

**See Me**  
End mental health  
discrimination

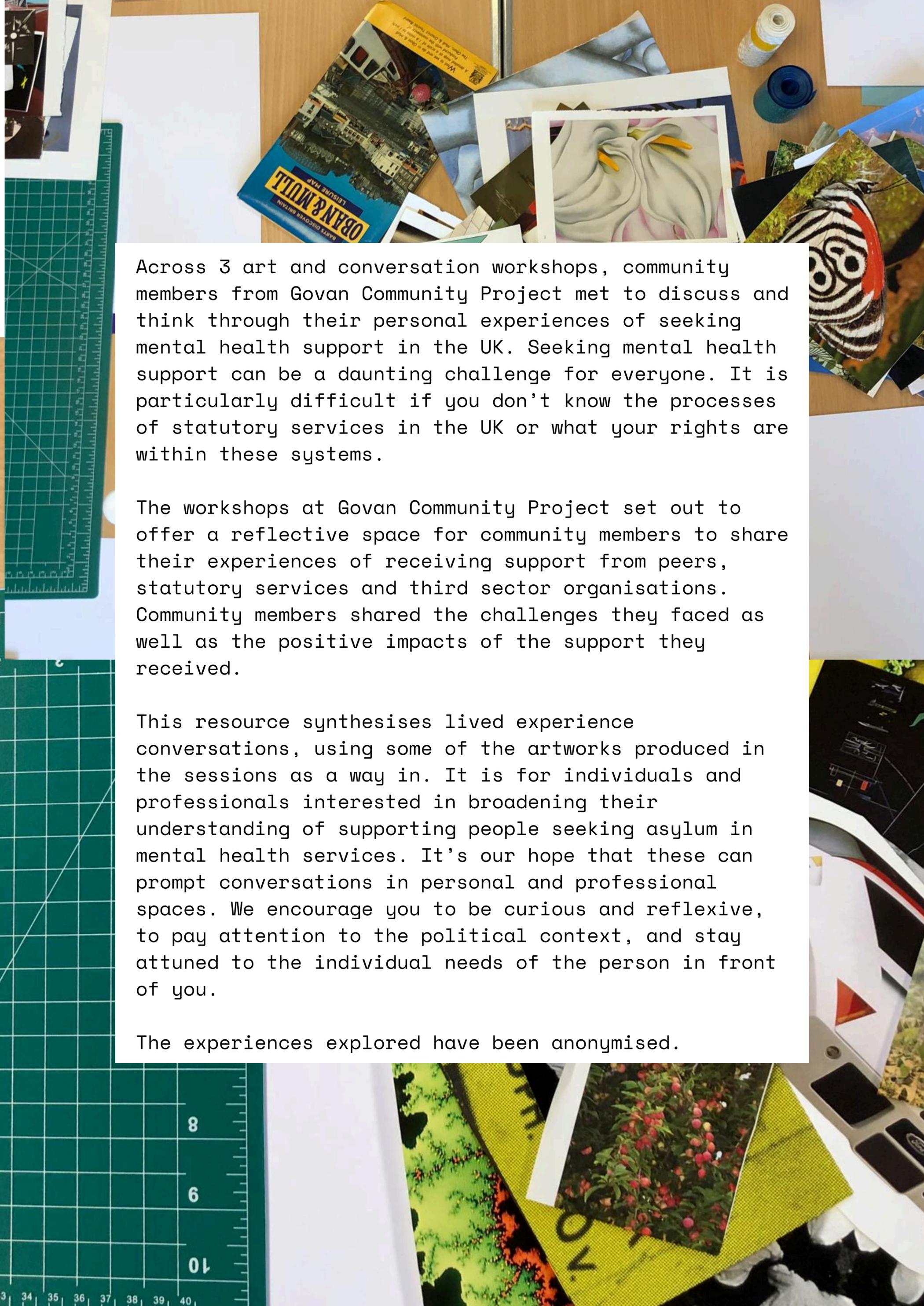


**GOVAN  
COMMUNITY  
PROJECT**  
Building Hope

# Seeking Mental Health Support Whilst Seeking Asylum

Reflections on Experience  
Through Art-Based Discussion





Across 3 art and conversation workshops, community members from Govan Community Project met to discuss and think through their personal experiences of seeking mental health support in the UK. Seeking mental health support can be a daunting challenge for everyone. It is particularly difficult if you don't know the processes of statutory services in the UK or what your rights are within these systems.

