

# Asylum Hotel: Culture Explorer Workshops

## January – March 2025

### Evaluation Report



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*'Promoting healthy relationships, consent and preventing harmful practices are top priorities that lead our work at Sundial Centre for Education on Harmful Practices. We were very pleased with the opportunity to deliver some of our work targeting a population who are, very often, limited on the support and informal education spaces they can access.*

*The series aimed to discuss consent and tackle multiple forms of abuse, raise awareness amongst the different communities at the hotel and encourage residents to seek support from the services available in the community.*

*We delivered this understanding the multiple perspectives on relationships, gender and community that travel with asylum seekers but we also aimed to look beyond the immigration status, creating a trauma-informed, person-centred safe space that allowed residents to share their experiences and seek the support they need.*

*As anticipated in the environment of the hotel, we found some challenges related to dynamics and fulfilment of basic needs that deviates the focus from other issues, however, despite the chaotic and messy nature of some of the sessions, they were also joyful and empowering.*

*We are immensely grateful to the women, men, young people and children that participated in this project. Having the opportunity to share their fears and anxieties but also their hopes and dreams has been an amazing journey!*

*We would like to thank the Office of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and to West Oxfordshire District Council for their funding support.*

**Vania Martins, DV specialist, and project coordinator, Sundial**

# 1 Introduction

Sundial Centre for Education on Harmful Practices is a charity that tackles harmful practices such as FGM/C, forced marriage, issues of abuse and shame affecting people from minoritised communities, as well as working with young people on body image and online harms. The majority of our facilitators are from affected communities. Several are survivors of FGM/C or forced marriage and 'honour' based abuse themselves and discuss their experiences. We work directly with schools, police, nurses, local councils, GP surgeries, social services and other charities to raise awareness of these issues and teach young people and professionals how to recognise the warning signs, prevent harm and support survivors.

This evaluation relates to a series of 'Culture Explorer' workshops to support Asylum-Seekers residing at an Oxfordshire Hotel awaiting the outcome of their asylum claims. These were focused on helping them understand some of the cultural differences they are likely to encounter and to better understand ways to obtain support. The content of this report reflects feedback obtained from staff at the hotel and the residents themselves plus notes and reflections collated by our team throughout delivery of the project. We have included some key elements of the workshop development, evaluation against the project aims, suggestions for ways forward and documentation of the outcomes involving the residents.

## 2 The workshops

Sundial Centre created the 'Culture Explorer' workshop to deliver to hotel residents between January and March 2025. This is a new workshop of 3 hours duration and was delivered in various languages for 10 groups following a one-off pilot involving staff and volunteers. The initial list of potential (adult) attendees was 87.

The project aimed to benefit the target group by:

- Increasing knowledge of abuse issues; understanding of what behaviours are unhealthy and harmful, plus rights issues
- Increasing understanding of differences in cultural norms and expectations between groups/people
- Improving understanding of support services available
- Improving understanding of the roles of the police and social care and the need for multiple support workers
- Allowing for the sharing of experiences for therapeutic benefit and to increase connection between residents
- Increasing trust and community cohesion at the hotel.

The immediate impact sought was the residents' greater understanding of similarities and differences in cultures, abuse issues and experiences as asylum-seekers.

The funding for this project was provided by **Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner** and we thank them for their support. We were also supported in the planning and organisation of the workshops by **West Oxfordshire District Council** as well as staff and volunteers at the Asylum Hotel.

## Facilitation

All of the workshops were developed by Sundial facilitator Vania Martins. Vania is a Domestic Abuse Specialist, with 11 years' frontline experience supporting victims of abuse with Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services (ODAS). Vania is also the Sundial Centre's Safeguarding Lead. Vania was lead facilitator for all of the sessions, Rashmi Lokapure (our Lead Trainer) and Dot Pritchard (Operations Manager) also co-facilitated some of the sessions.

The language needs identified when developing the workshops were: **Albanian, Punjabi, Arabic, Kurdish Sorani, English, Spanish and Urdu** with **Persian** added at a later stage to meet the needs of new arrivals. Vania speaks several languages, which enabled her to deliver across some different cultural/language groups and also enhance the inclusive nature of some of the sessions further, e.g., by translating slides into Spanish. Our own Rashmi provided support in Urdu. Those workshops with additional language needs involved the following interpreters/co-facilitators:<sup>1</sup> **Alma Kaca** (Albanian); **Evin Abrishami** (Kurdish Sorani and Persian); **Hemn Mustafa** (Kurdish Sorani); **Nesreen Yanni** (Arabic); and **Nuha Abdo** (Arabic).

## Workshop development

Initial groundwork was carried out in January 2025, and included a meeting with the Asylum Safeguarding Hub to gain clarity around a safeguarding pathway. Further preparation was made beforehand, in the event of any disclosures and need for refuge spaces. We therefore presented to ODAS on the Home Office pathway, and made Asylum Welcome aware of the project as they manage the Sanctuary Hosting Scheme.

Early workshop development included discussion with hotel staff, who provided useful input through initial suggestions. Some points that they raised included:

- The need to take time at the beginning to explain the overall aims of the project, as participants may be uninterested in the topics due to other concerns such as immigration and housing being their priority. It was agreed that facilitators made it clear that while the services mentioned may not be useful to them now, it was important that they learnt about them for their life long term in the UK.
- Consent is a particularly important topic to discuss with Muslim women in how they can communicate their boundaries, especially around physical touch, to people in the UK who may not be aware of these restrictions.

