



BAOBAB CENTRE
for Young Survivors in Exile

*Surviving Violence
Creating Hope
Rebuilding Lives*

“Baobab is like a tunnel.
Outside the tunnel you are
exposed to the elements.
Going through the tunnel
shapes your life and gives
you hope as you approach
the light.” *Papi*

Wishes
Hopes
and **Dreams**



Wishes Hopes and Dreams

A small group of Baobab Centre workers invited Baobab Community members, staff and young people, to reflect on their values, hopes, strengths and coping strategies as well as their views on 'community' and on Baobab itself.

We invited the young people to think about their resilience and express their **wishes** hopes and dreams.

In the interests of confidentiality all names of the young people have been changed to a name of their choice. In the photos each young person chose what they are holding in their hands.



Foreword

Baroness Helena Kennedy QC



As a lawyer, some of my work involves the most egregious crimes committed against people around the world. I see people nod when I am described as a human rights lawyer but I can tell that the stories of my cases are too hard for listeners to bear. They do not want to hear about man's inhumanity to man in its most horrendous forms. The dark detail of brutality and violence, the degradation and torture, the sexual violation is too much to stomach. Yet it is by sharing those experiences that those who have suffered can come to feel whole again. And we who live in the privileged security of the developed world have a responsibility to those less fortunate. That was what the great post World War Two consensus around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Conventions against torture and for the protection of refugees were all about.

Children as always suffer most. To witness your mother's rape or your father's torture or killing is often more destructive of the soul than any beating. Though children and young people too experience atrocious levels of direct violence, the longer term psychological harm usually relates to things they have seen, which have seared their hearts. The sense of powerlessness, the feelings of failure to protect the parents you love, worm deep into the psyche. It is silence that covers the pain.

It is for this reason that I love BAOBAB because it works with the deep harm of persecution, concentrating on young asylum seekers whose special needs are so often neglected.

Justice systems are invariably established with adult men in mind and the asylum system is no different. As a result the processes are often ill-suited to young people, whose needs can be so different. The culture of disbelief within the immigration and asylum system – approaching all asylum seekers, including children, as likely imposters and probably bogus – creates fear and distrust in the applicant, who merely wants sanctuary and respite from the horror of their suffering. Living in exile away from what you know is hard enough but it is the memories and loneliness that cause the worst pain.

BAOBAB provides the oasis of safety and solace that young asylum seekers desperately need and makes available the most amazing professional support – psychotherapists, psychologists and others who understand the trauma of persecution and work with the children and young people to express their loss and suffering. It breaks the silence. The community of BAOBAB restores hope and creates belonging.

I pay tribute to all the wonderful people who brought this great project into existence and make it work. My hope is that others will take inspiration from its success and replicate it elsewhere.



Sheila Melzak

Executive and Clinical Director



The Baobab Centre is a non-residential therapeutic community that enables child and adolescent asylum seekers who have experienced organized violence, violation, threats, rejection and kidnapping in their home communities, and exploitation as fugitives on their journeys, to thrive in exile. We currently work with one hundred young people from twenty five countries.

When violence erupts in communities, structures that protect children break down and expose them to witnessing and experiencing abuse, corruption and massive loss.

Baobab community members want to be like their peers but feel different and uncomfortable, unable to share their true experiences for fear of rejection.

At Baobab young survivors of various profound human rights abuses meet others with similar experiences of grotesque trauma, prolonged grief and changes of culture. We provide individual psychotherapy, where personal difficulties are gradually explored; group psychotherapy where coping strategies and barriers to coping are discussed; and full community meetings where they can develop assertiveness, conflict resolution and governance skills without fear of retaliation.

We offer support throughout the long, non child-centred asylum determination processes of the United Kingdom Borders Agency. We prepare psychological and developmental reports for legal hearings. In the UK young asylum seekers endure uncertainty, compounded by challenges to their credibility that, for minors, comes at huge personal cost. We offer a holistic and integrated approach addressing both internal and external needs.

Our community members' traumatic experiences combine with an unfamiliar culture and isolation, leaving them hopeless, bewildered and lost. Mourning is often blocked. Most have no-one to reflect back cultural expectations and



acceptable identities. Paradoxically, abused young people often feel responsible for the perpetrators' actions. Feeling complicit in human rights abuses perpetrated by adults causes shame, guilt, torment, self-loathing, conflict and despair for young survivors. Truly letting go of feelings of responsibility for perpetrators' actions is a long, painful process.

Our approach offers young people a sense that they are protected and acknowledged, that we ensure time to build relationships, explore moral and emotional difficulties and to mourn. Clinicians hold in their minds those feelings and memories that are initially unspeakable and unbearable for young survivors. Young people are given space for verbal and non-verbal reflections, for openly exploring difficult feelings and memories. Our workers must assume a complex, combined role as psychotherapists, parent substitutes, teachers and advocates.

Young people internalize the protective relationships they have with the Baobab workers. After some time they are able to face and acknowledge their extreme histories, which strengthens their sense of identity and allows them to sustain hope and move on.