The workshops at Govan Community Project set out to offer a reflective space for community members to share their experiences of receiving support from peers, statutory services and third sector organisations. Community members shared the challenges they faced as well as the positive impacts of the support they received.

This resource synthesises lived experience conversations, using some of the artworks produced in the sessions as a way in. It is for individuals and professionals interested in broadening their understanding of supporting people seeking asylum in mental health services. It's our hope that these can prompt conversations in personal and professional spaces. We encourage you to be curious and reflexive, to pay attention to the political context, and stay attuned to the individual needs of the person in front of you.

The experiences explored have been anonymised.



Having good mental health feels like freedom, its the feeling you have when you have a good car. You can move freely, go anywhere, do anything. Having support has this feeling, it makes you feel more able.



This collage speaks to the experience of recognising that you need support for your mental health and the journey embarked on looking for it and, eventually, finding it. On the left of the page we see the beginning of that journey. A strong tree stands alone, its branches without leaves. It is upright and resilient but in this season finds it difficult to imagine a time when its leaves may bud again.

In the background, the landscape slowly shifts from rugged mountains to steep, sloping mounro's, representing literal migration and the hopes and fears entangled within this.

In the grass, flowers are beginning to bloom, welcome reminders to grow toward the light but these flowers are far and few between, symbolising feelings of loneliness and scarcity associated with low mood.

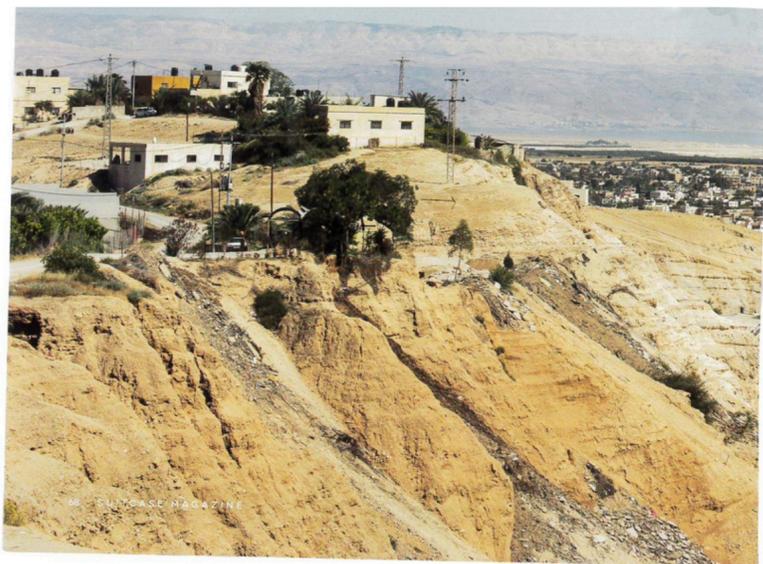
On the right hand side of the page we see an image of a house with a bright and thriving garden. Though the weather is far from perfect - the sky is a bit grey and the wind blows through the garden - the image of the house feels warm and inviting, its colours representing feelings of growing awareness, clearer thinking and moments of joy.

Through discussion of the image, participants explained that getting support for your mental health often feels like an uncertain journey with hope to move from greyscale into colour.