A great deal of flexibility was needed to meet fluctuating requirements, for example, original plans were for 95 residents, but numbers changed over the Christmas period which led to us including a session in Persian and another for young people, which differed from the original plan.



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<sup>1</sup> See Annex I for details of our team and some background on our co-facilitators

Overall, the sessions aimed to be gentle in their approach, to ensure engagement from the participants and include ideas around celebrating positive culture, as well as changing harmful practices and behaviours.

Plans for the programme were subjected to Sundial's standard risk assessment procedure. It was built into the facilitators' script to create a safe discussion space by establishing guidelines up front and making a 'community agreement'; to reassure participants about the informal and non-judgemental nature of the sessions; explain fully to participants their right to leave at any time without giving a reason. In recognition that there was high potential for safeguarding disclosures with some groups, as many would be vulnerable due to their experiences as refugees, our safeguarding lead was present at all sessions. It was agreed that any follow-up safeguarding information would be passed to the Hotel Manager. All facilitators are DBS-checked, and non-Sundial facilitators were provided with the required policies, e.g., adults at risk and child protection, and these are well-known to our own staff. In terms of physical safety, we were satisfied that the hotel's existing security was sufficient. Notably, in early discussions on creating the workshops, there was acknowledgement that there may be perpetrators in the room and consideration of the risks of this. Facilitators noted that the emphasis of the sessions should be on increasing knowledge, and therefore the risks of informing perpetrators had to be balanced with the benefit of increasing awareness and knowledge of services for victim survivors.

### **The workshop structure**

Following introduction of the Sundial team and other co facilitators, explanation of the workshop and the broader project, plus guidance and confidentiality guidelines, the following sections were covered.

#### *Icebreaker activity- 'The Cloth of Hope'*

Participants were asked to build a centrepiece on a cloth that represents their cultural values and connection to their roots. Each participant introduced themselves and said what they brought and the reason. Participants were then encouraged to share what they like in the UK.

#### *Culture and customs section*

This aimed to explore how culture impacts on our beliefs, values and interactions. We explained the culture wheel, which contains sections such as food and drink, values, languages and traditions and rituals. These were then explored with prompt questions such as: Are there different roles for women and men?; Why is family and community important?; Who organises community life?; Is there any difference in expectations of parenting by mothers and fathers?; What is acceptable in relationships?

#### *Healthy relationships section*

This aimed to explore the characteristics and dynamics of healthy relationships in all aspects of our lives and what healthy and unhealthy behaviours look like. Discussions were initiated

regarding respect and what a healthy relationship looks like with your partner, family and wider community.

### *Section on abuse*

This aimed to identify abuse and understand the meaning of consent, with facilitators using role play (e.g., touching each other's arms in various ways) to facilitate a discussion about consent and its withdrawal.



### *Human rights and support systems in the UK*



This section aimed to teach residents who to contact for support. Facilitators explained the role of social care and police, how to navigate the UK support system and organisations, and signposting to services that are available to help. As an activity, residents were given a drawing of an octopus and were asked to identify a form of support on each leg that a person might need.

### **Pilot workshop and feedback (staff and volunteers)**

The first workshop completed was a pilot with staff and volunteers associated with the hotel. In addition to the six participants, there were four members of Sundial staff. This session aimed to explore whether the workshops would work well with the communities residing in the hotel, and if the content would be appropriate. Staff members were asked to consider the following questions:

- How would you rate this training overall?
- What was the best part of the training?
- Do you think the workshop content will work with all cultural groups?
- Do you have any suggestions for changes or further comments about the workshops?

On a scale of 0-10 (where 0=poor and 10= excellent), their average response was 9.5, rating the session very highly.

The ability to have open discussions that were accessible to all participants on the topic of consent was identified as the best part of the training. It was mentioned that staff were impressed by the respectful, trauma-informed approach of the session, the way the content opened up discussion regarding the different elements of culture and how they intertwine and influence one another. A more detailed list of amendments made to the original workshop plan is available in Annex II.

## **3 Resident workshops & evaluation**

Once the session content was finalised, we organised (along with hotel staff) then ran a total of 10 workshops and welcomed approximately 70 adult participants (95 including children and young people). The numbers represented a good proportion of those in residence, particularly

as the sessions were voluntary. The majority of the participants were women, with just 10 participants being boys or men. The breakdown was as follows:

Date	Language	Gender split	Co-facilitator(s) working alongside lead facilitator Vania Martins)	Attendee numbers
21.01.25	English - staff and volunteers	Mixed	Rashmi Lokapure	6
23.01.25	Spanish	Mixed	Vania only	9
28.01.25	Arabic	Women	Nuha Abdo	11
04.02.25	Arabic	Men	Nesreen Yanni	0 (only women attended this session)
11.02.25	K-Sorani	Women	Evin Abrishami	5
13.02.25	K-Sorani	Men	Hemn Mustafa	11
25.02.25	Albanian	Mixed	Alma Kaca	4
27.02.25	English	Mixed	Rashmi Lokapure	14
04.03.25	Punjabi & Urdu	Mixed	Rashmi Lokapure	3
06.03.25	Persian	Mixed	Evin Abrishami	11
13.03.25	Diverse	Youth workshop (half-term)	Dot Pritchard	21

