

**2012 - 2013**

# ANNUAL REPORT

*Refugee Therapy Centre*



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*Message from Jeremy  
Corbyn MP - RTC Patron*

Congratulations on the ongoing vital support that is offered to clients to help them deal with the consequences of torture and displacement. I continue to be impressed by the RTC's beautiful and energy-efficient building and the calm and welcoming atmosphere within. The effects of the recession make life particularly hard for refugees and asylum seekers and the culturally sensitive services provided by the RTC become ever more necessary –indeed, I regularly emphasise to local Mental Health Trusts the importance of funding them.

I was very sorry to know of the passing of Pat Land, a loyal and hard-working Training Committee member. She was a life-long peace activist and even through her final illness her commitment to justice and the well-being of others shone through. She will be greatly missed by her family and many friends.





## Report from the Chair: John Denford

This year from financial and funding standpoint it has been challenging, but I am pleased to report the provision of therapeutic services, the training and education and research works have been outstanding. We have developed some new interventions such as storytelling, cookbook and other group activities with the hope that the provision of our service reaches more asylum seekers and refugees. We continue to provide a safe, respectful environment as we move forward, and I manage this well with committed staff, volunteer and funders who trust us. In the face of all economic and political challenges, I am proud to report that the Centre is able to continue to work towards its objective. Every time I walk into the Centre, it gives

me pleasure to feel and see an organisation seeking to provide service to those who come to our door to achieve their psychological liberation. Whether in the clinical work, the mentoring or the training, there is an important common strand – a desire to share knowledge and to help people achieve what they can for themselves, to gain or regain their resiliency. This is an excellent example of good leadership by Aida who knows how to help people achieve genuine empowerment – the sort that comes from within – a true intercultural core value. Aida and her team with their commitment ensure all the work is based on a strong human rights framework, while ensuring high quality clinical intervention with a clear boundary in all aspects of organisational functioning. The Centre's work reflects our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This helps us all to learn from each other, from our clients, the referrers, the frailty and strength of humanity.

The Board of Trustees and Management Committee as a matter of routine spent some time to reflect on our strategic priorities so that we can continue to provide services to people who come to us because of the existing gap in the provision of services within NHS, and we are hoping to develop and remain sustainable. Aida and her team are working hard without failure to follow the tasks Trustees set at the Strategic Planning meeting. I am proud to be Chairing such a human rights organisation with an excellent mix of talents; working together to provide the support, good governance and strategic leadership that is needed. I should like to express my immense gratitude to all the members of the Trustees and Management Committee, Aida Alayarian, Josephine Klein, Micol Ascoli and Lennox Thomas.

I wanted to emphasise as the Trustees and Management Committee, we are well-aware of Aida's tremendous personal contributions to the success of the Centre in all areas. Given a complex problem of staff shortages and financial limitation, the challenges of raising funds, the running of the training, her contribution toward the professional bodies such as CPJA-UKCP, IRTC, indeed, her long standing research on resilience - Aida has a rare and somehow enviable ability to find simple resolutions to any matters arising, enabling her to keep focus on the primary task of providing high quality psychological support to our clientele as well as all other aspects of running a functional organisation with strong commitments to human rights and equality for all. It is delightful to see how her eyes light up when she is reporting on Centre activities or working on new ideas to advance the services we are offering. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Management Committee, I would like to thank Aida and her team for their continued enthusiasm and hopefulness within their work, the benefits of which are felt in the community year after year. Aida and her team at the RTC offer a great contribution to the field of trauma work, and I look forward with anticipation to how her continuous innovative thinking and dedication will inspire us for years to come on the development of resilience focus psychoanalytical intervention for those who endured trauma of human rights violations.



## Report from the Clinical Director & CEO

### Aida Alayarian

I am both proud and encouraged to report that the last year has been another successful year for the Refugee Therapy Centre, with some changes. Our aim to respectfully and appropriately serve all those who seek our help following experiences of extreme adversity, including torture and other human rights violations, continues to be our guiding principle. Despite the unstable current economic climate we persevere with our work, reaching growing numbers of those in need. This is due to our increased ability to use our resources effectively and strong relations we have built over time with the communities we serve.

We are pleased to report this year saw increasing referrals coming from within the community itself, represented in 424 self-referrals received this year, showing a growing engagement without the need to rely on social workers and social services resources, GPs or other statutory actors. This year in particular, many unaccompanied minors have come to us for help, raising our concern with service provision available to young people and children in vulnerable positions within Greater London. Over 560 people we served this year were under 27 years of age, 43% of total referrals compared to 38% last year. Each year, we reaffirm our commitment prioritising young people, children and their families and those that have been in the UK less than ten years, particularly working to increase the accessibility of our services as we are made aware that other services are often not meeting the needs.

We have been able to offer services in 14 languages: Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Dari, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Somali, Spanish, Tigre, Tigrinya and Turkish. Individual, group and families sessions continue to be offered based on client linguistic and cultural need. Working to provide appropriate psychological intervention to refugees and asylum seekers means we need to stay vigilant of community needs and ensure we have a robust mechanism for feedback to improve our services. We proudly report that regular feedback received from clients, in addition to other members of the community during outreach activities, have given us the opportunity to reflect on our services and create new developments that support the needs of those we set ourselves to serve.

Last year was our fourth year in our current premises at Leeds Place in the London Borough of Islington. The hard work generously offered by countless people during the process of refurbishment until the present has made it possible for us to keep the highest standards for those we seek to serve. The need for a larger waiting area, equipped with additional space for responsible play for children and respect for individual space, has been made increasingly aware to us during the past year as the number of clients continues to grow. In the unending resolve to pursue the provision of services that accommodate the communities we serve with dignity, we also continue to work toward increasing the welcoming nature of the Centre itself. We are hopeful that through new funding support we will be able to complete this necessary extension and renovation in the coming year.

#### **Support Outreach Community Development Workers (CDW):**

Our SOCDW project is now in its 11th year and continues to thrive. This year we have bid farewell to two valued, Senior CDWs—Eden Melles and Linda Raymond—as they have moved onto new opportunities outside the Centre. This was a difficult change to adjust to for us, as a community and for the project; they are already dearly missed by staff and clients alike, but we

are extremely grateful for their important contribution and commitment to the work of RTC over the years. We were pleased to welcome three new CDW staff in March as well as report that our former Volunteer and Mentoring Coordinator, Natalie Yeong, has now stepped up to manage the project. This is an exciting development from which we anticipate a successful year ahead.