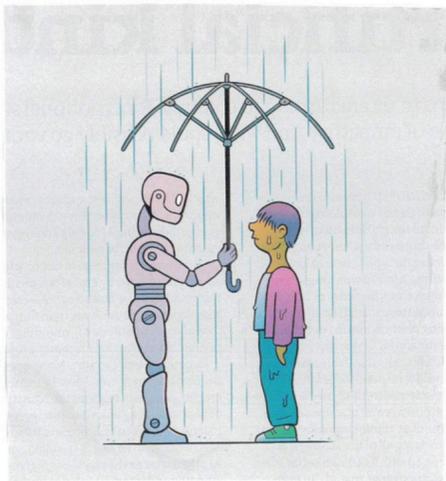
It's like walking down a path not knowing where it may lead to, noticing landmarks and swerving uneven ground underfoot so you don't fall. It's also being offered a hand when you stumble and trusting that you can take it. When you get to the imperfect garden, it's not like a sudden change. Its a slow and gradual shift, like the mountains, you see it more when you stand and look back to where you came from.

When you are struggling with your mental health it can feel incredibly lonely and shameful as though you dont want anybody to look and you and you cant look somebody else in the eye

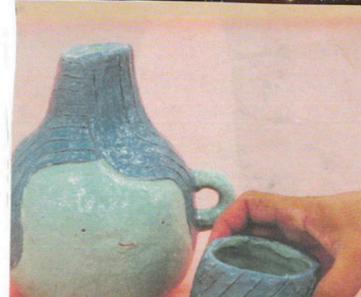
Though when you get the support, it starts to feel like home, it may not be a lot out there but its good, it makes you comfortable



Only the Best



TRANSFORM



on

It can take a lot to build up the strength to talk about it and then, when you do it's like the help that is there isnt really useful, it's like youre not really listened to or you don't know what you're meant to say to help the right help

This child represents a kind of naive unknowing, looking into the future without any idea about what is to come and how difficult it might be

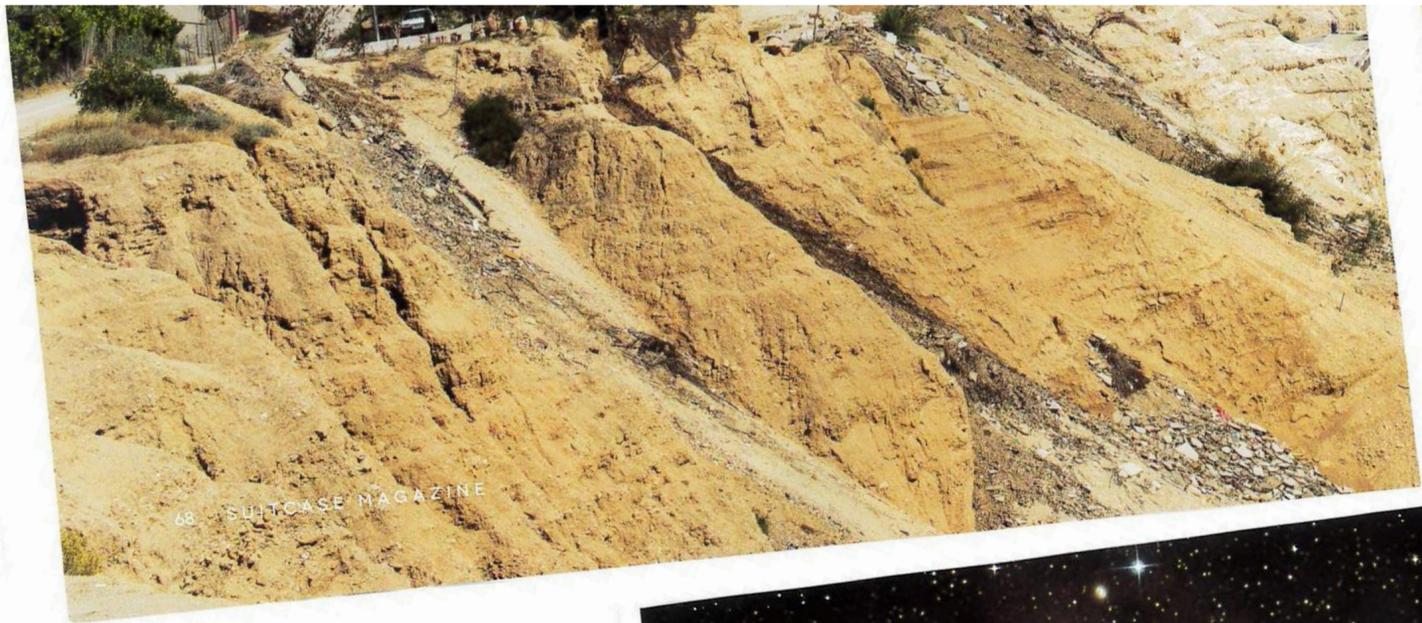
Good support feels like sharing a hot cup of tea, it can lead to possibilities and make the future look a bit bigger

This collage speaks to the experience of developing difficulties with mental health and the feelings associated with stigma and shame when seeking support. Often no knowing what to say and how best to say it.