This booklet gives a sense of our work and its consequences. We aim to build resilience, helping with accessing old strengths and developing new ones, rebuilding the sense of belonging and trust in others, gaining capacities for reflection, creativity, imagination and sociability. Eventually problems can be solved alone and with the help of trusted friends. We intend that Baobab Community members will gain the capacity to make relationships, care for themselves and find a meaningful position participating in life in the United Kingdom.



Jo McClatchey

Child and adolescent psychotherapist



I offer individual psychotherapy to a small number of young people in the Baobab community. The young people I work with have survived physically, but are struggling to find a way to live with the horrific things that have happened to them and their families. They face being alone in a foreign, rarely welcoming country. I offer a regular, predictable space for them to try to understand their thoughts and feelings, which can make a young person feel completely mad,

and without hope for their future. I listen. This listening involves paying attention beyond the words someone uses, to what is being unconsciously communicated. Psychotherapy offers a way of thinking about past experiences, at the same time as thinking about current fears, difficulties and frustrations. Together we try to get to know who they are. In many cases it is a way of preventing suicide or long term mental illness. I feel privileged to be able to work here, I have met some extraordinary people.

“ I didn’t
choose
to leave
my family
and
homeland ”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Mimi

Mimi's father was Eritrean, her mother Ethiopian. When the government persecuted the Eritreans, her father disappeared. Mimi was 12. She and her sister were sent to Kenya where her sister was killed. Mimi fled to the UK but was very lonely.

“ I am friendly, a good listener. If you listen you can help people. Sad books and movies draw out my tears. I enjoy laughing too. I love parks in sunny weather. They remind me of my peach trees in Ethiopia. It's like a dream but then I wake up. Tiny things upset me. I survived huge things. Patience has come from hardship.

My therapist tells me I can do it. I used to rush to friends but sometimes they knocked me back so now I help myself. I like Baobab community meetings. When we discussed anger I realized I wasn't the only one.

On trains I sit near the door because of fear. Once I sat next to a woman in an empty carriage. She insulted me. I shouted at her but cried when I got home.

I didn't choose to leave my family and homeland and be alone. Only when I am treated with kindness and respect, like at Baobab do I feel I belong.

In Ethiopia there is only one TV station and newspaper. That's not democracy. It makes me sick.

I'm studying nutrition. When I get my degree I'll work in the NHS. The UK has helped me, I want to contribute in the future. ”



Maggie Hewitt

English teacher



The young people I work with are desperate to learn to read and write. They have been robbed of their education as well as their childhood and have a mountain to climb to reach where they want to be.

As a teacher, I was used to finding materials that related to pupils' experience. But what if their experience has been of things that no child should ever go through?

I didn't want to pressurise them to tell me anything they didn't want to about themselves. They had enough of that from the agencies that interrogate them.

But I also wanted learning to read and write to mean something – for them to engage with language not just make themselves learn it. I decided to work with them as a small group so they interact with each other. Time is spent laughing, joking and arguing. Learning is a lot about being able to make mistakes in front of other people.

I began with short poems expressing strong feelings. We looked at poets who had experienced displacement which describe emotions rather than specific events, like those by Grace Nichols and the lyrics of Staff Benda Bilili. They could relate to lines such as:

'I have crossed an ocean, I have lost my tongue' (Grace Nichols)

In one of their versions it became 'I have crossed an ocean but it doesn't mean you have lost your tongue.'

I hope that they now all feel they have a voice.

“ I feel
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Photograph: Melanie McFadyen

William

William's loving parents came from different ethnicities. This led to bullying. During the civil war he was made to witness their murder and then forcibly recruited into the rebel army, branded and armed. After escaping with other child soldiers, religious men promised sanctuary but betrayed him. In the UK he had poor quality support and legal help and after ten years is still waiting for asylum.

“ I feel safe at Baobab, like places I went to as a child and I felt safe.

I look forward to coming here because people understand. Baobab takes in all kinds of people and handles them in a different way. They're encouraging and remind you there's a better world.

When I am alone it's too much. There is too much stuff going on inside my head. Sometimes I feel like giving up. But when you see people who understand, who are on your side, for the first time, you have courage and hope. It's like when you are fighting a battle and you lose everyone. Then all of a sudden reinforcements come you feel that you can win. Baobab gives me the foundations and I can start building from there.

I want to learn practical things and contribute to the world. I am studying civil engineering. We have to share the planet with others so I will work with an awareness of the environment. ”



Joy Richardson

Actress, educationalist and storyteller



As an actor, painter and storyteller, I take my inspiration from the arts and their power to transform. For over twenty years I have worked with young people and adults, using storytelling as a way of exploring the world around us.

I have worked with Baobab for two years as a storyteller, telling stories that originate from around the world. Myths and legends, old and new. Stories of love, betrayal, hope and triumph over adversity. These stories offer different ways of perceiving and engaging the world.

The storytelling session begins with relaxation and breathing exercises, followed by an energetic warm-up, and fun improvisation games. There is often much laughter in the room. This is important, as the preparation time creates a relaxed atmosphere in which the story can flourish. The story is told in a way that is very physical, so that the characters can come alive and be present in a real way. Once the story comes to an end, a discussion follows, in which everyone is free to comment on events, choices and consequences, and the nature of each character.