Access to local services continues to be a major issue for many we serve, emphasising the continued need for practical support that is delivered by the Support Outreach Community Development Worker project. CDWs help many clients to access services from other statutory and voluntary organisations by signposting and encouragement. Through outreach activities and during drop-in sessions, the CDW team helps to breakdown mental health stigma within the community, reducing isolation amongst people in need of psychological support and their families.

This year the hard work of the CDW's has further developed the Centre's connections with communities at large, with 556 clients referred and supported by the CDW team. Between them, the team offered Support Work in ten languages: Arabic, Amharic, English, Farsi, French, Italian, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya and Turkish, serving people from 52 different countries. Clients were provided with emotional support and encouragement in looking for work, voluntary or paid, and finding services that would be able to support their practical needs. In addition to the weekly drop in session offered Thursday mornings 10.30am – 12.30pm, this year we introduced a second time during the evening – Wednesday 5pm to 7pm – which gives those who work or have other day time responsibilities the opportunity to be supported. During these open surgeries, clients are signposted to a wide range of services depending upon the person's individual needs, including GP surgeries, housing advice agencies, Job Centres, ESOL classes, Colleges, Refugee Community Organisations, IAPT Services, Job Centre's, Community Low Centre, Citizens Advice Bureaus and other Community Organisations.

### **Group work:**

Several exciting new group work developments have taken place this year. Following feedback received from clients and based upon a growing number of referrals that indicated the potential need for such a service, we began a Refugee and Asylum Seeker Lesbian Group. This group is led by one of our Senior Therapists, Nerma Bisevic, and has been thriving since its inauguration last autumn. Nerma also continues to run our English-speaking Women's Group and Young Men's groups as in years past, which continue to have strong attendance and act as a vital part of the service provision of RTC. Our Senior Consultant and Therapist, Lennox Thomas, continues to lead the English-speaking Men's Group which receives much positive feedback. Since last year, our Senior Community Development Worker, Zubeyde Arabaci, has offered a Story-telling Group supported by one of our mentors Parisa Torabi for women who are learning English, many of whom feel unconfident to attend college or other publicly held courses. All group work at RTC holds a central aim of creating a safe, containing space where individuals can share their stories and experiences without fear of judgement or disrespect, and in effect, break social and cultural isolation that is often experienced by many refugees and asylum seekers. With the addition of a new team of Support Outreach Community Development Workers, we anticipate that several new groups will be launched within the coming weeks.

### **Training:**

This year has been RTC's twelfth year of offering its one year Foundation Course. This course provides a foundation in intercultural psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theories as they apply to working with refugees and other people who have endured extreme trauma, giving students the opportunity to explore how psychoanalytic techniques may be useful in this context. The training seeks to increase educational and occupational accessibility for those from refugee, asylum seeker

and other Black and Minority Ethnic communities in an effort to build capacity and provide a platform for recognising the skills of these communities that are too often marginalised or discounted.

We are now running PG-Dip/MA in Intercultural Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy in collaborative partnership with the University of East London. Students successfully completed the foundation year can carry studying toward the completion of full qualification and those successful can register with the United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy – Council of Psychoanalysts and Jungian Analysts (UKCP- CPJA), and independently with British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). In an effort to join fully accredited training with an academic component, this programme has been designed to build competency of its trainees in both the theoretical and the clinical competency for professional and effective practice in an intercultural setting. Following from decades of experience, enabled through strong networks of committed experts in the field of trauma recovery and psychoanalysis, this programme is considered the first of its kind in Europe, providing students with an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge from clinicians and researchers in this growing field as well have an active role in the continuing evaluation and re-formulation of psychoanalytic thinking from intercultural perspectives. We are pleased to have had such a promising year and look forward to the further development of this specialist training programme. The collaborative partnership with UEL however will end with this cohort of students and we are negotiating for alternative academic partners.

Special thanks to:

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all those who make our work possible throughout the year. Our very special gratitude goes first to our charitable funders and commissionaires, who recognise and share our assessment of needs enabling RTC to grow and fulfil its aims. Amongst many, I thank Sigrid Rausing Trust, Trust for London, Comic Relief, Islington CAMHS, Islington PCT, City & Hackney PCT, BBC Children in Need.

Our dedicated Patrons continue to provide unfailing encouragement and support and I send my heart-felt appreciation to them all: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Ms Eva Hoffman, Professor Roland Littlewood, Mr Claude Moraes MEP and Dr Eric Rayner.

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees and the Management Committee for their commitment to furthering the work of the Refugee Therapy Centre and guiding the policy and practice of all we do. I am grateful for their continued insight and expertise that enables us to rise from each challenge we encounter onto the solution.

I would like to express unwavering esteem and gratitude to all the therapists and counsellors who continue to provide the highest quality services to all those who walk through our door. By unceasingly putting the needs of people we are serving first, we continue to strengthen the reputation of the Centre and ensure we do not deviate from our objectives. I am so very appreciative and grateful to all my colleagues who take the extra efforts to reflect on our work with me to help RTC continue to be a place of hope for the many who have lost their homes and had to flee their homelands.

I am grateful and feel indebted to each of our lecturers and teaching staff who give their time and expertise so generously, often without any remuneration. I especially want to express my deep gratitude to Bob Hinshelwood, Micol Ascoli, Dilys Daws, Lennox Thomas, Nerma Biscevic, Jo-Anne Carlyle, Geoff Ferguson, Tirril Harris, Roland Littlewood, Lionel Bailly and Mary Lynne Ellis who have helped the trainees' development and learning expand immensely.

My appreciation goes to all of my dedicated colleagues, particularly Natalie Yeong our Project Coordinator and the Administrative Team who ensure the day-to-day operation of the Centre continues smoothly as well as helping to innovate and develop new strategies for the future.

The hard work and commitment of our volunteers, through the Mentoring Project is an inspiration to me. I continue to learn from their enthusiasm and energy to serve clients with care, integrity, genuine human contact with those needed and am grateful for the countless hours they so generously gifted to the Centre's activity. I also want to express my deep gratitude to other volunteers working in administration and other area of the Centre's work, without their commitments, it would not be possible to be as sustainable and forward looking organisation.