### Resident workshop feedback

So that we could have some measure of increased knowledge and confidence in the key area, e.g., healthy and unhealthy behaviours, the roles of police and social care or the support available, we designed pre- and post-workshop forms.<sup>2</sup> These were designed to be as user-friendly as possible to encourage completion. Across the (approximately) 70 adult attendees, we collected 49 pre-workshop forms, and 55 post-workshop forms, with the results being as follows.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex III for feedback form examples



### *Pre-workshop*

Prior to beginning the workshops, participants were given a form to complete containing three questions along a 5-point scale (indicated by smiling/unsmiling faces). Across all workshops, average responses were, as follows:

1. Do you know who to contact if you are being hurt by someone close to you?	<b>1.7</b>
2. Do you feel confident contacting a service or a helpline for help in the UK?	<b>1.9</b>
3. Do you feel confident about what consent is (or giving your permission for something)?	<b>3.1</b>

As can be seen the scores indicating knowledge relating to the UK context, e.g., support services were low, whereas confidence about an idea relating to their own actions (and understanding of that) was at a higher level.

### *Post-workshop*

Following the workshop, participants were asked to respond to further questions aimed at measuring whether their knowledge had increased throughout the session. The questions also sought to explore the sensitivity of the workshop content and whether anything could be improved. These questions were again responded to via the 5-point face scale, and the questions and average responses were:

1. Do you know who to contact if you are being hurt by someone close to you?	<b>4.6</b>
2. Do you feel confident contacting a service or a helpline for help in the UK?	<b>4.5</b>
3. Do you feel confident about what consent is (or giving your permission for something)?	<b>4.8</b>
4. Do you feel that the facilitators were sensitive to the issues and showed interest in your culture?	<b>4.9</b>
5. Do you understand what the role of the police is?	<b>4.6</b>
6. Do you understand what the role of social care is?	<b>4.6</b>
7. Did you enjoy the training?	<b>4.9</b>

We are pleased that responses showed a significant increase in understanding of where to obtain support, and that the specific questions on the police and social care also scored highly. There was also an increased score in relation to understanding consent.

Within the sessions themselves, we found there was often a good understanding of healthy relationships and consent. Other interpretations and situations relating to consent, though, were sometimes raised as a particular concern. For instance, both the Spanish and Albanian groups raised issues around image-sharing. The Arabic group, for example, discussed how some people touch their children without consent, leading to a discussion on how to enforce boundaries around this. In one group, an individual shared some personal details about someone they knew, and the facilitator was able to use this as a lead-in into the conversation on consent relating to other people's information.

The residents expressed their appreciation of the opportunity to learn more about 'UK systems' and some reflected that so far they have received very little information on this. Many took notes of the numbers available or pictures of the relevant workshop slides for later reference.

*"A thousand thank yous for your help. It is so good to be able to find angels like you with a big heart and availability to 'serve' the people around you!"*

**Feedback from a resident**

The role of social services was a popular topic, with concerns, for example, that they might intervene if children had bruises or injuries from school. This provided an ideal opportunity for the facilitator to explain safeguarding processes. Other residents said that they were not able to cook in their rooms, have knives etc. providing a chance to explain concepts of health and safety. Similarly, discussions relating to

disciplining children were enlightening for parent residents, who did not know that physical punishment is illegal here.

We were happy to note that our facilitators' sensitivity and interest in the residents' culture and their enjoyment of the training were scored very highly (4.9/5). This was also apparent during interactions with the residents, for example the 'cloth of hope' was very well received as it allowed them to talk about their own cultures. For some it also gave an opportunity to reflect on the aspects of British culture they enjoyed.

Residents were widely perceived as very positive about the sessions being offered as they felt listened to and that their opinions and thoughts were being heard. We found that they responded well to us taking time to introduce and contextualise the project and as a result showed respect for its aims. Often, residents would turn up to other sessions so they could express concerns and meet with Vania. Many residents expressed to hotel staff that they were very happy with the sessions and that they were hoping it would be a repeated session long term. They told the staff that it was very useful and they were glad they attended.

A key outcome of this work is that residents contact support services, and there were a number of strong indications that this will be the case. Many noted down numbers for support agencies, showed interest in us compiling a list of charities to support those who have moved on, and took away leaflets we provided. These variously related to the needs of children, FGM/C, sexual

violence, spiritual abuse and forced marriage, and it was interesting to note that residents were more interested in 'by and for' organisations, who would understand their cultural needs and speak their language, than local services. We already know, anecdotally, of several residents who either contacted a service after their workshop, or told us of a plan to do so. This was in addition to those we connected on their behalf (see 'Additional outcomes section).

Some residents, though, reported feeling overwhelmed by the different services that they need to contact for assistance, indicating an ongoing need for guidance on navigating the system. This highlighted the value of the advocacy that we were able to provide during the project, e.g., initiating connections with community groups and contacting support agencies.