Often the characters in the story are animals. They have both animal and human characteristics. This gives the option of heightening certain aspects of human nature, that may be useful for the discussion that follows.

I hope to continue being involved with Baobab for many years to come.

“Baobab
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Photograph: Jenny Mathews

Florence

Florence, orphaned at 7, is from Africa. She lived with an aunt who treated her as a servant. She died when Florence was 15. A male family 'friend' trafficked her to a fellow countrywoman in the UK who terrorized her. Florence escaped but was detained. She wants to study fashion and beauty.

“ From childhood, people looked down on me but you can't see inside a person so don't judge them. Coming here I was not believed. I enjoy sewing, cooking, making jewellery, dancing and gospel songs.

Baobab helps because of the dark place in my heart. I only share it with my therapist. When stress or loneliness get too much I talk to her.

Some people kill because of anger. If they were able to talk about it they would calm down.

Since childhood a voice inside has told me I will be fine. Sometimes a feeling of peace comes from nowhere and suddenly I am happy.

Having friends, attending Baobab meetings is new. I never belonged anywhere so I'm not 100% here. I'm afraid. I'm still building confidence.

I have my own place for the first time. No-one enters unless I say so.

I like graceful women like Beyoncé. I want to be a mother and give my children what I never had.

Girls in my country feel ashamed, as if they were in a cave. We need to bring them into the light, give them somewhere to run to, people to listen to them and financial support. ”



Jasna Kostic

Psychotherapist



When I started working at Baobab, I wasn't sure what to expect but I soon learnt to what extent the young people had been traumatized. They have experienced multiple losses, violence, and fear for their own lives and lives of loved ones. I have learnt the ways some children have fled from their country. I was truly inspired by the bravery and resourcefulness that these children and young people had to have in order to flee, to survive the unknown, and to be able to make it to the UK.

Their troubles do not stop upon arrival in the UK. The young people are then exposed to uncertainty and the arbitrary behaviour of the Home Office, the UKBA, social services, job centres and the education system.

Baobab offers children and young people a refuge, a community where young people learn to trust again, where they feel safe to speak about their feelings and where their feelings are met with acceptance, understanding and support. They learn about respect: they are respected, therefore they can respect in turn. Under these conditions children and young people can develop, grow and build on their resources.

I feel proud that I am part of this process.

“People
should
see
each other as
human beings”



Photograph: Jenny Mathews

Fakirzai

Fakirzai grew up in Afghanistan. The Taliban started using his madrasa to recruit jihadis. Fakirzai's father complained to the authorities and was murdered. His mother sent him and his brother to the UK. He had a terrible journey

“ In Afghanistan I loved playing cricket and ‘khusi’. You fight with one hand and catch someone by the leg. Here, I love football.

I love laughing, like at Harry Hill! And my happiest day is Eid. I chat with friends and eat Afghani sweets. When we are all together I feel safe. When I need strength, I pray. Sometimes I cook Kabuli Pillau. This dish gives me energy and reminds me of my mum and my country. In Afghanistan we had a community. There were gatherings and you met the same people. I miss that.

In London you see ‘community transport’ on vans but is it a community when you don’t know anyone? Baobab is a community because we come together often. Afghanistan brings back beautiful memories but also anger and sorrow. People should see each other as human beings, not just religion.

When I see someone in college doing their best I try to be like them. It gives me encouragement and hope. I want to become an electrician, to achieve something and make my parents proud.

I want to grow in confidence so that I can deal with everything that happened to me in the past and everything that will happen in the future. ”



Jodie Bourke

Social worker



In my role as senior caseworker for the Baobab Centre, I share my knowledge and skills to affect change and I continue to learn from the young people I support. At Baobab we offer support in an environment, which nurtures growth and resilience. The young people develop a capacity to overcome barriers and build on their inner strengths and move forward.

Every day they face challenges including systematic bureaucracy and re-traumatisation as they are forced to repeat their experiences of violence while living in exile, having to justify their existence. The most useful contribution I can make to these young lives is to encourage and support them to understand their rights and entitlements as human beings living in the United Kingdom; human beings with a rich heritage, diverse cultural backgrounds and a wealth of experience to learn from. My hope is to raise consciousness of the options available and work towards supporting self-sufficiency and positive futures.

The social and political context in which support is provided continues to be the most difficult challenge. The rise in destitution of our young people places a strain on our resources as other sectors fail to meet the increase in need.

The endless waiting for decisions on asylum claims, appeal tribunals, benefits applications and housing assessments slowly eats away at the ability to live for many of these young people. Most are suffering poor living conditions, enduring lengthy and often unjust assessments of their need through narrow lenses of judgement.

“I am not
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Malaika

Malaika's mother died when she was two. She lived with her father, a traditional healer & practitioner of Satanic rituals, and his second wife. She was terrorized and used as a servant and child minder. She ran away when she was a young adolescent. Her journey into exile was harrowing and in the UK she was detained. She is at college and plans to go to university.

Photograph: Jenny Matthews

“ I always think about my mother. I never knew her. She should be the one to advise me but she is not here. So now it's my therapist. When I am stuck I always come to her.