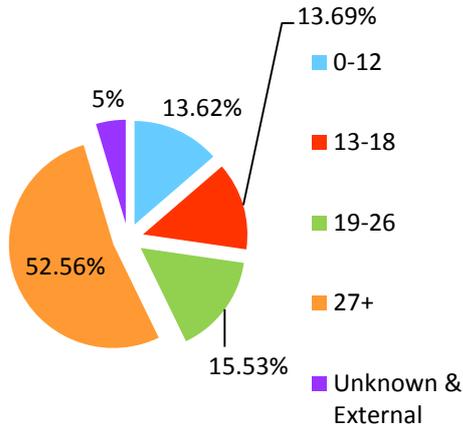
***Below is the summary of the services that we provided during the period of 2012-2013***

Summary of identifying activities undertaken to further our charitable purposes for the public benefit from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, we have offered 10,380 sessions to 1307 clients from 52 countries. Of these 40% were male and 60% female.

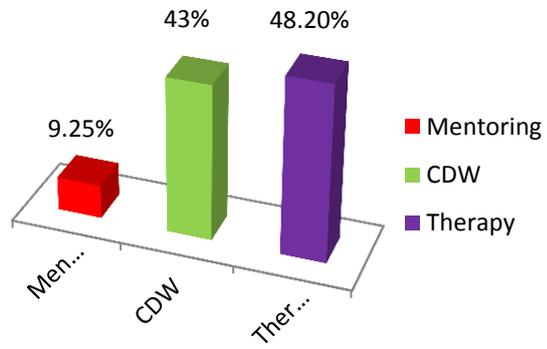
Total referrals	1307
Of these, number of clients offered psychotherapy & counselling	630
No. offered Support Outreach Community Development	556
No. offered Mentoring	121
No. Individual offered therapy	552
No. Group offered group Therapy	78



