

REFUGEE THERAPY CENTRE  
STORY TELLING WOMENS  
GROUP  
STORY BOOK





While some refugee women are able to integrate well into the British host society, others can find it more difficult. Some women feel isolated and fearful of their new environment, or tend to socialize exclusively with other members of their own community. Difficulties with language can cause a barrier, resulting in a lack of social contact with British society. This, combined with other issues such as un-resolved past experiences and/or trauma, domestic violence or racial abuse can create a loss in self-esteem, anxiety, stress, anger, physical symptoms and may lead to mental health problems. Some refugee women are not aware of the services which are available to help them or their children, such as education, health, and training, or how to access them.

Refugee Therapy Centre established The Story Telling Women's Group in February 2012, in order to meet the needs of these women. The group meets weekly for 2 hours, with the aim of helping women improve their English language, and to support women to feel empowered to take control of their own lives. Within the therapeutic setting of the Centre, participants are encouraged to share their stories and feelings in English. The safety of the containing group environment enables women to verbalise and explore their feelings, helping to build self confidence.

We have the privilege of presenting this Story Book, created by the women of the group to share with their community members and others who may be interested. The group members originate from different countries, with an age range of 25 to 45. While the number of women has fluctuated through out the project, we regularly see approximately 8 women per group. The Story Telling Group continues to offer the space for the women's stories to unfold.

\* Please note, for confidentiality our clients names, and details have been changed. We have not altered the content of their stories.



*Zeynep is a 45-year-old woman from Turkey and has been in the UK since 2000. She lives with her two sons. She was referred to the Centre by her GP for emotional support and mentoring. When she came to the Centre her English was limited, therefore, she was offered individual mentoring and a place in the Story Telling Women's Group. Initially shy, Zeynep engaged well with the group and said she enjoyed coming and socialising with the other women. She continues to be a valued member of the group. Here Zeynep shares two short stories based upon her childhood memories.*

One day when I was a child in Istanbul, my mum and I went to my uncle's house. When we went we were very happy to see my uncle's daughter. My cousin and I talked about going to the funfair and I told my mum. My mum asked us to please come back early. My cousin went to the funfair with me but because I came forgot the time, my uncle came and started shouting that we must go home and that we had enough, and that we must leave the funfair. After I went home my aunty-in-law had cooked a nice meal for us.

When I was 12 years old we moved to Istanbul. When we moved from the village we put all of our stuff into the lorry but we left my dog with a friend in the village. When lorry was going my dog was crying and my brother was also crying too a lot. My family and I had a long journey to Istanbul. My family were very sad to leave the village to go to Istanbul. The journey between Istanbul and my village was 18 hours long. We are all very tired when we arrived in Istanbul. When I moved to Istanbul I was very nervous. My father had built a brand new house in Istanbul and my family went to see the new house. Everybody was very happy because it was a nice place.



*Negiste is 29 years old woman from Eritrea. She was referred to the Centre by one of the Refugee Community Organisation. She had to flee from Eritrea for safe place, leaving her family behind. She missed her family greatly. She was able to talk to them by telephone and she treasured these moments saying 'they kept her going'. Negiste's asylum claim caused her much distress and her fear of being returned home left her unable to sleep. As a result she was nervous and anxious. After seeing a Community Development Worker at Refugee Therapy Centre she was referred to the Story Telling group with the view of increasing her confidence to integrate and build a new life.*

I was born in Addis Ababa. When I was a child I lived in a big house. It had six bed rooms, one living room with a table and six chairs, kitchen with laundry, cooker, and fridge and so on. We had also a big garden with flowers and different vegetables. It was nice to live there, I was happy. My school was far away from the house so I had to take a bus. Our house was in the centre of the city. It had shops and you could get everything you wanted. I went to Ntivit Girl's School. I had a happy family that's why I was happy in school. I had many friends. My father told me about my country. I know more about it. In my school we had three playgrounds. I played with children older me. My teachers were Eritrean, English and Ethiopian. I was a happy student. I liked to help to poor by giving them my lunch and dresses.