When I am alone thoughts keep coming. I would rather be around people. Some days I feel down but I just have to take it.

I used to get angry about how people have treated me. I talk to my therapist about why people behave as they do. It's changed me. I have more choices about how to react.

I'm not Mother Teresa , but sometimes the way people behave isn't necessary.

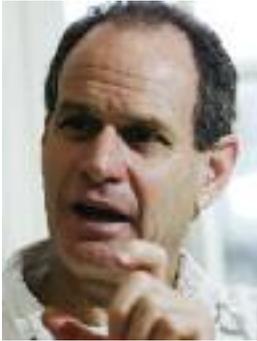
At Baobab you listen to and respect each other, knowing that the people in the community are there for you.

I want to teach English in developing countries. I collect kids' books and put them in a box under my bed. I plan to ship them off to my country, because there I never had a book, not even with pictures. I will find a school in my area. ”



Shai Schwartz

Story therapist and group therapist

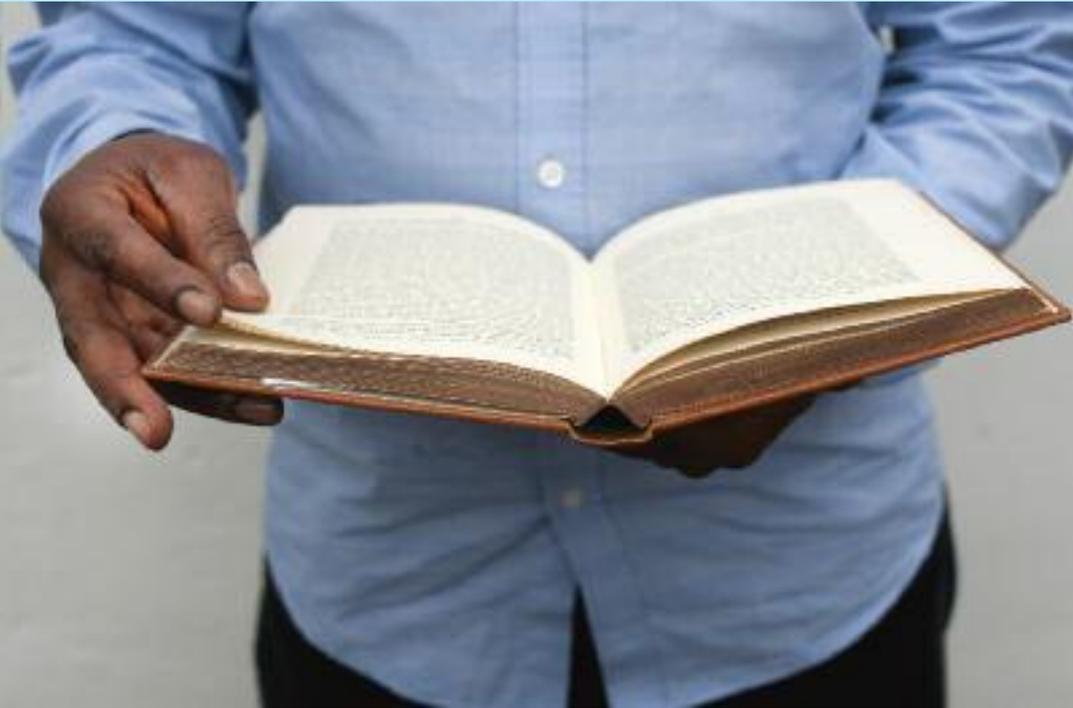


Our young adult clients have summer retreats. Where we go depends on funding and our need for a suitable venue for vulnerable young asylum seekers, close enough to nature but not too far from a town, allowing a gentle mix of the two. They need a break from the insensitivity of London but at times they find pure nature slightly threatening.

We blend the time at the retreats between outdoor activities like swimming and touring with daily therapeutic sessions. A vital element is communal responsibility for cooking and cleaning which are important therapeutically – developing social skills, enhancing the feeling of community and belonging. We have also found it rewarding for the young people to do volunteer work both in the local community and /or at the retreat. This helps to build self esteem and a spirit of giving and enhances the sense of belonging to their new country.

The sessions of therapeutic work are built around the telling of traditional tales, and working through the issues that arise through artwork and role-playing. Traditional tales enable us to work in displacement, working indirectly with difficult themes, thus both creating involvement and dealing with hidden issues. The artwork and role-playing aid us in concretization of these hidden issues and serve as a stage to contemplate them. The comparative relaxation of the summer retreats allows us to address painful issues of the realities of life in a creative way.

“ I don’t
think
I will ever
be the same
again ”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Moses

At 12, Moses' parents and younger sister were killed in a car crash. His older sister looked after him until rebel soldiers brutally attacked his sister and forcibly recruited him. He escaped at 16 and sought asylum in the UK. He has a university place to study nursing.

“ Because of everything I went through I don't think I will ever be the same again. No matter how much I try to get rid of it from my mind, it stays.

When I first came here my head was so full I couldn't handle anything. I enrolled on a course but I couldn't focus. My attention was completely missing. I could not control anything about myself.