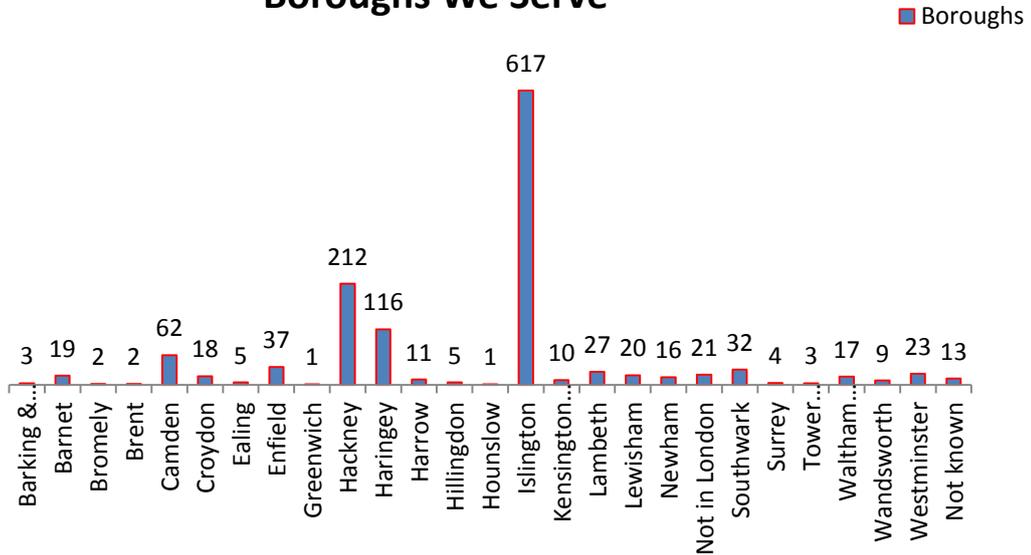
### Ages



### Services Provided

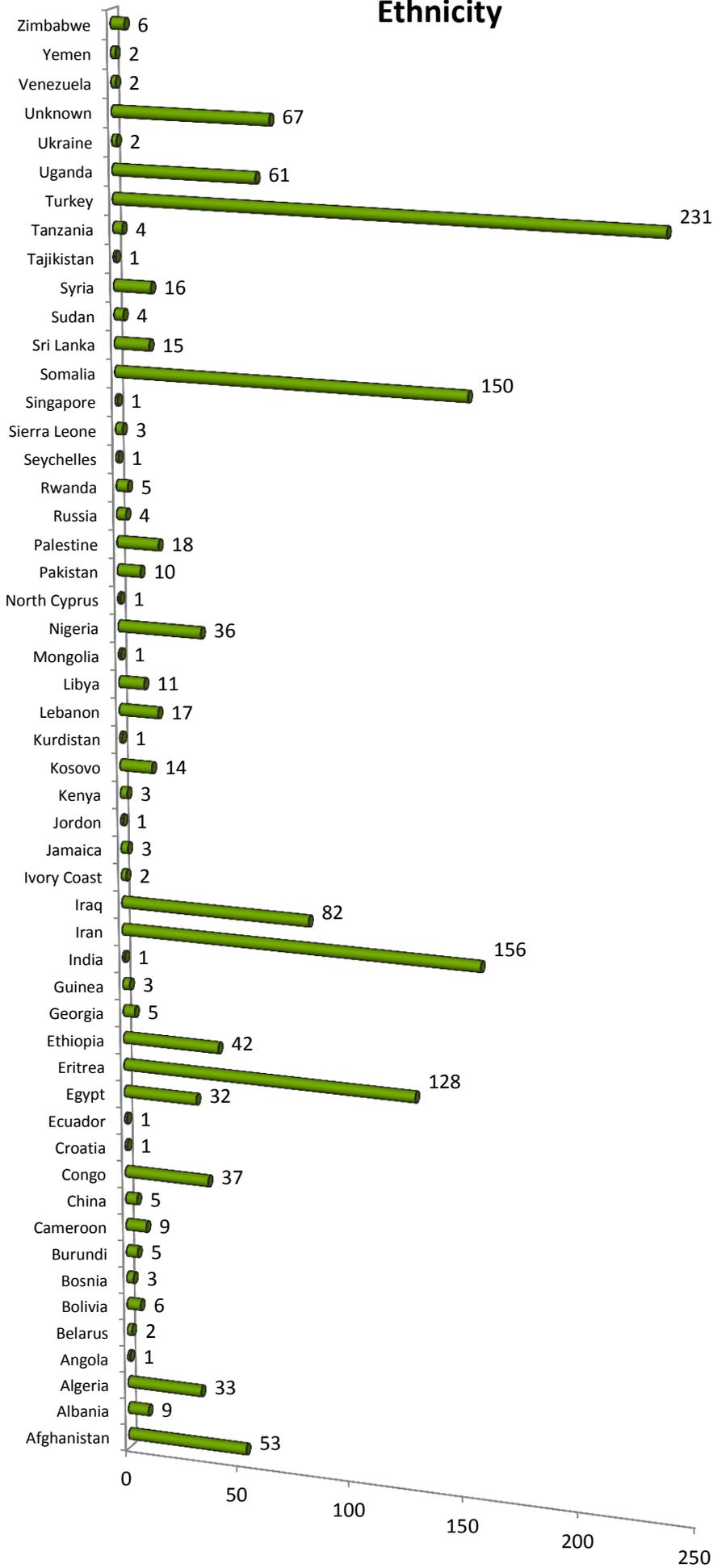


### Boroughs We Serve



# Ethnicity

■ Ethnicity





## Community Development Worker Project

One of the main aims of the CDWs is to break the stigma attached to mental health amongst the hardest to reach refugee, asylum seeking and other black and ethnic minority communities. CDWs offer a safe and confidential listening ear in their specific mother tongue languages if desired to those who are dealing with feelings of depression, frustration, stress, anxiety and isolation which can be overwhelming and particularly when language is a barrier to communication.

The team members coordinate with each other to offer drop-in hours every Wednesday evening between 5.00pm and 7.00pm, and Thursday between 10.30am and 12.30pm. This is important as this offers the space for people to telephone or turn up at the Centre without knowing what they want – sometimes, feeling overwhelmed by their own needs, it can be relief to find somewhere welcoming and homely which offers the space to think along-side someone about what their most immediate needs are, what can be addressed and how they can feel empowered and capable of managing their lives.

CDWs aim to help ease the process of integration by offering assistance to help clients who may have mental, physical or social problems resulting from being a refugee or in the process of seeking asylum. CDWs sensitively work to address clients' particular needs through the process of assessment clients' and discuss ways to help them adapt or improve their situation. They also help aim to empower clients and improve their resilience by thinking positively and working towards agreed goals. Progress is closely observed and discussed with the team in regular supervision groups.



Outreach work remains a vital route in reaching and engaging hard to reach communities, this includes specific intervention to reach and involve refugee, asylum seeking and other black and ethnic minority groups who can be at risk and not know how to contact available services. The CDW team has established and maintain good links with community organisations and they continue to build upon this by visiting Refugee and other Community Organizations in the field to target different refugee and other BME groups. The workers aim to reach those marginalised refugee, asylum seeker and BMEs who are suffering from mental health problems in isolation and would not normally be known to mental and social care services. The CDW team also continue to run the Parenting Workshops and Story-telling workshops.

This year we have said particularly sad farewells to some highly valued members of staff, as well as welcoming new staff to the team. I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all of the CDW team, Zubeyde Arabaci, Eden Melles, Linda Raymond, Sega Habtom, Ayda Abassnejad, Marta Meli, Najuma Ali and Alessandra Mongardi.

## Mentoring project

We continue to provide weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions in a safe and containing environment. Developed in 2003 in response to feedback from clients the Mentoring project remains a popular and highly effective way of providing a service in helping people develop their English skills to ease the process of integration and resettlement. Clients can receive help to improve their spelling, speaking, learning to use a computer or practise to get ready for their citizenship exam.

For children and young people, a mentoring session focuses on learning as well as building self-esteem and confidence. Mentors provide help and support to children who might be in a vulnerable situation and not able to catch up with their education, their homework and revision. Mentors offer a space where children can think about other situations; specifically, where there are issues related to a child being bullied due to difficulty with language, level of achievement at school or as a result of being a Refugee or Asylum Seeker pupil.

The main aims of the project are to help people:

- Increase self-esteem and confidence
- Improve concentration in school work
- Improve English language skills

- Improve educational and work achievements
- Make new friends and integrating into school and society
- A reduce feelings of anxiety and loneliness
- Increase positive hopes and aspirations for the future

The majority of our mentors are UCL medical students, some of whom have returned to mentor with us for consecutive years. Medical students gain experience in working with refugees and asylum seekers which will we hope, inform their future practice, understanding of and sensitivity to refugees' health needs. This year we also recruited 5 non-medical students who have brought with them their individual experiences and expertise to the project. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to Ahmed El-Sayed, Alice Tyler, Tomasz Smith, Hannah Costelloe, Charlotte Craven, Rosie Ridley, Parisa Torabi, Kalina Bridgewater, Gjana Elezi, Eda Shehaj, Cary Whitworth, Tina Bouffet and Mary Newman for their commitment and hard work.

## Volunteers

RTC continues to actively recruit volunteers from refugee communities and provide people with an opportunity to improve their educational or employment prospects in the supportive atmosphere of the Centre. Volunteers are working in areas such as office administration, graphic design, web design, translation, and support work. We have also welcomed many highly regarded professionals to join us in our journey on a voluntary basis and we are fortunate to have our distinguished colleagues contributing to our work mainly in psychotherapy. In particular I would like to thank volunteers Eleanor Nairne and Tom Donnelly who have been kindly organising our library system as well as Claire Burke and Sophie Deen who have advised us on PR and media.



## Two Case example from CDW Project

### Aster\*

*Aster came to the Refugee Therapy Centre for practical and emotional support after hearing about the Centre from her friends. Aster, originally from Eritrea, was a 72 year old woman living in Westminster Borough of London. She suffered from diabetes, high cholesterol, and chronic physical pain, using a walking stick to support her. Aster felt lonely because of where she lives, unable to meet anyone from her community or organisations that speak her language. Due to her limited English and inability to find help, she would often struggle to understand letters she received from the Local Authority, hospital or GP regarding her appointments. Meeting with a CDW in her own language, she expressed her anxiety and frustration due to the language barrier and resulting isolation that she felt unable to cope with. Aster shared memories of her childhood and other life experiences to the CDW she met with and felt contained and listened to. At the end of one session she said, "I am lucky person I found someone who speaks my language and only I take one bus to get here. I wish I knew you long time ago". The following week she came with special homemade traditional bread. While the kindness of the gesture was acknowledged, Aster was encouraged to focus on how we can provide help to her to feel empowered to make social connections she was seeking and find confidence that she is not alone. By the end of the sessions at RTC, Aster expressed a greater feeling of contentment and hopefulness now that she had been able to find a community that was there to support her in her own language after 16 years.*

### Samir\*

*Samir, a 37 year old man from Iran was married with an 8 year old son. He came to the UK 4 years ago as a refugee and had claimed asylum successfully. Samir had a degree from Iran in Biology, but was finding it difficult to find work that would accept this qualification. As his wife was ill and often unable to care for their son, he had been busy with supporting the child and other household tasks. As the son was beginning school and becoming more independent, Samir had more time to look for work. Although he was keen to become employed, he felt unconfident about his ability to prepare a CV and presentation of his skills in English. Through meeting with a CDW, Samir was referred to an organisation called Camden Working which provide help with CV writing, and give support and advice on how to look for a job. In addition, he was referred to a community ESOL class where he could start to further develop his English language ability and gain confidence to look for a job. In his last session, he expressed his gratitude for RTC's support in helping him to access services available in the community and said he looked forward to being able to help his son with his homework.*

*\*All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

## *International Women's Day*

This year, along with many all over the world, RTC held a celebration of International Women's Day, inviting members of the community to join us in honouring the achievements, strength and courage of refugee and other women contributions around the World. The RTC's commitments to furthering the human rights, we identify the struggle for women's equality, wellbeing and recognition as a vital part of our wider effort.