In the centre of the page an image of a child looks out to represent the 'before' of facing mental health challenges. The child is a symbol of innocence and naivety, they do not yet know what is to come and are unaware of the tools they will need to overcome difficulties.

In the top left we are invited to think about stigma and shame. How sometimes struggling with your mental health can feel like all eyes on you without anyone really seeing you for who you are. This feeling is compounded by being offered support that doesn't feel accessible or tailored to the individual- represented here by a robot offering a not fit for purpose umbrella to a person in the rain.

Towards the right hand side of the page images represent the experience of when support is going well, in this collage that positive support has come from community connection, and peer support. Having someone to talk to who cares to understand an individuals context and takes time to build trusting relationships.

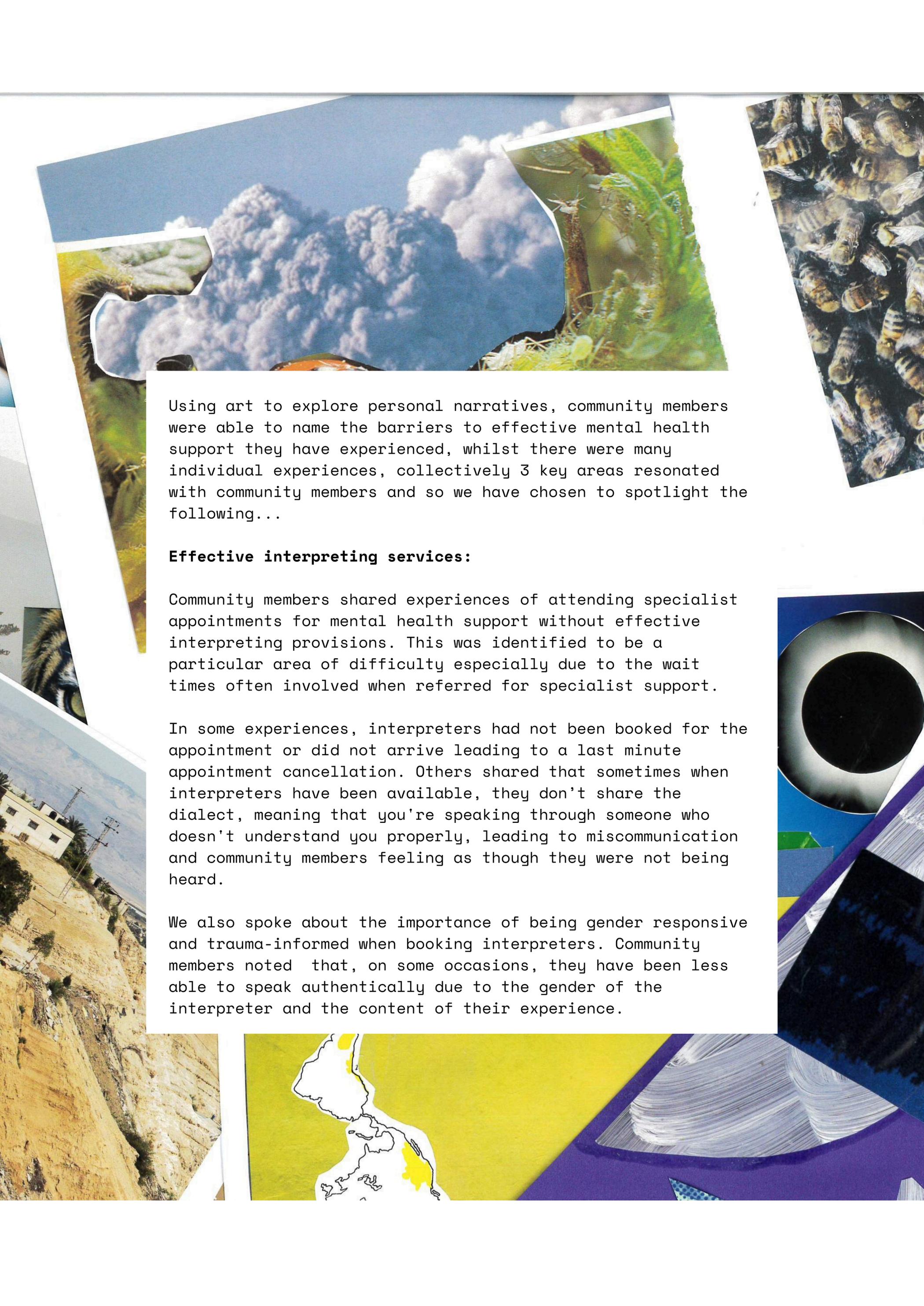


Only the Best





We are all united under the same sky. When your brain is busy thinking about the past, it helps to know there are people around you to support.



Using art to explore personal narratives, community members were able to name the barriers to effective mental health support they have experienced, whilst there were many individual experiences, collectively 3 key areas resonated with community members and so we have chosen to spotlight the following...

#### **Effective interpreting services:**

Community members shared experiences of attending specialist appointments for mental health support without effective interpreting provisions. This was identified to be a particular area of difficulty especially due to the wait times often involved when referred for specialist support.

In some experiences, interpreters had not been booked for the appointment or did not arrive leading to a last minute appointment cancellation. Others shared that sometimes when interpreters have been available, they don't share the dialect, meaning that you're speaking through someone who doesn't understand you properly, leading to miscommunication and community members feeling as though they were not being heard.

We also spoke about the importance of being gender responsive and trauma-informed when booking interpreters. Community members noted that, on some occasions, they have been less able to speak authentically due to the gender of the interpreter and the content of their experience.



### **Travelling to appointments:**

Following on from our conversation about interpreter provisions, community members also reflected on the significant cost of travel to appointments which has increased the impact of last-minute cancellations. People seeking asylum in the UK receive a weekly payment of £9.95 or £49.18 depending on an individual's type of support and accommodation. With return bus tickets costing approximately £5.90, travel to appointments can be a significant investment and difficult to prioritise.