An area of concern to take forward was the report from some of the groups, who may have been at the hotel for several years, of division between the communities, a loss of community atmosphere and complaints of discriminatory behaviours and poor behaviour, e.g., teenagers who behave badly and are not properly monitored. Issues of trust were also raised, particularly around the preparation of food, e.g., whether it was actually halal. One group explicitly stated that they came to the workshop because it was organised by an external provider, which implies that they felt more likely to take something on board from outside of the hotel. A major concern across many of the groups was a lack of mental health support for residents. For some groups this was their main difficulty, and they expressed a particular need for support services in this area, especially for young people who have experienced trauma. Others sought help and were given details of support relating to sexual abuse and sexual violence and domestic abuse.

### **Residents' shared experiences**

A key success measure from this project was the promotion of sharing of experiences for the residents to achieve some therapeutic benefit and increase connections between them. During the session, we noted several key concerns that resonated across the groups. We have collated the main issues, and hope this will support the learning from this project. We have also collated the stories of some of the residents who approached us for support, and related their stories in two 'composite' case studies.

In addition to addressing these issues as much as we were able to during the workshops, we also provided additional information and signposting (see section 'Additional outcomes from the project' below):

**Mental health concerns** - there was a great deal of anxiety among residents for a variety of reasons, and they often did not know where to seek support. Some young people who attended the sessions expressed that they were anxious, experiencing panic attacks and did not know how to cope with the trauma they had experienced. Anxiety is also caused by the uncertainty of what life they would have beyond the hotel, not helped by a lack of information on how to access forms of support and housing.

**Location and mobility** - The area where the hotel is located is quite isolated and it is therefore difficult for residents to get access to community groups or social activities, which are limited in this area of Oxfordshire. There is no support to help residents find where to go, and no funds for them to access transport. A lack of local activities particularly affects young people.

**Housing** - Often residents expressed that they were fearful of life after the hotel when they are granted asylum. After receiving an eviction notice, residents find the complexities very difficult to understand. Many residents therefore fear they will become homeless, which causes a great deal of stress and anxiety. Some residents find it hard to contact the council regarding these issues due to the language barrier, though there is a weekly housing drop-in for those granted asylum.

**Food** - Access to culturally appropriate food was an issue for many, having impact in several ways that undermined the residents' wellbeing. For instance, there are a great deal of concerns about the quality and hygiene of the food provision at the hotel. This issue was consistently raised during the workshops and the majority of residents discussed how they often avoid eating food from the kitchen due to concerns about its hygiene, nutritional value and whether it is halal. Some residents have instead decided to spend what little money they have on buying food from local supermarkets but this is minimal and often means that they are not eating enough. Children often refuse to eat the food available, and there are concerns that residents are losing weight and muscle due to the lack of nutritional food available. Concerns were also raised about the food provisions during Ramadan as the kitchen opening hours are very restrictive.



*The Nawruz gathering and some of the resident's 'cloth of hope' offerings*

In this respect we were able to help by using our contacts with appropriate organisations and arranging for them to bring additional culturally appropriate meals to the hotel. During Ramadan, by facilitating discussion with the hotel staff, an alternative arrangement was made with food prepared in advance.

**Discrimination, abuse and inappropriate behaviour** - Participants described that they felt that some groups in the hotel were treated differently or discriminated against compared to others. Concerns were also raised about people going into each other's rooms and some expressed this made them feel unsafe. The issue of inappropriate touching was also mentioned several times especially among Muslim participants. Due to the communal nature of much of the living at the hotel, there were also worries regarding hotel residents disciplining other residents' children.

**The following are ‘composite’ case studies based on real stories. We have merged some detail and changed the names of organisations so that none of the residents involved can be identified.**

### **Case studies - narrative 1**

*We arrived in the UK after facing a lot of hardship, and our family sought safety and stability but we faced many challenges. Our children are young and when we came we did not really know what our legal status was.*

*First we needed to know about some legal help and we were kindly recommended to the SOAS legal clinic. They gave us guidance about our asylum case and told us what to do next to apply to get an update on our case. This help made us feel less alone as the process is very complicated and hard for us to understand.*

*Our littlest child has challenges with her learning and we do not have the right equipment for her to learn online like some of the other children do. We were so delighted. After a talk with Vania we were shown a place to go to apply for a grant for a tablet. Our daughter now has a chance to keep up with her lessons and it is also a way to get her someone to talk to.*

*We do feel very isolated, though we have family who have been placed in another city so are not alone in the UK. We are desperate to see them. Vania understands how important and emotional this is and is trying to get us funding for train tickets to go and visit them. It will be the first time in years we have seen them and we are really grateful.*

### **Case studies narrative 2**

*I am [in my 20s] and currently seeking asylum in the UK after fleeing my home country. I have endured many traumas including forced marriage and persecution for my sexuality. It is very difficult to be alone in a family hotel where I don't belong. I have struggled with my mental health and isolation – there is no community for me here or in the local town. I was helped by Vania who connected me with Rainbow Sisters, a group for LGBTQ+ asylum-seeking women. Through them, I met people who understood my struggles, and for the first time in a long while, I felt less alone.*

*The trauma I carry is heavy. At a workshop, I finally shared my experiences of sexual abuse. It was terrifying, but people listened. Because of this I was given information for Survivor Space and Safer Spaces, where I could speak to specialists who understood what I had been through and are organisations that can make people heal.*

*I also needed legal support to appeal my asylum claim. I was referred to Refugee Legal Support, but they couldn't take my case at the time. Still, they gave me contacts for Asylum Aid and Migrant Legal Action. It was a small step, but it gave me hope. I still struggle every day, but I don't feel completely alone.*