Indiscriminate of age, race, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and geographical location, women all over the world are subject to violence and marginalisation, commonly with impotent or absent public outcry. Despite women's widespread and indispensable contribution to every sector of society, subjugation has tragically followed us into the 21st Century. As the struggle for women's rights continues and takes new form, we at the RTC proudly hold this day with honour and intention—we all have a part to play in advancing equality and respect for women whether in political office, grassroots campaigning, working the community or simply being an honourable parent or carer.

This year Aida opened the event marking a brief history of the Women's Rights Movement – starting in the early 1900's where women campaigned in the streets of the US to demand better pay, shorter working hours and the right to vote, to women's involvement in campaigning for peace during the first and second World Wars, and onto the present day where women all over the world are becoming increasingly active in politics at both the grassroots and institutional level. The discussion was open for all present to participate and share their understanding of the day's meaning, and how they, throughout their lives have celebrated or acknowledged it. Reflective of the attendees' diverse backgrounds, a beautiful mosaic of memories and tradition unfolded demonstrating experiences of discrimination as well as dignity and courage from many different cultures. At the close of the discussion, all those present were asked to consider the power women have as mothers and carers to help raise the future generations to show greater respect and become participants in the movement for women's rights.



The event finished with refreshments, further discussion in small groups and the opportunity to dance together—an opportunity we take, whenever possible, at RTC as an activity of joy and solidarity. As we move forward through the year, let us each do what we can to make every day Women's Day.



## *Human Rights Day*

International Human Rights Day is an important time for us here at the Refugee Therapy Centre. We see this day as an opportunity to raise our voices in solidarity with our brothers and sisters across the world, condemning human rights violations in any form wherever they occur as well as a time to recommit ourselves, through word and action, to the principles of equality, social justice and human rights. Although there is great need for our active and daily commitment toward furthering human rights, we recognise the importance of coming together to recognise trauma and torture unjustly endured by so many and how we can each play our part to eradicate such treatment of our fellow human beings.

As a specialist organisation whose primary objective is to empower refugees and asylum seekers who have endured extreme human rights violations overcome associated psychological difficulties, our work aims to respond directly to denial and abuse of basic human rights. This year we held our celebration to honour International Human Rights Day on 13th December, beginning with a discussion acknowledging the contradictions of a global political community ostensibly struggling against terrorist threat while simultaneously enabling or perpetrating acts of terror against its people through the Arms Trade, natural resources and commodities conflicts, and repression and corruption by those with power. The tragedy, and indeed shamefulness, of modern times in which technology has become so advanced yet unnecessary and extreme human rights violations increase unabated in many parts of the world, cannot be ignored. Our discussion closed with an affirmation that there is a great deal of work that remains—and therefore—it is the responsibility of each of us to become engaged in the larger struggle toward the increased realisation of human rights wherever we are.

Refugees and asylum seekers are in the heart of this struggle— forced to leave their homes under a multitude of pressurised and challenging circumstances, with little resource to safety or security, and often with a range of traumatic experience endured prior to flight, during transit and in the resettlement process. Too often we see that these communities are left, or pushed, to the outskirts politically, socially and economically within the regions they seek sanctuary. In honour of efforts defending all those beleaguered in the process of forced migration, we watched a short documentary on Maison Des Journalistes, a Parisian safe house for refugee journalists. Through the brave testimony of those who shared their stories, extreme anguish as well as profound resiliency was evident. While we can feel a certain sense of impotence toward effecting change to the circumstances that influence forced migration, we must not lose sight of what we are able to do and continue to raise our voices confirming the equality of rights of all people anywhere in the world.



## Words from Staffs

**Natalie Yeong**



*Project Coordinator*

This year has been a great year of change for me at the Centre as I have recently taken over the post managing the CDW project. This has been new, exciting and challenging in equal measures. I continue in my role as Volunteer and

Mentoring Coordinator, both of which I enjoy immensely and I hope to contribute to the development of the CDW project. Thanks to further funding for Islington commissioning the CDW team are able to continue offering their valuable service to refugees, asylum seekers and now other BME groups. This funding enables us to reach more diverse and marginalised groups in Islington. I hope that this will go some way to help the increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and BMEs who are as yet unable to access main stream services and are struggling with tragedy and loss by offering a space where they can rediscover themselves, and be empowered to rediscover their abilities to build new lives and futures for themselves and their children.

I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to Aida for all her support during my years at the Centre and for her unwavering belief in me which has very often been greater than my own. I love being at the Centre and it has become clearer to me what a special place it is. Offering a home from home and a space for people to simply come to sit and think is invaluable. I am privileged to be a part of the team at RTC and look forward to many years to come.

**Alice Tyler**

*Mentor*

I have been volunteering at The Refugee Therapy Centre for over 6 months now and have found it to be an extremely positive experience, both in terms of the other volunteers I have met but also observing and partaking in thoroughly positive and affirming work. The work I have done with children who have moved in the this community has produced synergistic benefits for both their achievement and attitude to school and my development through them; learning about cultures and a way of life previously unknown to me. I have learnt a new patience and respect with these people and the work that they do at the Refugee Therapy Centre.

**Parisa Torabi**

*Mentor*



This is the second year that I have volunteered at the centre and it has always been a truly enjoyable experience. There is such rich diversity and the caring ethos of the Centre has made it a supportive and safe place for all that require its services. I have

been having one-to-one sessions with clients, mentoring and supporting them to improve their English language skills. Watching their progress and seeing the impact that they have developed has on their lives, such as helping them go to university or get a job, has been the most rewarding aspect. I am truly grateful to Aida, Natalie and the others working at the Centre, for their hard work and diligence in making the mentoring project run smoothly and ensuring the greatest benefits to our clients.





