



**Room to Heal is a healing community for asylum seekers and refugees who have survived torture and other forms of organised violence**



## Who we are

Room to Heal is a specialist charity working therapeutically with people who have survived torture and organised violence. We provide group and individual therapies, creative and social activities, and practical casework assistance. At the heart of our work lies the cultivation of a non-residential, healing community through which our members re-establish trust and belonging, and build meaningful lives in exile.

Our members include people tortured by governments for political reasons; people trafficked to the UK, and people forced to flee their country of origin because of sexuality-based violence, conflict and persecution. We aim to enable people to heal from their traumatic experiences, find renewed meaning in life and reintegrate into society.

The central therapeutic support we offer is through our weekly mixed-gender therapeutic support groups. In addition the whole community meets weekly at Culpeper Garden in Islington for food-growing, gardening and social activities. We also run a range of other activities to support each member of Room to Heal and help them rebuild their lives in exile: activities currently include individual short-term therapy and casework; body and trauma-centered therapies; creative activities including theatre, music and storytelling; social gatherings, and intensive therapeutic retreats in the English countryside.

“Room to Heal is my bridge to a bright life.”

## Our Members

The Room to Heal community is made up of men and women from more than twenty-five countries all over the world. Our members are united by common experiences of torture and extreme human cruelty on one hand, and the challenge and complexity of claiming asylum and building meaningful lives in the UK, on the other.

Our members often arrive at Room to Heal in a state of hopelessness and despair: desolate, fearful and alienated - from themselves and other people around them. Our members typically struggle with a range of psychological and physical symptoms resulting from their violent, traumatic experiences, as well as the loss of family, home and community, and the sense of isolation that follows. Our members also face social insecurity, marginalisation and often destitution, as they struggle through the asylum system.

## Our Aims

We aim to enable people who have experienced torture and/or organised violence to heal from their traumatic experiences, find renewed meaning in life and integrate into the UK. We achieve this through the provision and maintenance of a supportive, therapeutic community, whereby we:

- Address traumatic experiences and symptoms via support groups, individual counselling and body therapies;
- Enable people to find renewed meaning and enjoyment in life through a range of social activities;
- Help people to navigate the stress and complexity of the asylum process;
- Support people in educating themselves and preparing for future employment;
- Create a forum which allows members to interact with local communities.
- Raise awareness of the plight of this vulnerable community amongst the wider public and policy makers.

**“At Room to Heal you are not a patient or a reference number you are a human being.”**

## Our Approach

Room to Heal is a healing community for everyone involved: members, staff, volunteers and supporters. There is an important principle here. Whatever the nature of our life experiences, and our differences, we are all human beings united by our need for love and belonging; our struggles and experiences of loss. We have different roles of course – therapist, caseworker or member for example – but, in the end, our commonalities are greater.

To this end, we aim to move beyond an expert-patient relationship and strive to relate to our members first and foremost as human beings. We believe that to be recognised as such, and treated with dignity and kindness, is crucial to the healing process.

We see that talking about trauma has its limits, so we help people to reconnect to their bodies and to the natural world. We bear witness to the depth of pain that people have experienced, but we also appreciate the importance of humour, playfulness and a light touch.

We respond to each individual's needs holistically, and our therapeutic and casework teams work closely in tandem to support members as they try to move forward with their lives. We have learned that by offering emotional and practical support we build an unrivalled trust, honesty and rapport with our members that permeates deep into our community and helps people to heal.

The way that we facilitate our community enables members to take some ownership of it; it becomes a second family to them – a place of home and belonging. Through relating meaningfully to themselves and others, people rebuild their emotional strength and natural resilience, begin to undo the legacy of torture, and are more able to endure the insecurity and pain of waiting for protection in the UK. Through finding family again, our members begin to process their loss of family and homeland, and find a new place of belonging; a new hope in life.

Our garden and the natural world are also at the heart of our work. Our garden is a space to talk, and a space for therapy - a place to cultivate, to contemplate, and to share a meal and some company. Perhaps most importantly, it is a space to simply be. Our intensive rural retreats give us even greater opportunities to harness the natural world to support members' healing processes.