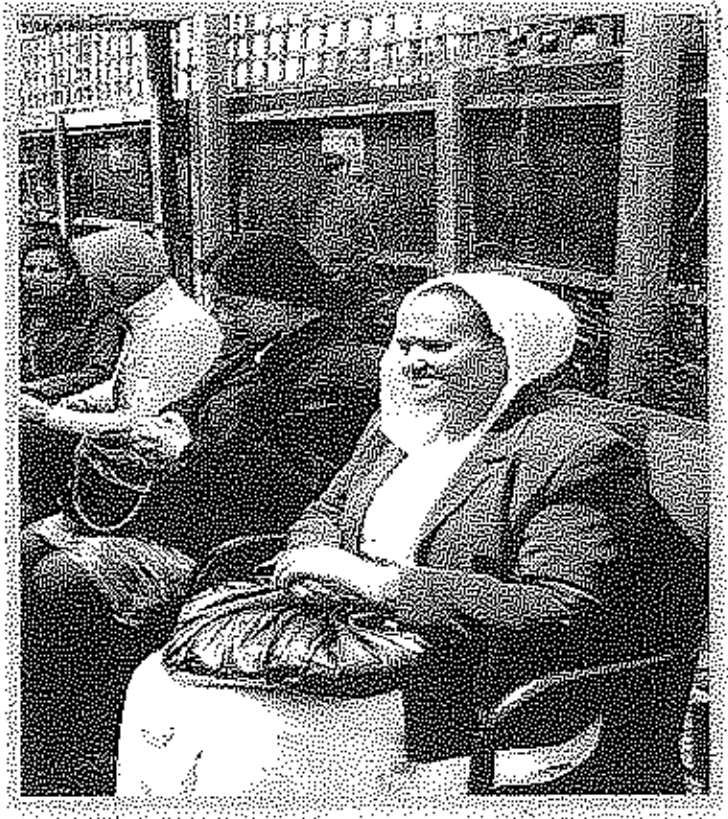


*Nermin is a 49-year-old Kurdish woman from Turkey. She came to the UK after facing persecution due to her involvement in politics. She is a refugee and has lived in London for 10 years. She has three children and lost her husband four years ago. She relied heavily on her husband for translation and since his death she has lost interest in her community, becoming isolated and depressed. Due to her lack of confidence and lack of language she now depends heavily on her children to support her. She contacted the Centre after bumping into an old political colleague who told her about our Turkish speaking Community Development Worker. Nermin came to a drop in session and was referred to Story Telling Women's Group by her CDW to help her improve her English skills and to encourage her socialize with other women in the group.*

When I was a child and 8 years old I went to primary school (the boarding school) in the city call Sivas. I started primary school with my brother. My brother went to theatre in the school. In 1972 it was the first time we had television in the village. We used to watch the television in school once a week and we had to queue up to watch it. I went folk dancing in the school and went to the cinema in the city. I liked my Turkish lessons and my teacher played the guitar in the lessons. I played the tennis with my friends. Sometimes on the weekend my mum visited us and I was happy.

When my brother and I were children in the boarding school my brother once ran away from the school. My grandfather came to visit us in the school. My brother couldn't stop crying. My grandfather told my brother 'please you should stay in school.....what can I do?' My brother didn't listen to my grandfather. Grandfather was very sad. The teacher came and took my brother. He kept on saying 'you don't understand.... I am going home! I thought it was very bad day for my brother. He missed my mum very much.

*Shahzad is 26 years old woman from Iran. She has been living in the UK for 6 years. She was referred to the Centre by her GP, and was offered individual mentoring and a place Story telling Women's Group to improve her English. Shahzad was a very quiet member of the group who initially needed much encouragement to participate. In time she bonded very well with the other women and has been one of our most regular members.*



I was forced to marry with my ex-husband by my parents. I was living in a small city surrounded by beautiful mountains and fruit trees. The weather is always very good. I miss my city a lot especially in spring times. All the trees blossomed during the spring. London is always raining there is no sunshine. I know there are lots of parks and canals but I am still missing my village. I have been in London for six years but I don't want to remember the first five years.

My ex-husband was violent and never let me go out without him. I had to stay at home all day because he was working during the day. I did not have any friends, I have some cousins here but he did not allow me to see them. I wanted to learn English because if you don't know English you cannot do anything here. I begged him to send me to school but he always said to me there was no need for English. I was secretly trying to learn English. Everyday I was getting more depressed and I lost all my life energy. Everything seemed to me very dark. One day I was brutally beaten up by him and my neighbour called the police and I was taken to the refuge. After that my life has been changed for the good. My GP referred me to Refugee Therapy Centre for support and help. I started the individual therapy and Story Telling Women Group. Now I am learning English and I started to see a light again.