## 4 Reflection - our learning outcomes

There were several issues that arose during the project that have allowed us to reflect on learning outcomes and what we would take on board when planning future projects:

### Advertising the sessions

There was feedback from the residents that they were not always aware of the sessions or clear on the content or age-appropriateness (e.g., if they were teenage or adult, or if young children could be accommodated). Furthermore, some residents attended sessions that were not intended for their group. Some ways to address this would be:

- Agreeing with hotel management a plan for proactively informing residents of the sessions, and also holding a follow up debrief where there have been problems to check where communications may have broken down.
- Ensuring that flyers are crystal clear about what ages are appropriate for workshops.
- Adding information to the door/keeping the door closed etc during the sessions.
- Acting on experience that advertising the workshops person-to-person and putting flyers on the boards increases attendance. We also found that if flyers were also left displayed in communal areas this was helpful as all residents need to check in and out so the security corner is one of the best places to convey information. It was also helpful to put flyers in communal areas such as the canteen, lounge, bathrooms and corridors.

### Session timings

For some groups it was difficult to get the timings right, for example, when a participant did not arrive until 11am but then needed to go for lunch. Other participants did not eat, so their sessions ran through until 2pm. As food is only served at specific times, residents are anxious to ensure they do not miss a meal. It is not appropriate to continue the workshop in the lounge due to it being a common area and therefore we had to ask participants to come back to the workshop after lunch. Some proposals would be:

- Potentially doing shorter workshops.
- Running them 'in chunks' i.e., do the workshops over several days with different language groups.
- Changing the timings to reflect having to drop children to school - starting later.

### Content and workshop groups

There were a number of issues relating to **content and what was appropriate for the audience** at the time, for example, Arabic men accompanied the Arabic women as they were unsure of the content. Learning from this, for future sessions we would consider starting with the least 'traditional' groups and work with the most conservative groups last. This way if any group spreads rumours about the workshop being inappropriate we would have reached the majority of residents beforehand. For this project, there was a need to accommodate Ramadan so there was less flexibility with the group order.

We will also build on our learning regarding the wide interpretation of consent across different cultures. For some, there is greater concern regarding consent of taking photos, whereas touching etc. in regard to sexual intimacy was not often the main concern for them. With other groups, the greater concerns are around inappropriate touching, disciplining of children (especially towards those who are the children of single mothers), stigma and abuse of divorced women. We also would continue to prioritise concerns about mixing men and women in some sessions, particularly where women may have fled sexual exploitation.

It was noticeable that gender-based roles and expectations played a part in the dynamics of the workshops. This was particularly the case with the Arabic women's group, who were accompanied initially until it was clear what the workshop content was. The Arabic men did not attend their own session. However, the women's group returned for a second time to discuss issues of concern. There were suggestions of creating another reason for them to attend, such as making a session about the food, which would clearly be seen as more appropriate for women to attend.

**We have learned a lot about the groupings** from working with this cohort of residents. Those we put in place generally worked well, and discussions flowed. There were a small number of exceptions, for instance:

- In one group a dynamic arose from having a small number of people from very different generations, meaning that attitudes were quite divided and conversation stilted, with younger attendees unable to ask questions freely.
- In a small number of groups, where there were individuals from various cultural backgrounds, e.g., the English-speaking group, there was such a variety of stories to tell that less of the agenda was covered (though the conversations were very rich).
- Where we had an 'open door', i.e., people attended sessions that were not aimed at them, e.g., in terms of age group, this made things difficult to manage. We were able to adapt on the ground in terms of the material delivered, though because of this not everything was covered and some may have missed out on useful learning.

There were, though, individuals who knowingly attended sessions not aimed at them. Though at times this was simply to raise a concern or meet with Vania, others came to make use of a safe space for wider discussion. One attendee was able to attend an alternative session using Google Translate on her phone, and the Arabic women's group were proactive in returning after their own session to take advantage of the men's slot, discussing issues that they had with some masculine behaviours. Some residents suggested returning to a second workshop the following week in a language not their own, wanting to spend time in the group. This interest in the workshops shows the range of their impact, offering a safe space where the residents can share their concerns, discussing cultural differences and difficulties and being part of the hotel community.

**Culturally appropriate food was an incentive to come to workshops**, and where facilitators made these available the sessions were often better attended. To provide more popular, culturally appropriate food takes time to discuss specific needs with participants. Our facilitators

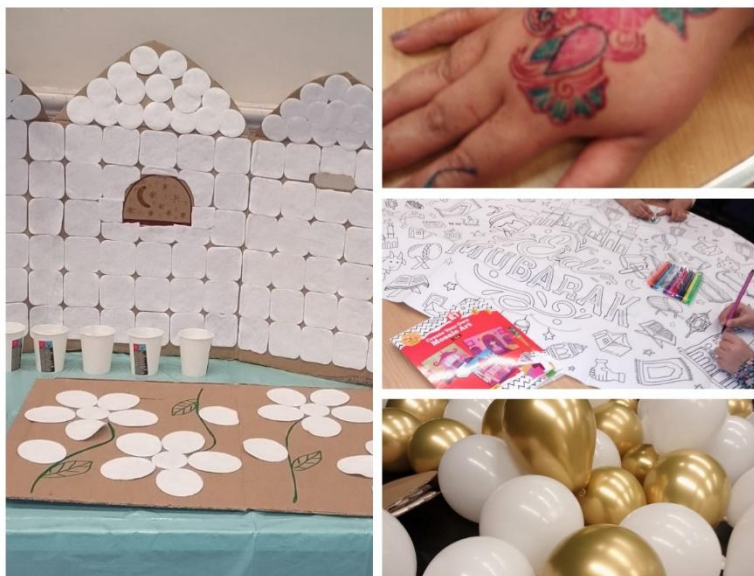
also visited alternative shops to provide appropriate refreshments, teas and ingredients such as spices. It is recommended for future projects that budgeting includes funds for this as residents identified hotel food as a key concern.