Psychological issues are very difficult. If you have been through sad and terrible situations it is really hard to get your life in order.

I am strong enough now to talk about my past. It took years of psychotherapy to get the courage to say out loud what I went through. Finally, I can handle it.

I am studying to become a psychiatric nurse. I can concentrate. I am getting good results. That is a measure of how strong I am and how far I have come.

When I qualify I will be able to help others who have also been in difficult times, psychologically. It is a goal I have set myself and I intend to achieve it. ”



Marion Baraitser

Writer in residence at the Baobab Centre



My role ranges from helping young refugees to address a Medical Conference concerning their needs, to putting together an exhibition of their therapeutic writing from my sessions, which was shown at the Group-Analytic Society (London) European Symposium last year, and is a travelling exhibition.

With the mixed group of older asylum seekers and Baobab staff during the Easter mask-making project, we used a structured but informal approach combining mask-making, mime and readings from Chinua Achebe and Jackie Kay which culminated in written performed playlets.

With the children's group, I use objects like an African beadwork necklace which holds a 'message' in the colouring of the beads, to stimulate good cultural memories as well as discussion around feelings and thoughts that are then written as personal stories that help to establish resilience and self-worth. The bead necklace led to a girl describing with pride her belonging to 'the king's people' who wore red beads threaded in their hair. I combine this with readings and discussions around books using displacement to allow the young people to indirectly- re-narrate their pasts and connect with their present circumstances.

With their permission, I am recording the young people's spoken and written responses to this work for a book *Unpack My Heart with Words* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014), about the techniques and aims of using literature therapeutically with traumatised children. One young survivor wrote: 'Writing is helping me to put down my memories, different perspectives, to try and find the line. Writing is like having a conversation with yourself. I pick up on things that lie deeper. I love myself, in writing.'

“ I don't
think
**I will be able
to laugh
out loud
again** ”



Photograph: Melanie McFadyean

Nasir

Nasir's father was killed by Afghani government forces. They then killed his mother and sister and came looking for him. He came to the UK. He is now working hard to support himself and his young family.

“ I don't think I will be able to laugh out loud again because of what is in my heart, which no one knows. If I laugh again it will be quietly. I always smile though. Sometimes, friends say ‘forget about your past, just think about your future’ but I can't.

One day on the bus I saw a man who looked like my dad. I sat near him and stared. I was trying to remember my dad, to keep a picture of him alive in my mind. The man got angry and said ‘Why are you looking at me?’

I belong to Baobab – this is my home. Before, if something happened I would always go home and tell my mum. Now, whether with good news or bad, I come here first.

There is a beautiful place in my mind with the sun above the mountains. That sun is like my mum. The sun rises and sets. Night comes and goes and it never finishes. The sun is always there.

There is a bright sky there and a bird flying. I want to be like that bird; free to go where I choose and have a peaceful life. ”



Akiko Kobayashi

Child and adolescent counsellor



I am a counselor, and I like my job very much.

I try to listen very, very carefully.

I listen to what you tell me with your voice.

I try to listen to what you cannot speak in words.

I try to listen to what you say only in your heart.

I try to listen to what is hidden deep inside you.

I need to be patient, and my job is to wait.

I wait and wait until you are ready to speak, with words or without words.

I will be in the room at the time of your appointment.

If you are not there, I will be thinking how you are doing, if you are all right.

Sometimes I think of you in my free time and wonder how you are.

I feel very lucky to be working at Baobab Centre.

I feel deep gratitude that you share your inner feeling with me.

It is not easy at all, and I think you are very brave.

“My grandfather
taught me
patience”



Photograph: Melanie McFadyean

James Olum

James Olum was sixteen when civil war came to his community. Many of his people were raped and murdered by the rebel army, which forcibly recruited him and his brothers. Later arrested by government forces, he was tortured. Eventually he came to the UK where he waited many years for asylum. He wants to combat human rights abuses and work for the community.

“ I miss so many things about home. My grandfather was Chief Elder in our village. He was my inspiration. I think about my people but since the war I don't know what is going on in my community.

If I could go back, I'd clean my grandparents' graves but maybe they are no longer there? When I am alone and a problem comes I think about my family. Then I think about Baobab and remember I am not the only one in this situation. Other group members help me reflect on how far I have come. At least I have somewhere even when I'm lonely. People at Baobab try to understand my story. If they cannot directly help, they give you hope and support by suggesting different ideas. I started to recover when I was able to face my past.

I suffered detention, lived on the streets, experienced racism and was beaten up. If I managed to go through all that...

My grandfather taught me patience. He said 'don't kick a stone or it will bounce back and hurt you'. ”



Bitenge Makuka

Bi-cultural group and support worker



I work on a part time basis with the young adult group as a bi-cultural group and support worker. I jointly run and facilitate this therapeutic group with Sheila Melzak. All members of our group have experienced different types of torture and abuse. They regularly attend our group and talk about their feelings and other issues related to their life and integration in the UK. At Baobab, I work with young adults who have suffered profound trauma as a result of torture. Many of them

are struggling to deal with their internal and external world.