**Lennox Thomas**

*Consultant Psychotherapist*

The work at the centre continues to change and grow with the needs of the clients. My work with the men's group has been affected by many of them being moved to different parts of the country as part of their asylum claim.

Whatever security that they might have achieved, people that they have become familiar with therapy that helped them to settle is erased. In some cases patients have been seen for several months and are sufficiently resilient to start again and use acquired skills to survive in a new place. The severity of mental ill health of the patients we see is still high as compared to other therapy centres and their mental state is often accompanied by physical conditions, like diabetes joint problems and bodily pains from beatings and torture. Young people who came as unaccompanied minors to the UK appear to make good progress in therapy and education despite their isolation and loss of family. The young people who are referred by Social Workers seem to do well, others who are not picked up before eighteen are referred to the centre via the psychiatric services, usually a period after experiencing breakdown.



**Shweta Sayed**

*Administrative Assistant*

I have recently joined the Refugee Therapy Centre, working as an Administrative Assistant. The staff has been very friendly and helpful during my induction process. Despite the small amount of exposure I have had to the Centre, I can already begin

to see what a strong community has been created and the important work taking place. I am honoured to have the opportunity to work with such a dynamic and committed organisation whose work aims to serve the community by providing a critical space where people who have endured trauma can build resiliency and begin to live in wellbeing. As a new addition to the RTC community, I am eager for the learning and challenges that lie ahead.

**Tom Smith**



*Mentor*

This is the second year I have participated in the mentoring project at the Refugee Therapy Centre. Although it represents quite a significant time commitment I think the project is very worthwhile. As well as providing support to clients the scheme allows

mentors to gain experience working with people from different communities within the London area. Through helping clients with numeracy and language I have been able to develop my own communication skills. I have also gained an important insight into the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees living in the UK, and the role of charities and public services in addressing them.

**Tony Slater**



*Counsellor*

I am now in my second year of working as a therapist at RTC. This originally came about as a consequence of meeting Aida through our mutual involvement in the Occupy movement during its time at St Paul's. Then I knew little about the RTC

but was greatly impacted by the warmth of Aida's concern in terms of the psychological and welfare support we were trying to offer at the camps, and the strength of her conviction in the way she put her care into action. I have worked as a therapist and trainer for over twenty years and have found this last year to have been a significant source of inspiration and learning. The therapeutic work at RTC is deeply moving and rewarding, but also helps to sustain important political questioning for me about the role of psychotherapy in society generally.

I have a great deal of appreciation for Aida's support and encouragement, as well as for the space in which to sometimes argue from different clinical and theoretical perspectives which makes for a lively and engaging professional environment. The rest of the team are incredibly warm and committed for whom I have a great deal of affection. There are few places one could travel

to work with such warm anticipation of a sense of belonging.



**Rosie Ridley**

*Mentor*

When I began mentoring in October, I was unsure of what to expect from the experience. However, the guidance I continuously receive from the staff at the RTC and the resources that are provided mean that I have been able to provide

my mentees with sessions tailored to their personal interests and needs. It has been an honour to have the opportunity to meet such inspirational people and to help them overcome the hurdles they may face on a daily basis as refugees. Although the position is a frequently challenging one, being able to see week-by-week progress has been an incredibly rewarding and encouraging experience, and I feel very fortunate to have been able to see the improvement process first-hand. I look forward to seeing my mentees advance further, and hope I can continue to provide them with whatever help and support they need.

**Kiymet Omur Biyolaku**

*Counsellor*

It is the time for us at RTC to reflect on another year that has passed by. But, I cannot reflect on a year without reflecting on the years that I have spent being



part of the Refugee Therapy Centre. It feels like a long time, yet it feels like yesterday when I first approached Aida back in 2004 for a placement as a student. She took me on board with both arms and I have so much to thank her for, for an amazing journey I have experienced and continue to do so, for my learning and growing, for meeting and working with all the exceptional people who were or still are involved with RTC. And mostly our clients who walk through these doors and put all their trust and faith in us. We hope we never let them down.

What stands out for me this year in the larger frame of working at RTC is CHANGE. Change as a part of life's process. And let me tell you, change

is the hardest to accept and it is only natural and human to feel so. It remains one of the themes in our clients' worlds and we are all only too familiar with it. Yet it is the most necessary component for growth as a person and human being. Since its foundation back in 1999, when war was happening in the Balkans and unfortunately wars continue to happen in the world we live in today, the Refugee Therapy Centre has welcomed as well as said its goodbyes. To staff, to students, to dear friends and to our clients who have moved on to rebuilt their lives. But, the Centre has also stood the test of time and the recent recession crisis which has affected all alike, by standing strong and defiant and continuing to do its most valuable and important work by helping clients who come through these doors. It will always welcome with both arms, no matter what...



**Mary Newman**

*Mentor*

I have been volunteering as a mentor at the Refugee Therapy Centre for the past few months. The mentoring sessions provide a friendly safe space where refugees and asylum-seekers can improve their English skills and general confidence through conversation and learning exercises. I'm so glad I applied for this role; it is extremely rewarding to be able to make even a small difference in the, often very difficult, lives of forced migrants.

**Eleanor Nairne**

*Volunteer Librarian*



I am one of a small group involved in the organising and further construction of a library of both books and journals, many of which have been very kindly donated to the Centre by members of the public. It is my job to check and enter the details of new books onto a computer database, whilst also checking that those publications which are already in the collection are as clearly and accurately labelled and displayed as possible. This enables people who want to use the resources available to easily find what it is that they are interested in.



**Alessandra Mongardi**

*Community Development Worker*

I recently joined the Refugee Therapy Centre as Community Development Worker, in particular for people and Associations of the Spanish-speaking area. I enjoy the variety of this position, which comprises outreach activities and

working directly with Clients (i.e. groups, drop-ins, signposting). It is an enriching experience so far.

I'm also a student of the MA in Intercultural Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy: I'm on the 2nd year and what I particularly value about it is its unique focus on both intercultural aspects and the theoretical ground in psychoanalysis. We are encouraged to reflect about and to take in consideration the cultural impact on the clinical practice working with people coming from diverse backgrounds. This is reflected in the student group, from different cultural and professional experiences as in the teacher's.