Finally, **the importance of the co-facilitators** who supported us cannot be overstated, as they were crucial for being at the intersection of being able to speak the language, having awareness of abuse issues and also lived experience of either the asylum system or the immigration system. As well as making the workshops more accessible for attendees, there were also possibilities for developing relationships beyond the sessions that contributed to the residents' support networks.

## 5 Additional outcomes from the project

In addition to the direct benefits of the training, additional work was carried out that will benefit the residents in a number of ways. Firstly, we helped to build on what the participants had learned and help them develop their networks of support. This included outreach to different organisations and stakeholders during the project, where we were able to expand the community networks for the residents and link them up with their own cultural groups to foster feelings of belonging. Similarly, we have created other important links to share information, for example, between frontline services and the Asylum Safeguarding Hub. We are also exploring a mechanism for Sundial to link directly with local schools to support young people living at the hotel, in recognition of the many needs of the young people there. By creating information packs and notice boards on services with multiple language information,<sup>3</sup> we have helped open up possible sources of support and addressed some of the economic and social exclusion. Identifying funding opportunities such as travel grants and donations of new clothes for the residents has also been a helpful way to make them feel more included and alleviated some of the poverty issues they face.

Given the importance of food to the residents for mental as well as physical health, particularly where this relates to cultural or religious practices, we felt this was a priority. Externally, through our networks Syrian Sisters, Damascus Rose Kitchen and Vania put together a celebration for Eid which also celebrated the completion of the project and helped build rapport and connections between the residents and the diaspora community in Oxford. A celebration for Nawruz, the Persian and Kurdish New Year, was also



*Eid party!*

<sup>3</sup> See Annex IV



arranged for the residents, supported by Evin, our Kurdish co-facilitator. There are also 'ripple effects' in terms of accessing resources, such as the Syrian Sisters offered to donate toys for the children for Eid and the Damascus Rose Kitchen was delivering food for Iftar once a week during Ramadan. They arranged for travel for women to attend a communal meal in Oxford to celebrate Eid. We provide a full list of the additional outcomes in Annex V.

## 6 Summary and way forward

Feedback on this project has been very positive, and we are excited that there is potential to build on the work we have done. Having received a great deal of feedback we suggest it would be helpful to form a residents' committee to make suggestions for improvements and to give feedback to staff, and also to accurately represent residents' viewpoints at strategic meetings. We also suggest that a dedicated worker for signposting, applying for grants and coordinating with schools would alleviate a significant number of the issues that the residents have, within the constraints of their situation as asylum seekers.

We have proposed ways for us to follow up with the Asylum Hotel and measure the longer-term impact of this project and our interventions. We aim to link with them after this project's completion, hopefully to share and analyse anonymised data with us (for example, on the number and type of safeguarding concerns or signposting that has happened post workshops) and/or interview hotel staff to gather this information. We also feel it is important to upskill hotel staff and asylum agencies on issues such as 'honour'-based abuse to help challenge stereotypes and foster understanding, empathy and inclusivity for asylum-seekers, not least because during our brief time there we encountered victim/survivors who are struggling to deal with the aftermath of their experiences.

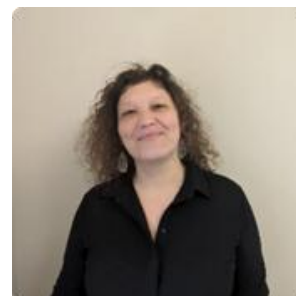
Finally, we are pleased that there is interest in our work from stakeholders overseeing two other asylum hotels in Oxfordshire, as well as the Asylum Safeguarding Hub. We feel that it is important to deliver education with a holistic and strategic response to more hotel communities based on our broad learning and the connections we have made during this project.

*Sundial information boards to support the residents*



## Annex I - facilitation team, workshop support & co-facilitators

Vania is our Domestic Abuse Specialist and has 11 years' frontline experience supporting victims of abuse with Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services as Team Leader and Helplines Manager. She has worked extensively on violence against women and girls in both the UK and Portugal and recently joined the Portuguese Government Task Force on Forced Marriage. Vania has extensively worked with refugees and asylum seekers both in conflict areas and refugee camps and schemes. She has held research roles exploring femicide and life stories of women survivors of domestic abuse, focusing on politicisation and activism as pathways to recovery. She brings specialist expertise in delivering training for Sundial on domestic abuse, 'honour'-based abuse, No Recourse to Public Funds, transnational marriage abandonment and spiritual abuse. Vania also leads on safeguarding.



