgraef entitled 'Social justice Informed Therapy with Refugee and Asylum Seekers'



[Click here for more information and to purchase](#)



**"It's not one single trauma, it's hundreds of traumas"** New films highlight mental health crisis among refugees and asylum seekers

Solace is proud to be part of a collaboration with University of Cambridge to produce research and films on the serious mental health issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers

*Asylum seekers are five times more likely to have a mental health difficulty and 60% or more have serious mental distress," Explains Anne Burghgraef Clinical Director at Solace in the film "That may not always be apparent when you speak to someone, but it's always there in the background"*

*"Everything that held them in place, that gave them a sense of identity, has been ."*

[Click here to take a look at the films](#)

Solace also featured in a publication entitled *Thresholds* by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), written by Jeremy Bacon, BACP 'Third Sector called *Soul, Faith and Love*, in which he calls for improved access to a trauma informed support refugees and asylum seekers.



[Click here to read the discussion article](#)



### Mental health in a migration crisis

Following on from a consultation day earlier in the year about refugee mental health policy sponsored by the University of Cambridge, a major report was produced, which Anne contributed which can be accessed [here](#)

**"I miss my Mum so much"**  
– The pain of separated Afghan families.

Our friends at Refugee Council have published an article on separated Afghan families.

Our therapist Philippa is quoted.

*"If you just stop for a minute and imagine your own child, or a child you know, being in this situation, and just try and to empathise – surely the answer is just obvious, it's not complicated. Let them bring their parents. They need their Mums and Dads, they were separated through the chaos of the evacuation from their children. It's just obvious to me. They need each other in order to thrive, and be children."*



[Click here to read the article in full](#)



### Training the Trainer

As Solace has grown in the delivery of therapeutic services and in the development of educational materials, there has also been an increase in requests for training, consultation and reflective practice. To build our expertise, Solace held a 'Training the Trainer' day on 14th September facilitated by Paula Boston, who is the former Director of Family Therapy at Leeds University and is the external supervisor of the Child and Family Wellbeing Project. The day focused upon experiential learning to build confidence in developing and facilitating creative group exercises. None of them will forget how Paula took us through an exercise on, 'how to talk like a Texan!'



## Solace Training

Solace is providing more free training in 2024 for people in Leeds

We have:

- 'Working with interpreters in a mental health setting' on Friday 26th January at 9.55am via Zoom
- 'Understanding Factors impacting wellbeing in Asylum Seekers and Refugees on Monday' on Monday 4th March at 10.00am at the Solace office.

[Click here to see our training offers and to register](#)