Enabling our members to move from a place where life feels as though it is already 'finished', to one in which hope and a new life becomes possible, is at the heart of what we do.



**“The strength of Room to Heal comes from the enthusiasm and dedication of the people involved.”**

**Amy Saunders, Comic Relief**

## Our Team

Our staff team currently consists of five part-time therapists, a part-time caseworker, a part-time clinical administrator, a part-time finance consultant and a part-time community gardening coordinator.

We are also assisted by around twenty volunteers, who support all aspects of the charity, as well as a team of seven dedicated Trustees.

## Our therapeutic team

### **Mark Fish**

Room to Heal's Founder and Director. Mark has 20 years' therapeutic experience in group therapy, mediation, clinical supervision and professional development. He is currently Senior Counsellor and Psychotherapist at the Helen Bamber Foundation.

### **Chloe Davies**

Chloe is Deputy Director and a UKCP qualified psychotherapist. She previously worked at legal charity Reprieve, coordinating after-care for former prisoners. She trained in psychotherapy at the Minster Centre and has worked with victims of torture for over 8 years.

### **Rae Ambarwati**

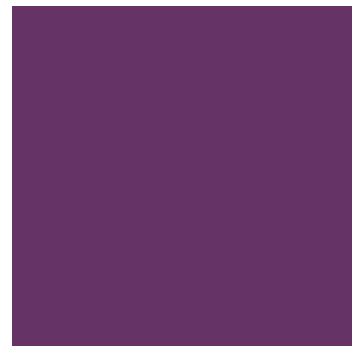
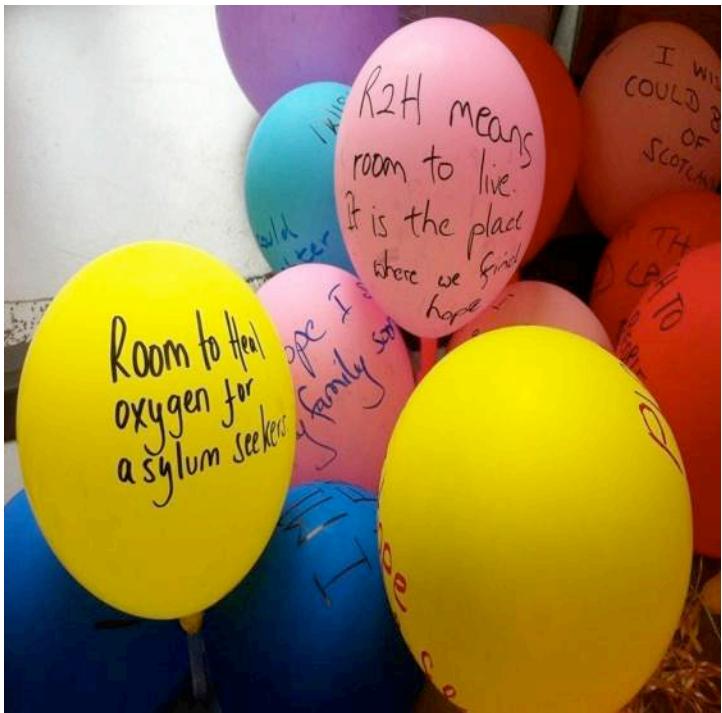
Rae is a Senior Community Support Worker and has co-facilitated our therapeutic support groups since 2009. Rae has qualifications in psychology and therapeutic group-work, and has worked at Room to Heal since it was started.

### **Kirstin Hubert**

Kirstin is a psychodrama psychotherapist. She joined in 2014 and currently co-facilitates a mixed group with Ahmet Caglar. Kirstin has worked in private and public healthcare for 15 years, and is registered with the UKCP and the BPA.

### **Ahmet Caglar**

Ahmet is a Counsellor and Group Facilitator at Room to Heal. He has been working with groups in various settings including the NHS, community organisations, and food-growing groups on health, well-being and self management.



## What we do

Our assessment process is a chance for a potential member and ourselves to decide if Room to Heal is the right place for them. It is a chance for us to look at a person's material and psychological needs and how we can best address them.

We are able to offer short-term individual therapy, aimed at preparing new members to join the Room to Heal community and, where appropriate address enduring post-traumatic symptoms. A new member will also be assigned a caseworker who will work with them to resolve practical challenges and develop educational opportunities.