**Mohammad Jameer**



*Finance Administrator*

I have now been involved with the centre for eight years as their finance administrator and it seems like only yesterday since I joined, with every day presenting a fresh challenge. Working in

an environment surrounded by different cultures and views creates an enlightening and fulfilling experience. We are faced with uncertainties in funding; however the resilience of the organisation will make it stronger in the future due to the staff, volunteers and Management Committee who provide a continued atmosphere of warmth, support and dedication.

**Ahmed El-Sayed**

*Mentor*

After my excellent experience last year, I decided to continue at the refugee therapy centre. After



2 years here, I still cannot recommend it highly enough. The staff are like a family, willing to help in any way possible to support both mentors and refugees. Regular supervisions ensure that mentors feel comfortable in what they are doing and allows the staff to offer advice about ways of advancing or if there any problems present at all. The positive effect, on all the refugees involved in the centre, is clear to see.

It has again been a privilege to be a part of this project and I have every intention of continuing next year. I encourage anyone thinking about joining to do so.

**Gjana Elezi**

*Mentor*



I have found my time working at RTC very pleasant and enjoyable as I have had the pleasure of meeting clients from a variety of countries, all of which were extremely keen in developing their English. Though there were times where I found it difficult to

obtain resources which I needed for a client, I found the staff at RTC extremely helpful in terms of pointing me in the right direction.

As a result of working at RTC since November 2012, I feel more confident in terms of figuring out an individual's needs and communicating any necessary information in basic terms, as most of my clients only understood basic English.

I feel that the clients that I have worked with have gained a lot during our mentoring sessions. I made sure that I was patient during all my mentoring session as I felt this was very important in terms developing a relationship with my client whereby they felt confident to express anything even when it was not grammatically correct. In addition to this, I was able to help them with areas in English and Maths which clients not only sought help on but also on areas which I felt they would benefit. Although some of my clients have made slow progress in terms of developing their areas of weakness, either in English or Maths, I am pleased with the fact that they feel confident enough to attempt things without being afraid of getting things wrong.

### **Charlotte Craven**



#### *Mentor*

The Refugee Therapy Centre offers a unique supportive and calming environment for individuals of all ages, from a huge range of social and cultural backgrounds. I am so pleased to have been able to get involved with the mentoring project, and to witness first-hand the positive impact that the centre has on these people. It has been encouraging to see the improvement not only in language, but in the confidence and self-belief of my clients. It has been a pleasure to help such extremely talented and driven individuals in achieving their goals, and I hope the experience has been as enjoyable and rewarding for them as it has been for me.

### **Hannah Costelloe**

#### *Mentor*

During my three years working as a mentor at the Refugee Therapy Centre, I have seen a wide range of people, of all ages, and from many different backgrounds.

I usually see three clients a week on a one-to-one basis. My aim, as a mentor, is primarily involved in helping the clients to improve their spoken English, in order that they can succeed at school as children and live independently as adults. A major benefit for all is the increased capacity to express their thoughts and feelings.

The more I have worked with people at the Centre, the more I have learnt about the hardships people face when they come to live in London, and the total isolation that they can experience, whilst often carry the burden of very troubled pasts. My time here has made me far more aware of the difficulties faced by others. I feel like my work here has been worthwhile, but I have also benefited from the time, as I have gained so much from the experience of talking to the people that I have met. I consider myself fortunate to be part of such a brilliant initiative.



### **Clare Burke**



#### *Press and Publicity Volunteer*

I've recently started volunteering at the centre after meeting Natalie at a volunteering event at the Guardian. I'm using my experience in journalism to offer ideas about press and publicity, and to make suggestions about how the website could be developed. I'm really enjoying it so far and have found everyone at the centre to be very friendly and welcoming.

### **Kalina Bridgewater**

#### *Mentor*

In the first few years of medical school, I have had little clinical experience - I may know a lot about molecules, but not much about helping real-life people. Volunteering at the Refugee Therapy Centre has given me the opportunity to talk to people from a variety of backgrounds and to have a positive influence on their lives, whether it be helping with their English skills or just to lend a listening ear.

Although it has sometimes been challenging, it has been very rewarding to see an improvement in clients I have seen over a long period of time and the experience has emphasised to me how the little things can make such an important difference. What I have found particularly inspiring is how children have turned into amazingly mature and cheerful young adults despite growing up under the most difficult circumstances. From the therapists to the receptionists, I have also really enjoyed meeting the warm and friendly staff working at the centre. I am fortunate to be a part of such an engaging and worthwhile project.



### **Tina Bouffet**

#### *Mentor*

My time as a mentor for the RTC was one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences yet. Every week, I was



able to interact with people who, despite having been through a tremendous amount of suffering, are still willing to learn and to adapt to a new environment as they strive to move on from pain and trauma. Most of mentoring is centred around the teaching of English, causing me to see the language itself in a whole new light as I broke it down into the smallest, simplest, most completely unrecognizable pieces. I would recommend joining the mentoring project at the RTC to anyone interested in giving back to their community and willing to have their communication skills tested like never before.

### **Nerma Biscevic**



#### *Counsellor*

I first joined the Centre in 2002 and I am currently working full time as a Bosnian speaking Psychodynamic Counsellor. Over the years I have offered counselling to clients from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. We have been

working together in one-to-one sessions and in groups. Since 2003 I have been running an Experiential Student Group as part of our training in Counselling Refugees.

This year, in response to a growing need amongst our clients, we have set up a Refugee and Asylum Seeker Lesbian Group, which is now running steadily and we continue to receive referrals for this particular group. I have been more engaged in student work by facilitating seminars and providing tutoring support. Over the past year I have also been offering individual and group supervision to Counsellors and Support Workers.

I am very grateful to my colleagues in the office for their part in making this work possible.

### **Shahrzad Khamoush**



#### **Counsellor**

I am a Farsi speaking counsellor, working two days a week at Refugee Therapy Centre for over a year now. The increasing demands and sensitive care needed is a challenge the service faces on daily basis. I feel privileged to work with this client

group, and value the experience of being part of the team at the centre.

### **Kate Banner**



#### *Personal Assistant to the Clinical Director*

This has been an exciting and transformative year at RTC. The arrival of 2013 brought several new developments, including internal restructuring as some former colleagues have moved on to other opportunities while new

ones have arrived eager to become involved. This past year has brought significant learning for me, and I think for all of us at RTC. We have seen our trainee cohort successfully finish their first year on the way toward completion of PG Dip in Intercultural Psychodynamic Counselling or MA in Intercultural Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy which has been a great achievement. The Foundation Course training was also a success, with many hoping to continue onto the qualifying training. I send my warm congratulations to all the students for their hard work!