Rashmi is our Lead Trainer and has over 10 years' experience in training and development. Her experience includes designing and delivering training for aid workers to help prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, customising curriculum design and preparing training evaluation. She employs adult learning principles to ensure meaningful, lasting results and has a highly engaging delivery style. Rashmi holds a bachelor's degree in management studies from the University of Mumbai and a master's degree in occupational and business psychology from Kingston University. Rashmi is also a Certified Ashtanga Yoga Instructor, practitioner of Zen techniques, traveller and avid reader.



Dot is our Operations Manager, coordinating our education programme and leading our team of facilitators. She has considerable experience delivering training and lessons, leads our Web Café programme and plays a central role in many aspects of the charity. Dot has a special interest in body image issues and led the development of our education work on online imagery, pornography and harmful body alterations. She has also been a mentor with Refugee Resource and a trustee for Young Women's Music Project. Dot has a BA in Philosophy and teaches yoga.

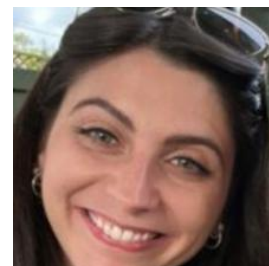


Nesreen is a Sundial Anti-FGM Facilitator, paediatrician and campaigner against FGM from Egypt. She previously worked as a GP in Egypt, at a state health centre in one of the poorest rural areas of the country. In this role, Nesreen was regularly asked to carry out FGM as a "medical procedure". She did of course refuse and these requests gave her an opportunity to raise awareness about the harms and risks involved in FGM with individual families. She also worked with various NGOs, bringing health education to rural communities. Nesreen then moved to Oxfordshire and currently works as a locum paediatrician. Nesreen has a special interest in delivering FGM education for medical



professionals.

Alexis is our Bookings Coordinator and Research Assistant. She is currently undertaking an ESRC funded PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex, having previously undertaken master's degrees in social Anthropology and Social Research Methods. Her research focuses on experiences of mental wellbeing among Ghanaian migrants in the UK, exploring how community practices, gender, family, religion and racial inequalities factor into resettlement and help-seeking behaviours. She previously worked as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice at Oxford Brookes University working on equality and diversity projects, and as Refugee and Displacement Research Assistant for Oxfam GB.



Additional facilitators were: **Alma Kaca** (Albanian translator) is a housing officer for A2Dominion; **Evin Abrishami** (speaking Kurdish Sorani and Persian) is founder of the Kurdish Women's Group and has worked previously at the hotel as a community nurse – she is currently an NHS mental health nurse; **Hemn Mustafa** (Kurdish Sorani speaker), is currently a carer for his daughter and wife, both with disabilities, and has experience of sports activities for young people. Finally, **Nuha Abdo** (Arabic speaker) has worked previously with Asylum Welcome, Oxford University and Pitt Rivers Museum. She currently coordinates Syrian Sisters and manages the Damascus Rose Kitchen – a refugee- based catering service. All four of them have lived experience of the asylum system.

## Annex II - post-pilot workshop adjustments

Staff feedback on the pilot workshop covered the following and led to adjustments to the content:

- All participants agreed that the sessions would work with all cultural groups, however suggested that language and tone will need to be adapted slightly depending on the gender makeup of the groups and the religious background of participants. Additionally, content was discussed with co-facilitators for each session who were from each community and therefore could help adapt the content and mediate any concerns.
- Make the aims of the workshop very clear to residents and acknowledge that they had many competing concerns. To combat this, the facilitators explained that they understood that issues such as consent and services may not be their top priority currently, the workshop would provide a space to think about culture, family and community and that it was important for them to know about the services available as they might need to access them in the future.
- A trigger warning was added to the start of the session to make participants aware that there would be discussion on forms of abuse.
- In discussing different cultures, it was suggested that facilitators should also talk about and bring objects related to cultural representations of the UK to explain the new environment and society that residents are now living in.
- It was suggested that the facilitators should explain to the residents that in some communities touching someone of the opposite sex in any way is not acceptable. It was also explained that individuals and families should be able to express this boundary and explain why it is needed.
- In discussing consent, it was mentioned that we should also be explicit about UK law surrounding the age of consent and marriage, and the fact that capacity is required to give consent.

# Annex III – evaluation forms

Staff evaluation form



## Culture Explorer Workshop

1. How would you rate this training overall (where 0=poor and 10=excellent)?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. What was the best part of the training?

3. Do you think the workshop content will work for all cultural groups?

4. Do you have any suggestions for changes or further comments about the workshop?

5. FOR INTERNAL PURPOSES ONLY: What is your job role/title?

Resident evaluation form



## Culture Explorer Workshop

FOR COMPLETION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WORKSHOP

Do you know contact if you hurt by close to you? who to are being someone

(Not at all) - (Very)

Do you feel confident contacting a service or a helpline for help in the UK?

(Not at all) - (Very)



Do you feel confident about what consent is (or giving your permission for something)?

(Not at all) - (Very)

FOR COMPLETION AFTER THE WORKSHOP

Do you know who to contact if you are being hurt by someone close to you?

Do you feel confident contacting a service or a helpline for help in the UK?

Do you feel confident about what consent is (or giving your permission for something)?



Do you feel that the facilitators were sensitive to the issues and showed interest in your culture?

