

أمان

AMAAN

Improving the Mental Wellbeing of  
Asylum Seeking and Refugee Women



## **The Amaan Project**

**The project is based on the findings and recommendations from the 2011 Scottish Sanctuary project evaluation report which identified that mental health problems are a major public health issue for asylum seeking and refugee women.**

**This is exacerbated by their experience of the asylum process, barriers to participating in their new community and by the fact that they face barriers accessing support services in Scotland.**

**The project started in 2012 and is led by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC) and Freedom from Torture (FfT). The project involves the development and piloting of Community Conversations alongside training for professionals who come into contact with asylum seeking and refugee women in Scotland and has been funded by LankellyChase and Comic Relief. It is also art based.**

## Project aims

The three strands of the Amaan project aim to:

1 Raise awareness of mental wellbeing amongst refugee and asylum seeking women.

2 Decrease the levels of mental distress and mental health problems amongst refugee and asylum seeking women.

3 Increase help seeking amongst refugee and asylum seeking women experiencing or at risk of developing mental health problems.

4 Raise awareness of the mental health needs of and trauma experienced by refugee and asylum seeking women amongst those working in the wide range of services they come into contact with.

4 Improve the responsiveness of services to the mental health needs of refugee and asylum seeking women.

5 Reduce the risk of interaction with services compounding the effects of trauma they may already have experienced.

**Project aims 1 to 3 will be achieved through the delivery of Community Conversations with asylum seeking and refugee women, and project aims 4 to 6 will be achieved by the development and delivery of training to services across Glasgow that come into contact with asylum seeking and refugee women.**

## Focus Groups

- MHF conducted focus groups with 38 refugee and asylum seeking women who had experienced pre-migration trauma to explore their understanding of mental health and their experience of accessing services in Scotland.
- The findings from these discussions were used to develop the free training.
- The training has been developed and delivered in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council and Freedom from Torture. As a sustainability measure, Training for Trainers will be delivered throughout the last year of the project (Oct 2013 – Sep 2014).
- The aim is for 300 people to be trained over the life of the project.

## **Training Public Services**

The project includes a programme of training to raise awareness of the mental health needs of women amongst those working in services in Glasgow that come into contact with asylum seeking and refugee women. A key aim of the training is to build empathetic understanding and improve the responsiveness of services to the needs of women refugees and asylum seekers, helping to reduce the risk of contact with services where the effects of pre-existing trauma are compounded.



# Community Conversations

A series of 8 sessions per block

The aims of the Community Conversations are to:

- Raise awareness of mental health issues and strategies for wellbeing amongst refugee and asylum seeking women;
- Decrease their levels of mental distress and mental health problems;
- Increase levels of positive engagement with community support projects;
- Increase awareness of when and how to seek help amongst those women experiencing or at risk of developing mental health problems;
- Develop a model of co-facilitation that enables women to facilitate with the support of the current community development facilitators who run the sessions;
- Facilitate the development of social networks between participants and the growth of self-help groups and friendships.

# CC's continued

Currently no other organisation provides this type of service. The evaluation of the Community Conversations pilot demonstrated the extent to which these women experience isolation in the community.

Many women reported that participation in the CC's gave them an opportunity to meet others who share their experiences. Women were supported to share their often distressing stories in a safe environment with the aim of helping others which has been empowering.

The evaluation demonstrated the great need and positive impact of the community conversations for this group who are often excluded. The project managed to reach women that were not accessing support and successfully sign-posted them on to appropriate community based services. We are now seeking funding to run two further Community Conversations programmes over the next year alongside developing a strategy to mainstream this valuable service.

A resource will be produced alongside the women who have taken part in the project that will be aimed at other Asylum Seeking and Refugee women. The resource will be a self-help guide and the content will be mainly informed by the women.



mental  
health  
foundation

**“When I use to feel depressed I felt too weak to do anything but after the community conversations I feel that I can help myself feel better by keeping myself busy and meeting up with friends.”**

**Community  
Conversation  
Participants, 2013**

**“I feel that the community conversations really helped me because I felt like I was normal and not alone.”**



# Focus Group Art Work

- ❖ Each woman was given a piece of felt and asked to decorate it.
- ❖ The women were asked to tell their journey through the art work.
- ❖ At the end of each session, the women were encouraged to share their story and feelings with the rest of the group.



# The Message

Each flag tells the story of a refugee/ asylum seeking woman.

Some stories are sad, some are inspirational.

All deserve to be heard.

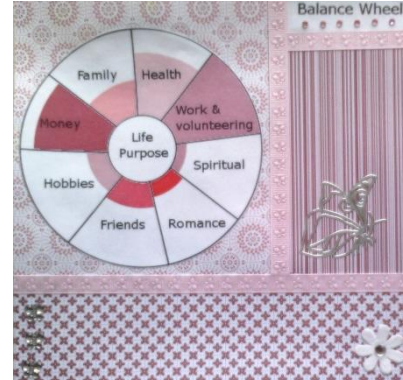
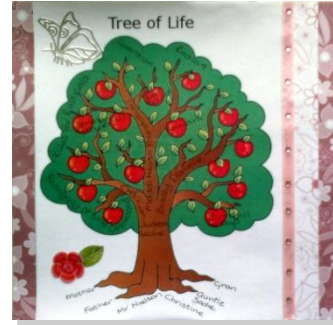
Individually, each flag is beautiful.

Collectively, they tell a powerful story which cannot be ignored.



# Community Conversations Scrapbooks

Participants in the community conversations were each given a scrapbook. Each week they completed a page related to the topic covered.





## Now its your turn!

- Think of a time you have ever migrated. It could be change of school, house or country.
- Take a pennant
- Decorate it
- Behind each pennant there is a post it note. So make sure you write your story behind your pennant
- Be part of a wider exhibition

# Questions

1. How do we build a web of connections between agencies for more humane, inclusive and sustainable cities?
2. Where is the added value in taking a holistic approach?

# Contact

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