*Yasmin is a 27 year old woman from Somalia; she is a single mother with 3 children. Yasmin came to the Centre take part in our International Woman's Day celebration which she thoroughly enjoyed. She had seen the Story Telling Womens Group leaflets in the waiting area, and asked whether she could join in order to improve her language skills. She also felt it was an opportunity to meet other women in a similar position to her own. She said she had struggled initially after her marriage broke down, as she felt she had no one to turn to. With her 3 small children depending on her, she felt she had to be strong for their sake, and carry on.*

*Yasmin described never having the time to study or do anything for herself, but she felt she was now ready, with the aim of being able to help her children with their homework. Yasmin had low self-esteem, and found it difficult to socialize with a non-Somali people due to the language barrier. She is able to understand and speak limited English, although this stops her from doing things for herself and she has always required an interpreter for her appointments. Initially, Yasmin was shy, although half way through the sessions she became more involved and started to slowly participate. She wants to be a teaching assistant in future.*

I would like to talk about my dreams I have for the future. Things have been hard; it is difficult bringing the children up on my own. I have some good friends but I sometimes feel lonely and wish I had more confidence to do more. Now the children are all at school full time I want to start learning English so I can eventually look for employment. I do not want to rely on my children and I want to be able to help them with their home-work.

My mother was a school teacher, and I was in her class as a girl. She taught mathematics. Everything changed after the war but I remember being so proud of my mother being my teacher and all the other children wanted to be my friend. I have always wanted to teach like my mother and this is why I want to learn English. I feel that if there had not been a war my life be different. Now I feel I can learn and change my life. I am really glad I am part of this group I can see a difference in myself. I feel more confident and positive about the future.



Farideh originates from Algeria, after coming to the UK with her husband due to his political activities. On arrival in this country her husband became angry and frustrated at their treatment, feeling the world was unjust. He became violent towards Farideh who eventually fled to a women's hostel in the local area. Farideh came to the Centre after she had heard about it through one of the women at her hostel and came to one of the drop in sessions.

Farideh was shy and visibly anxious when she first joined the group. Through the support of the other women and the group facilitators Farideh became more confident, and was able to share her childhood memories, as well as eventually her experiences in the UK. Farideh said being able to share her stories and memories within the safe context of the group helped her to think and reflect on her experiences and move on from them.

I remember going to the market place with my mother as a young girl to buy fish for dinner. We bought fresh fish every day- it is not like here, it tasted and smelled so different! I can remember the smell of the sea and market; I didn't like it much as a young girl but now I think about it a lot. My mother would go there every day, early in the morning to buy the fresh fish, and to buy vegetables, fruit and meat. We would see the same faces, everyone went to the market. We all knew each other and people were so friendly. We would bump into our neighbours, aunts, uncles, cousins, I miss that. I wish I had some family here or people who just know you and where you come from.

I remember helping my mother carry heavy bags full of food before going to school. Sometimes I would help her prepare the food. I would help to clean and chop vegetables. I used to love being with my mother in the kitchen. It was always welcoming in our house and we always had family over, I remember my aunts and my mother always talking in the kitchen and laughing. Everyone lived close by. When I was young I wanted to live far away. I have not seen my family for a long time, we talk on the telephone but it is not the same. We talk about my parents coming to visit one day, I do not think they would like the food here. I miss the smells and sounds of home.



*Eyerus is 40 years old woman from Eritrea. She has been in London for 7 years. She lives with her husband and her two daughters. She referred her self to the Centre. She heard of our organisation from one of her friends. She wanted to improve her English and was initially interested in joining the Mentoring project but the possibility of learning from others prompted her to join the Story Telling Group. She is a very active member of the group and is encouraging to the other participants.*

My teacher's name was Sara. She was forty years old. She had long hair, she was slim and tall. She was from India. She liked to wear dresses, sometimes she wore trousers but most of the time dresses. She had smiley face and she was nice person. When she taught she tried to make sure the students understood the lessons very well, that's why all the students liked her. I liked the subject; she taught us English and made us study hard. Whenever I learn English she comes to my mind. When I was at school we studied the whole day, in the morning and afternoon. I had a lot of time to spend with my teacher. I liked my teacher because she was kind and hard working.