All new members will then be expected to join and regularly attend one of our therapeutic support groups, which run weekly, for at least six months. We run two concurrent mixed-gender groups from 11-1pm on a Tuesday, followed by lunch and a range of creative, physical and trauma-healing activities, which include storytelling, music, yoga and therapeutic massage. Members also attend our therapeutic gardening and social group, which runs weekly on Fridays at Culpeper Garden in Angel between 2-6pm.

In addition we run 2-3 intensive therapeutic retreats in the countryside per year, which members are invited to. They are a chance to deepen the therapeutic process and people's experience of community.

It is important to stress that though we do try to assist our members wherever possible with casework issues (including housing, legal and welfare related) the heart of our work involves providing a therapeutic community for our members in order that they can heal from their traumatic experiences and build a meaningful life in exile.

RtH sometimes provides therapeutic reports for members in relation to their immigration cases, however, we are unable to provide reports independently of full participation in our programme. We cannot accept referrals purely for the production of medico-legal reports.

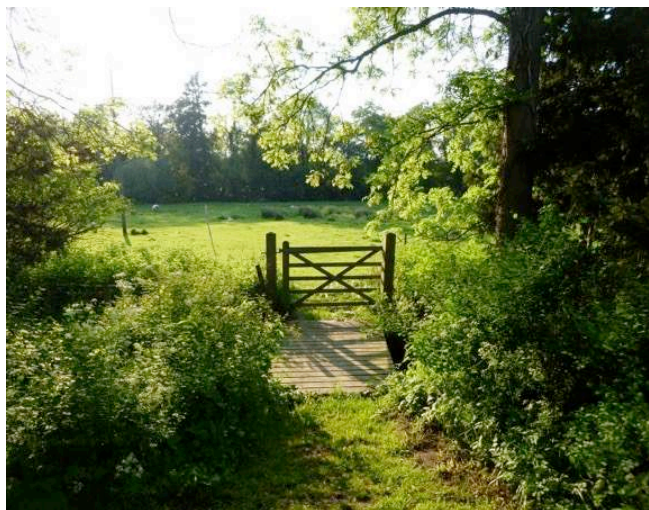
We are able to provide up to £4.40 towards peoples' travel to our sessions.



## Our criteria

We assess potential members on a case-by-case basis according to their suitability for membership of Room to Heal. The following are general guidelines on who can be a member of our community:

- Our members have been forced to flee torture or organised violence and are living in exile in the UK. We do include people who have fled sexuality-based persecution and people who have been trafficked and are unable to return to their home country. Our members are at various stages in the asylum process;
- Our members describe RtH as 'like a family.' Fundamentally we are a community, and the bulk of our activities are group-based. Potential members must want to, and be capable of, belonging to a community, and be able to take part in social activities. Of course we recognise that this is a challenging process for many people, and does not happen straight away, but there must be a willingness and desire to move towards integration, belonging and contributing to community life;
- Our community operates in English, so for someone to be part of it we require that they speak and comprehend enough English to take an active part in our support groups;
- Our members are 18 or over, and we do not currently have childcare facilities, though people are able to bring children to the garden on a Friday;
- To be a member of RtH requires a significant commitment and regular attendance of our programme. We do not offer a drop-in service;
- **We do not provide** long-term individual psychotherapy, but can provide some short-term therapy to help a new member ease into our therapeutic groups.



# To make a referral

To make a referral to Room to Heal please download and complete one of our referral forms, available on our website <http://roomtoheal.org/help/referral/>. Please then send the form to Tom at [tom@roomtoheal.org.uk](mailto:tom@roomtoheal.org.uk). If you would like to discuss a possible member before making a referral to us you can call our office on 0207 241 5941.

We aim to get back to you within a week and to see people who have been referred to us for assessments within one month.

Assessments take place at our offices at the Mildmay Community Centre; a two-minute walk from Newington Green, and accessible by London Overground at Canonbury and Dalston Kingsland stations. Maps and directions are available [on our website](#).

Room to Heal, Mildmay Community Centre, Woodville Road, London, N16 8NA  
0207 241 5941  
Charity registration number: 1128857