Many of the survivors who come to us are damaged psychologically, physically and spiritually but with our support they gradually find new ways to cope enabling them to re-enter society, advocate for themselves and lead a fulfilling life. During the course of my work, I have seen clients initially coming to us broken with no smile at all on their faces. And then they gain strength, confidence and self-esteem and they smile after attending group or individual therapeutic support.

Empowerment, better understanding of their needs, advocacy, patience, and guidance, walking together are vital in the restoration of our clients' health and well being.

What gets me every week is the opportunity to work with amazing individuals from all over the world who have suffered unbelievably but who find the strength to carry on. Sometimes I feel as if we hold the key to help unlock some of their talents.

“ I know
what
I stand for
and this
makes
me strong ”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

George

George often experienced the ongoing violence in his locality and ran away to a city where he had difficult time living on the streets. In his country there is no child protection and safeguarding system. His journey to the UK was long and frightening. Now he is training to be a hairdresser.

“ The only good thing about my home country was the sunshine. I never had one happy day there. I lived on the streets going through bins for food. Everybody ignored me. The police were corrupt. Every day was stress, anxiety, bullying, oppression and injustice. If me, my mother and sisters had been elsewhere it could have been different but it never was.

There's a lot of upset in my mind so it's really hard to think straight. I have a big problem with anger, learning how to handle it, not just exploding.

In the adolescents' group I share things but some things I will only tell my therapist.

On the summer retreat for the first time ever I was with people who were all on my side. I loved playing football and cooking meals together. It was the happiest time of my life. When we did role-play about anger and self-assertion I learned how to take command of myself and become calmer.

Because of everything I went through, I know what is good, what is bad. I know what I stand for and this makes me strong. ”



Dick Blackwell

Consultant in group and family psychotherapy



My focus at Baobab is on the relationships between adults and children in families, between clients in therapy groups and as members of the Baobab community, between ourselves as staff and between us and our clients. The aim of the therapeutic community is for clients to participate with staff in the therapeutic process, helping, supporting and sometimes challenging each other, and constantly learning from each other.

Every six weeks we have a large therapeutic community meeting to which all staff and clients, (including parents) are invited. For an hour and a half, anyone can talk about any aspect of his or her experience of Baobab. It is important to encourage everyone to speak, to listen and to be heard however difficult and frightening that might be, particularly for our clients whose experience of oppression and persecution has denied them a voice. They do this in individual therapy, in smaller group therapy sessions and together in the community meetings when we all have the chance to understand people from different places with different experiences.

This meeting is probably unique in the field of psychotherapy with refugees, in discussing and connecting political, cultural and interpersonal experiences with the internal worlds and psychological development of traumatized young people and the staff working with them. There is, I believe, a Chinese proverb, 'If you want to be wise, you must remain a student.' Baobab is a community where we are all students and learn from each other.

“Out there
you feel
like a
nobody”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Kadiatu

Kadiatu is from Africa and grew up during a civil war. Her father and grandfather were government soldiers. They were killed by the rebel army who then kidnapped her, her mother and brothers. At 9, abducted by different rebels, she was forced to participate in perverse and savage activities and to cook and clean with other girl soldiers. Helped by an aid agency, she escaped to the UK aged eleven. Two years later she was reunited with her mother and brothers who were already here.

“ Before I became a mother there were times when I wanted to hang myself but talking to my therapist helped. She said, ‘You’re young, you have your whole life ahead.’ Now my daughter gives me hope. I want to improve myself, to eventually run my own business.

At Baobab I can talk about my problems; that makes you a stronger person.

The therapist makes us all feel special, whereas out there you feel like nobody. Everyone is a celebrity at Baobab! It makes me smile. I enjoy the community meetings, talking and listening to people.

Sometimes I leave my problems at the door. People chat and crack jokes. I forget what is bothering me. We don’t necessarily tell our stories but if you ask someone they say ‘yes I am here by myself’.

I’d like to grow mango trees in my flat! My granddad grew them. I loved him a lot. When I eat one it takes me right back. ”



Claire Manson

Art psychotherapist



Art therapy is about building a trusting relationship where you can feel supported, remembered and thought about.

We don't always know what is affecting our moods, or what is stopping us from doing the things we would like. We cannot always find thoughts or words to explain or to describe to ourselves, or others what is happening. Art therapy offers another way of telling your story.

There are no rules in art making, only fashions that come and go. In art therapy, there is no good or bad, right nor wrong – it is not about being Good at Art. There can be pleasure in making art and learning to use and experiment with different materials, and finding new forms of expression.

We have many art materials: paints, crayons, clay...

For people who have little or no English, this psychotherapeutic practice alleviates the need for speaking directly or fluently, or speaking at all.

I work individually, meeting people for an hour: this is time and space for reflection that includes exploring unconscious thoughts and fears, wishes, conflicts, and hopes for the future.

The paintings, drawing and objects that are made in the session hold and contain profound, often unconscious expressions for someone. Memories, stories and feelings that cannot be borne or put into words can emerge and be given non-verbal form – eventually coming into thought and language. The art made in sessions is kept safe and private.