Once upon a time when it was April fools all the students wanted to make the teacher a fool. When she came we told her that one of the students was in a car accident. She was shocked and sad, after a short time we told her that it was April fools. But she became angry and she made us kneel down and she hit us by the ruler but all of us were still laughing.



*Jetta comes from Somalia and has lived in the UK for 17 years with 2 of her 4 children. She lost her husband during the civil war in Somalia and fled to the UK with her children and some other family members. Her children are now grown up and she was encouraged to join the Story telling women's group by a friend who attends the Somali Cook Book group at the Centre.*

*Jetta describes herself as being happy and contented with her life- she has family close by and is usually socially active within the Somali community. Jetta would like to learn more English to help her with her everyday life. As her children are slowly moving out of home she wants to learn to be more independent and confident doing things on her own.*

I would like to share a child hood memory from when I was a little girl. We had a big house just outside the city. My father was a business man and life was good. I remember every week my brothers, sisters and me had to have music lessons. We were eight brothers and sisters, and I was the oldest. I did not like these lessons and I would get in trouble with the teacher. She was an old woman with grey hair. I thought she looked like a witch. I had to play piano and I hated it. I could not remember what to play and my brothers and sisters would watch me. She would hit my fingers every time I played a wrong note. One day I had enough and I hit her back. I got in big trouble with my father but I am glad I hit her back. It makes me laugh when I think about it.





*Azra is a young single mother of Kurdish descent from Turkey with a young child. She joined the Story telling group after initially being referred to the Centre for the Mentoring project. Ms Azra's daughter was attending nursery school part time, and occasionally, she would also attend the group with her mother, much to the delight of the other women. Ms Azra had a good support network as some family members were already in the UK. She joined the group as she lacked confidence with her English and wanted to build a life for her and her daughter in the UK.*

I came to the UK 4 years ago, with my boyfriend. I thought we were going to get married. My parents did not approve of him as he was involved with Kurdish politics. They thought he was dangerous to our family. I did not believe them; I was in love and wanted to marry him. He became more involved in politics and was wanted by the police. My family forbid me from seeing him so we ran away, and came to the UK with money from his uncle.

I was happy when we arrived in the UK, I missed my family but I was happy we were together. I became pregnant and I wanted to get married. I thought everything was okay, but one day I woke up and he was gone. I have not seen him since. He has never seen his daughter. I was so shocked and sad; I did not know what to do, I could not believe he would just leave. I hoped he would come back for a long time, I waited and waited but I heard nothing. My pregnancy was difficult; I did not want to have a baby without him. I feel bad now I had those thoughts.

I had some family here in London who helped me, I was lucky. I now live with my aunty. She looks after me and my daughter, I owe her everything. My family in Turkey do not know what has happened; they would be so angry and ashamed. I cannot go home. I wonder if I can trust anyone again- how could he leave us like that? I am so happy I have my daughter. I think of what I will tell her when she asks where her father is. I am so sad that she has not even met him. I want to learn English so I can get a job and build a life of our own here in UK. I want my daughter to be proud of me.





*Sara is 38 years old woman from Albania. In 1999, during the Kosovo Civil War, she and her family managed to escape to the UK. She was referred by her GP for therapeutic support at the Centre, and was initially offered therapy in her mother tongue language. Due to her lack of confidence with her English, Sara was referred to the Mentoring Project and Story Telling Women Group by her therapist. Although Sara could understand English, she did not feel confident enough to converse.*

*She was offered both individual mentoring and a place in STWG for improve her English. At the very beginning Sara was shy and stressed. The other members of the group encouraged her to speak in English. After five meetings she said that her first day in the group was awful and she had thought that she would never have managed to speak in front of the other members but it happened due to the support of the group. She said that she felt happier now.*

Before the war we were living in harmony with Serbians in Kosovo. I had friends and neighbours and I loved them. I do not understand when we became enemy and killed each other. When I was a child my best friend was Serbian and sometimes our mothers allowed us to stay in each other's house in the nights. I remember we were very happy to spend all nights together because we got chance to make gossip about other girls at the school and of course talk about boys. That time, I and she in fall in love with the most handsome boys at school but the boys did not know that. And we could not cope with other girls who around our boys. I have lost my contact with her after I left the country; I wish I could see her again and talk about our good memories.



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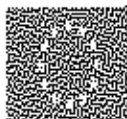
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