Do you understand what the role of the police is?

Do you understand what the role of social care is?

Did you enjoy the training?

Is there anything you would change about the training?

## Annex IV – support information supplied to residents

**ARE YOU OK?  
DO YOU FEEL SAFE?  
DO YOU NEED HELP?**

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Services helps all people affected by domestic abuse, even if you are not currently in a relationship with your abuser.

Our services are free and confidential

**0800 731 0055**  
das@a2dominion.co.uk



**01865 725311**



**01865 247788**



**07767 671 406**



**08009995786**



Care | Empower | Recover

**03001234148**



**01865 722082**



**01865 403280**



**08009995428**



**07746153703**



**03030031111**



**07963509044**



**02070080151**



**02073466700**



**08088005000**



**02079206460**



**08081454909**

until women & children are safe

**08082000247**



**02077042261**



**support@nour-dv.org.uk**



**02078314276**



**08005999247**



**03003031056**



**08081111**



**02072516575**



**08088010327**

## Annex V - additional support accessed for residents

### Community groups, charities and local authority support obtained, were:

- We engaged with the charity Bras not Bombs who provided three bags full of new underwear to the hotel. All women were guaranteed access to new underwear and the women at the hotel organised the dissemination of this between themselves by collecting the requirements and handing out underwear as appropriate.
- Our Kurdish/Persian attended the health board for the hotel and this has been taken forward with the Home Office and multi-agency meetings.
- Syrian Sisters paid for bus travel for Syrian and Kurdish women from the hotel to attend their community group session in Oxford and the Eid party.
- Clothing - West Oxfordshire District Council has agreed to sign on to a partnership with Clothing Collective who will provide £400 of vouchers to hotel residents in order for them to buy clothing from charity shops at the cost of £1 per item.
- We have connected with the Abortion Support Network who fund travel and expenses for women in need of pregnancy termination.
- We have engaged with Connections Support to enquire about the possibility of a long-term support volunteer for the hotel, though at present no one is available.
- A2 Dominion originally offered to provide residents with old laptops, but due to existing IT agreements cannot. However, having contacted a scheme in London any donated items will be cleaned and delivered for use.
- Translation: some organisations have offered to assist with translating documents in the hotel such as Immigration Legal Centre Interpreting and Translation Service, Charity Translators and funding from Side by Side Refugees.
- Linking with an Islamic Centre in Oxfordshire to see if they would be interested in supporting the Islamic community in the hotel.

### Specific guidance for individuals and families

- Within sessions, facilitators taught participants about the #55 rule when calling the police if they cannot speak. Facilitators encouraged participants to teach their children this too.
- Facilitators engaged with staff to ensure that services working in the hotel are aware of the migrant domestic abuse pathway.
- A family was referred to SOAS legal clinic for advice where they were provided with advice and explanations about the next steps in the immigration process.
- Details of three families were sent to the Transport Department at the County Council in order for them to be provided with bus passes for their children.

- A family was referred to Refugee Legal Support for legal advice and support with working hours requirement for a student and we further signposted them to Asylum Aid and Migrant Legal Action.
- A man who was concerned about not being placed in accommodation close enough to a hospital due to a health condition was given resources in his language and the contact details of Asylum Welcome.
- Signposted a family to funds and grants to assist with moving on (Zakat Fund and Home Office Loan).
- Funds were applied for and provided for two families to get access to translation for documents.
- Signposted a family to a grant for a tablet for a child.
- Completed four referrals for LGBT+ support services (Rainbow Migration, African Rainbow Families, Micro Rainbow, Rainbow Sisters).
- Referred two families to Asylum Welcome who are exploring ways to access bus passes.
- Inquiries are underway for a West Oxon Boxing instructor to visit and provide a free membership for a young person.
- One woman was signposted to Survivor Space and Safer Spaces for further information and support on spiritual abuse.
- A 10-year-old girl with Special Educational Needs was identified as being out of education, this issue was raised with West Oxfordshire District Council to ensure the child was given a school place as soon as possible.
- One family was signposted to support services for their young adult son who is currently sleeping on streets and support for their young adult daughter, who is a victim of modern slavery. This family was given the details of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) to access legal advice on the right to work.
- Worked with our Arabic co-facilitator to help translate phone conversations with housing officers for explanations on why families may not always be housed together when they leave the hotel.
- Signposted a woman to Survivor Space and MIND.
- Signposted two young people to Talking Space for support with anxiety and depression.
- Signposted young people to ESOL classes for 11+.
- Referred a woman to Nour and the Zakat Fund for funding for a gym membership, bus pass and to attend a Health and Social Care course. This woman was also signposted to the Muslim Women's Network for legal advice regarding marriage and changes to status.
- Referred a single woman with a child to the Zakat Fund for support.



## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to **Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner** and **West Oxfordshire District Council** for their support with this important work, and hotel management and other volunteers for their help. We would also like to thank our amazing facilitators and co-facilitators for their work in making the sessions so successful.

Find out more about Sundial's work via:



<https://www.sundialcentre.org/>



<https://www.facebook.com/SundialCentreforEducationonHarmfulPractices>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/sundialcentre/>



[https://www.instagram.com/sundial\\_centre/](https://www.instagram.com/sundial_centre/)



<https://www.youtube.com/@SundialCentre>



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