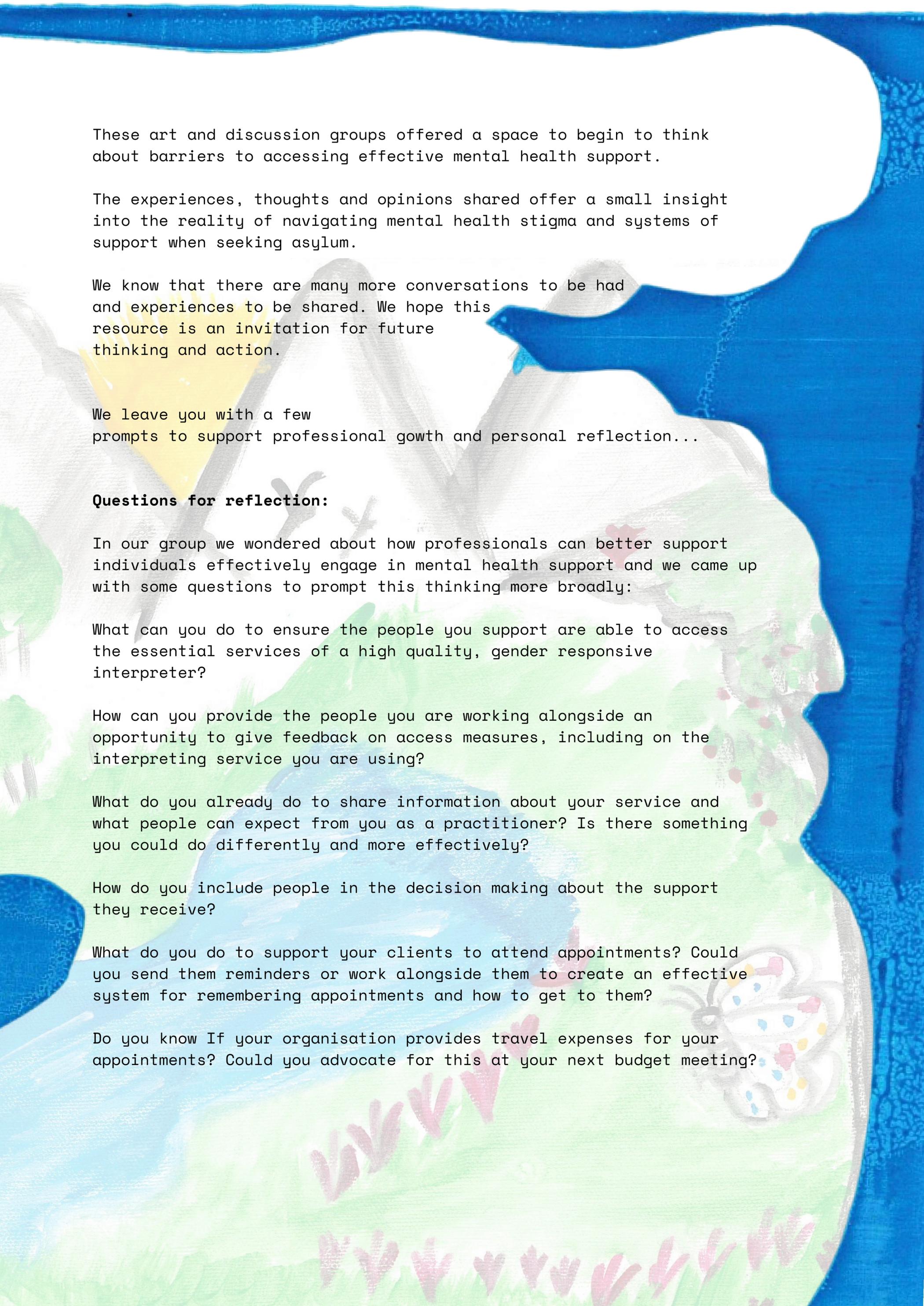
Additionally, navigating travel in a new city can be difficult and community members highlight that it can take a while to learn and understand a new bus route to get to appointments. Sometimes, this can feel overwhelming and acts as a significant barrier to attending appointments.

### **Choice in decision making:**

Community members shared that, in seeking mental health support, they have been confused about the options available to them and unclear on their role within decision making. This has on occasion looked like accepting prescriptions to medication they were unsure of and not being able to effectively advocate for their own needs and preferences. These experiences have led to a sense of powerlessness and contributed to further low mood and feelings of shame.



Nature brings peace, Sometimes, talking to someone about what is in your heart feels like being in nature.



These art and discussion groups offered a space to begin to think about barriers to accessing effective mental health support.

The experiences, thoughts and opinions shared offer a small insight into the reality of navigating mental health stigma and systems of support when seeking asylum.

We know that there are many more conversations to be had and experiences to be shared. We hope this resource is an invitation for future thinking and action.

We leave you with a few prompts to support professional growth and personal reflection...

#### **Questions for reflection:**

In our group we wondered about how professionals can better support individuals effectively engage in mental health support and we came up with some questions to prompt this thinking more broadly:

What can you do to ensure the people you support are able to access the essential services of a high quality, gender responsive interpreter?

How can you provide the people you are working alongside an opportunity to give feedback on access measures, including on the interpreting service you are using?

What do you already do to share information about your service and what people can expect from you as a practitioner? Is there something you could do differently and more effectively?

How do you include people in the decision making about the support they receive?

What do you do to support your clients to attend appointments? Could you send them reminders or work alongside them to create an effective system for remembering appointments and how to get to them?

Do you know If your organisation provides travel expenses for your appointments? Could you advocate for this at your next budget meeting?