“Maybe
I could be
a jazz playing
basket ball
player”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Saviour

Saviour was born in a rebel camp. He witnessed extreme violence against his captive mother. Even though very young, he tried to protect her. His strong sense of justice and vivid imagination are huge sources of resilience yet often get him into trouble at school.

“ In our children’s group I love using watercolours. I like bright bold colours and splashing lots of paint around. If we had a big studio we wouldn’t be on top of each other, we could make a mess without worrying about the carpet.

In the summer we had a whole art day in a big hall and it was really enjoyable being creative. Lately I did a really bright abstract painting, the group worker said it looked like Jazz.

I recently learnt that I am a musician and that playing music is fun. Until I joined Baobab music group, other people didn’t know that I can play the piano and I didn’t realise how good I am at it. With the Baobab musicians I learnt two new songs. I feel proud that I took part in the concert. I discovered how to play 12 bar blues. I decided now that I am a musician!

I like to play Jazz. Taking part in the practice and performance has made me proud and positive and I want to do more music in the future.

I am not sure what I want to be when I grow up. Maybe I could be a jazz playing basket ball player? ”



Esin Cubukcu

Interpreter



I am a Turkish speaker, working as an interpreter at Baobab. My role is to act as a bridge between professionals and clients – including children, adolescents and young adults who are asylum seekers and refugees – in both individual and group-therapy sessions. My role is more than a mere interpreting function, as I seek to provide a safe environment for the clients and develop mutual trust during therapeutic sessions. As such, I bear a great responsibility, but I find

it a great pleasure to help in this community, supporting young people in exile who have often experienced torture, violence and various rights violations – some suffering post-traumatic stress disorder. I work with clients from diverse political and cultural backgrounds. During our sessions, particularly in the group therapy, we learn about and celebrate each other's cultures. Clients are encouraged to feel that our community is a part of their family and that they are safe.

**“ I just
want to be
normal
and work
and
help people ”**



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Le Van Thin

Le Van Thin is Vietnamese. As an orphan, his community bullied him. When he was 15, his grandmother became frail and she sent him to the UK in search of a better life. Instead, he was trafficked and forced into captivity growing cannabis after which he was arrested, imprisoned and detained. After 3 years in prison he is trying to build a new life here.

“ I am quiet, a good listener. My grandmother brought me up. She loved me dearly. She taught me life isn't always easy so you should be proud, patient and self reliant and not just ask God or other people. Since she died I see her in my heart and dreams.

Before, I was so depressed I just slept. Then one freezing day I thought 'I can't live like this, I need to do something useful, or else ...' I walked miles in the snow until I felt stronger.

I can't attend college yet so I exercise and study English alone. I find children's detective books exciting and interesting!

Baobab is a community, which is good. You learn a lot. There are different opinions and discussions. We have to listen to each other or it's a supermarket!

In future I would like a relationship, maybe children? It's the tree of life.

I want to become a human rights lawyer. When I get a job I won't claim benefits. I just want to be normal and work and help people. ”



Annie Ellison

Group worker



Together, with Sheila Melzak I co-facilitate the Children's Group and Adolescents' Group.

The children live with mothers who have experienced extreme violence in their home countries and captivity there or in the UK. The group provides a containing space in which to access, explore and slowly express difficult feelings and discover resilience, to individuate, form nurturing relationships and grow into

adolescence. We work mainly in displacement using art, craft, music, writing, brainstorming, story telling, role-play, and trips out.

The adolescents are all unaccompanied minors, having experienced extreme violence, violation, abuse, trauma and loss in their home countries, on the journey here and in the UK. Together we are building a supportive, stable environment in which to explore and process extreme and conflicting feelings and experiences and to find and share strengths. Working directly and in displacement we explore current concerns as well as the wider political contexts of experiences. We reflect on culture, identity, values and difference.

To move into being able to think about the unthinkable and then into speaking about the unspeakable (either to one person or to a trusted few) and to release self sabotaging defence mechanisms is a slow, gentle and necessarily very delicate process, hence the long term nature of both groups.

“ It's hard
to define
a good
human
being ”



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

Papi

At sixteen, Papi, and his brothers were arrested, detained and tortured. His father's friend helped him to escape and come to the UK, since when he has not heard from his family. Despite missing them very much he studied hard and is now at university.

“ I am positive. I want to succeed. I dream big. I love studying politics, exploring ideas , discovering patterns. Learning gives you strength and respect. I laugh often. When I feel low I pray or talk with my therapist. She is calming and encouraging. I sometimes counsel myself. I say 'you can do it' or 'everything will pass'. Believing in destiny helps me accept what happened.

Baobab is good because we exchange different knowledge and experience.

I wish I could reunite my family. I have no photos. I can't remember their faces. They live inside me. Their love and belief are deep and strong. It's hard to define a good human being. War comes. People kill your family. You feel anger, revenge. You react but still you are nice inside. It's complicated... choosing good or bad.

When you are on a dark road a caring person is like a shining light. Mandela inspires me. Despite all he endured, he embraced white people. If he'd chosen revenge South Africa would be a different place.