Overall it has been a year of many changes for the organisation, all of which we hope will propel us into a new year of greater capacity to meet the needs of those we seek to serve. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with such respectful, hardworking and compassionate people serving the community and look forward to seeing the ways in which RTC is further able to achieve its worthwhile aims.

### **Zubeyde Arabaci**

#### *Community Development Worker*



Another year has gone by. This year, besides my individual clients I am involved with Story Telling Women Group. While I have worked with them I have learnt so much and am grateful for their willingness to share their experience with us. The aim of the group is to support participants to improve their language skills, to break isolation, to build new social contacts with society and to feel empowered and regain their self-esteem. We also encourage them to write their own stories in their own words.

I am privileged to be part of the Centre and would like to thank all my colleagues, especially Aida, for their amazing support and sharing their experience and knowledge with me.

**Najuuma Ali**

*Community Development Worker*

I started working at the RTC in March as a Community Development Worker. My role as a community development worker is to raise awareness of good mental health and to offer clients practical and emotional support when



required. I think my supervision group and my supervisor Nerma in particular for all of their feedback, reflections and input. It has been a pleasure to work at the RTC; it has given me the opportunity to meet such a wonderful range of people from different cultures and backgrounds.

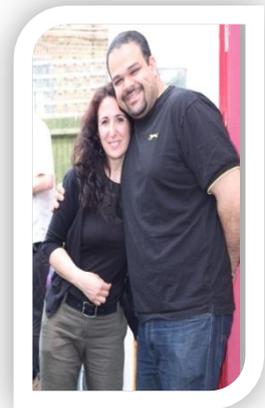


*RTC Annual Open Day 23rd June 2012*

Our Annual Open Day at RTC consists of two important elements. One is the opportunity to speak to the work and learning taking place within the Centre throughout the past year in a spirit of acknowledgement and reflection. A second part of this focus is a conscious effort to connect the issues motivating the work of the Centre into larger national and international contexts. In other words, the principles we strive to work by and the injustices we hope to effectively struggle against in all our work at RTC relate to, and take root in, global struggles to further the cause of Human Rights.

Another equally important aspect of the day is coming together as community through sharing food and music, dialogue and experience. While connecting in solidarity to events that are marked internationally during this part of the year—such as International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression and the Day of the African Child and Youth Day, and 61st Anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees—we also emphasis the good work, expertise and political struggle that is taking place locally. Dr Lennox Thomas, prominent Psychoanalytic Clinician and Senior Psychotherapeutic Consultant, presented his paper, A First Psychotic Episode in a Community Mental Health Setting. We were pleased to welcome an audience that included professionals from the NHS, students, community workers, and local GPs, and others from within our sector. A discussion ensued following the presentation where members of the audience brought questions of how to promote best practice and the responsibility of supporting those suffering psychologically.

Following this discussion, our Patron Jeremy Corbyn MP addressed those present emphasizing the significance of the specialist service offered by the RTC and our sister organisations throughout the region standing up to support Human Rights, indeed the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. He also spoke of the tremendous contribution refugees have brought, and continue to bring, to our greater London community. He raised the importance of human rights campaigning; particularly as such struggles are being undermined by changes in domestic and international policy. As MP, Mr Corbyn has continually been a strong political advocate for refugee rights and leader in promoting just policy within the UK. Students, staff, mentors and trustees gave brief reports on their work within, and relationship to, RTC. Hearing from one another brings alive the work at the Centre, demonstrating that the services we offer have a beneficial impact on many of those involved—not only the clients and mentees themselves. Our Clinical Director, Dr Aida Alayarian, put it succinctly, ‘year after year on this day we remind ourselves of the change we want to see in the world and to continue to do what we can do now to makes things better rather than hoping to do it in the future’. Recognising that to create change requires action—undeniably encompassing the practice of building trusting relationships that make space to hear one another—we recommit ourselves as members of a greater community to the challenging and necessary road ahead.



*"Since that day till now our life is one unbroken paradise. We live a true brotherly life. Every evening after supper we take a seat under the mighty oak and sing our songs."*—Extract from a letter of a Russian refugee in Texas.



**In Exile** - By **Emma Lazarus 1849–1888** in Source: **Selected Poems and Other Writings (2002)**

Twilight is here, soft breezes bow the grass,  
Day's sounds of various toil break slowly off.  
The yoke-freed oxen low, the patient ass  
    Dips his dry nostril in the cool, deep trough.  
Up from the prairie the tanned herdsmen pass  
    With frothy pails, guiding with voices rough  
Their udder-lightened kine. Fresh smells of earth,  
The rich, black furrows of the glebe send forth.



After the Southern day of heavy toil,  
    How good to lie, with limbs relaxed, brows bare  
To evening's fan, and watch the smoke-wreaths coil  
    Up from one's pipe-stem through the rayless air.  
So deem these unused tillers of the soil,  
    Who stretched beneath the shadowing oak tree,  
stare  
Peacefully on the star-unfolding skies,  
And name their life unbroken paradise.



The hounded stag that has escaped the pack,  
    And pants at ease within a thick-leaved dell;  
The unimprisoned bird that finds the track  
    Through sun-bathed space, to where his fellows  
dwell;  
The martyr, granted respite from the rack,  
    The death-doomed victim pardoned from his cell,—  
Such only know the joy these exiles gain,—  
Life's sharpest rapture is surcease of pain.





Strange faces theirs, wherethrough the Orient sun  
    Gleams from the eyes and glows athwart the skin.  
Grave lines of studious thought and purpose run  
    From curl-crowned forehead to dark-bearded chin.  
And over all the seal is stamped thereon  
    Of anguish branded by a world of sin,  
In fire and blood through ages on their name,  
Their seal of glory and the Gentiles' shame.



Freedom to love the law that Moses brought,  
    To sing the songs of David, and to think  
The thoughts Gabirol to Spinoza taught,  
    Freedom to dig the common earth, to drink  
The universal air—for this they sought  
    Refuge o'er wave and continent, to link  
Egypt with Texas in their mystic chain,  
And truth's perpetual lamp forbid to wane.



Hark! through the quiet evening air, their song  
    Floats forth with wild sweet rhythm and glad  
refrain.  
They sing the conquest of the spirit strong,  
    The soul that wrests the victory from pain;  
The noble joys of manhood that belong  
    To comrades and to brothers. In their strain  
Rustle of palms and Eastern streams one hears,  
And the broad prairie melts in mist of tears.