Many black youngsters have low self-esteem. They feel excluded. A white student said recently I couldn't be a university rep because I was black. I was completely shocked. ”



Godwin Honest

Godwin was born in an African country where he lived with loving parents, one Moslem, the other Christian. Aged ten, Godwin and some other boys were kidnapped by a child trafficker. He was held in captivity in three different countries. He arrived in the UK aged eighteen. He wants to become an engineer.



Photograph: Jenny Matthews

“ I don't like shame. I was brought up to be proud and caring. If someone is sick I help him. If someone is sad I find out what he likes, maybe football or dancing, or eating? Together we forget our problems and enjoy life. When I came to Baobab I couldn't stop thinking. But my therapist helped put the past behind me. In individual therapy I can say things I wouldn't say in the group. There we share what feels easier.

Some songs give me courage like Saheed Osupa singing 'I was crying because I had no shoes but then I saw someone without a leg'.

If I am in a bad place I fast and pray until my prayers are answered. This makes me strong.

Arriving in the UK I was shocked by the drinking. Maybe it's because it's so cold and grey.

I hate the corruption in my country. Children go hungry so they steal. There is too much suffering. Everyone should have enough. My mum and dad are my inspiration. They never smoked, drank or argued and always treated me with love and respect. They are with me forever along with everything they taught me. In future, I would like to have money to buy Baobab a minibus so we could go on trips together! ”

Ronnie M now has a secure place in the community of exile

Ronnie came to the UK from Rwanda aged 14. He was fleeing from the Rwandan genocide and its consequences, false accusations of complicity, imprisonment and torture. He now has a BSc in mental health nursing, has worked in a mental health ward, in intensive care and is currently a community psychiatric nurse. He has a partner and is the father of two little boys. He has started a small business selling organic food and supplements which he hopes one day soon to run full time.



“Working with my psychotherapist allowed me to ventilate my frustrations, painful and horrific experiences of torture and bad feelings about those who mistreated me in Rwanda. I learned not to allow my past to influence my future but to adapt to living the future and look forward with hope.

Baobab allowed me to relate to different types of people with cultures and beliefs which often vary greatly from my own. Attending group activities allowed me to develop interpersonal skills, communication, confidence, openness and trust. I am now prepared to help others when they are in difficulty or face challenging situations. Meeting people who shared horrific experiences like mine strengthened my understanding of hope, belief in positive change, forgiveness of those who wronged me and belief in life. Baobab shaped me into the person I am now.

I was given an opportunity to share my experiences in a secure, friendly, non-judgemental and warm environment. My psychotherapist encouraged me to take part in some research and as a result I met MPs in the House of Commons to discuss age assessment procedures for young torture victims.

I wish to stay focused on my goals, to support others in the community and be there for my kids and my partner.”

“I don't like shame. I was brought up to be proud and caring”



Donations

Regular and one-off donations, however small, are a very valuable source of income for the Baobab Centre.

To make a one-off donation go to:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/baobabcentreforyoungsurvivorsinexile>

To become a regular supporter please complete a Standing Order Donation Form (and the GiftAid form which is worth an additional 25% to us if you are a UK taxpayer) and return it to us; the form can be downloaded from our website: www.baobabsurvivors.org/pages/support-us/donate.php

Alternatively you can contact the Baobab Centre directly at:

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London

N7 6LA

020 7263 1301



Charity registration number: 1135407

Our thanks to all who have shared their wishes hopes and dreams. Thanks in particular to Annie Ellison who did the interviews and edited them. And thanks to Melanie McFadyean who coordinated and edited this booklet and made it happen. Thanks to the Baobab staff without whose dedication this work could not continue and on whom these vulnerable but resilient young people depend. And a very special thank you to Sheila Melzak whose tireless compassion for humanity knows no bounds. Thanks also to Anna Cronin for our new logo design and to Andy Dark for the design of this booklet. Photographs by Jenny Mathews and Melanie McFadyean. No charitable funds from trusts were used to prepare this booklet. All costs were generously covered by Melanie McFadyean. Printed by Mid Wales Litho.

£20 would pay for a practical Christmas present for a member of the Baobab community

£25 would provide art materials for each children's therapy group session

£40 would pay for room hire for each monthly community meeting

£65 would pay for an interpreter to attend a psychotherapy or assessment session

£100 would pay for a group worker for one psychotherapy group meeting

£500 would pay for 2 young people to attend for a year

£1,100 would pay our rent for a month

£1,700 would enable us to buy a practical Christmas present for each member of the Baobab community, for many this will be their only present

£5,000 would pay for public transport travel costs for 20, often destitute, young people to attend their weekly psychotherapy sessions for a year

£3,700 would fund one young person to be fully supported by the Baobab Centre with one-to-one therapy, group therapy and practical advisory support for a year

£5,000 would allow us to establish a permanent repayable destitution fund

£10,000 would pay for our summer project for the children, adolescents and young adults allowing outings and a therapeutic country retreat for our older members

£30,000 would enable us to employ a second psychotherapist to support our young people and volunteer therapists

£320,000 would fully fund our organisation for a whole year and enable us to meet more demand.

“ I feel safe at Baobab,
like places I went to
as a child where
I felt safe. ”



BAOBAB CENTRE
for Young Survivors in Exile