

A young Black woman with short, braided hair, wearing a yellow polo shirt and a light blue apron, smiles warmly at the camera. She is standing in what appears to be a kitchen or bakery, with shelves of baked goods visible in the background.

solace

Employment Project Funding Report

March 2021 – March 2022

solacewomensaid.org

Solace Women's Aid is a charity registered in England & Wales.
Charity Number 1082450. Company Number 3376716.

@SolaceWomensAid   

Haringey
LONDON

The aim and objectives of this Project was to support a diverse range of women survivors who had either experienced VAWG, were in receipt of benefits or who did not have Recourse to Public Funds, enabling them through work readiness and into employment.

The Project was delivered by offering holistic support and developing support for service users through strengthening partnerships with other specialist agencies.

There were 2 strands to the project, which were delivered through the Employment Navigator and the Peer Mentoring Navigator.

After some unforeseeable delays due to unsuccessful recruitment of the two main posts and the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic the project commenced on 01.03.21.

Implementation of the project

Initially we created a mobilisation plan with timeframes to set up the project. We recruited:

- Service Manager - 1 day a week
- Full time Employment Navigator - 37.5 hours
- Peer Mentoring Navigator - 15 hours a week
- 6 Peer Mentors - 1 hour a week

Our Communications Team promoted the service and advertised the Project internally, on our Solace website and on our social media posts. We designed new leaflets and referral forms, these were shared and distributed to all our internal and external partnerships. A service description, new welcome packs and evaluation forms were designed. A welcome pack was given to all new service users, to provide an overview of the service, information of the service and support that we can provide, overview of our confidentiality and data protection and our complaints and improvement with a copy of our complaints form. A tailored Induction training programme was also provided to all staff.

As the length of the project was only 12 months, we increased awareness of the project through leaflet drops, and by contacting several agencies and services in the borough where we shared our eligibility criteria and process. We also attended joint team meetings with partner agencies and shared information at external meetings as well as services within Solace. A PowerPoint presentation was designed for the project which we also shared.



“The worker made me feel good about myself. She is amazing, very dedicated and a fantastic mentor. The experience built my self-esteem and confidence, and I came away thinking, ‘I can do this!’”

The Employment Navigator

The role was to support a total of 70 service users over the length of the project with a target of 15 service users supported into employment which was to be sustained for at least 13 weeks. These service users were also to be in receipt of benefits.

The Employment Navigator has also supported a range of service users including those with No Recourse To Public Funds to be in a position where they could work. The Employment Navigator developed new partnerships to increase awareness of the project and to increase referrals. The support she provided was a combination of 1:1 support and workshops, during Covid most of the support was over the telephone or via zoom.

Support was given to explore childcare opportunities and to enable service users to access training courses and employment, support in writing CVs, applying for job, completing applications, and preparing service users for interviews through mock interviews.

Service users were also signposted to other services both within and outside of Solace, to access specialist support from agencies including legal surgeries, CAB, Counselling services, Floating Support and groupwork programs.

The workshops offered were:

Workshops	Participants
Confidence Building	8
Writing up a CV	7
Job searches and applications	3
Networking Skills	3
Interview Skills	6

Peer Mentor Navigator Role

The Peer Mentor Navigator assisted with the recruitment of 6 Peer Mentors and line managed the team through day-to-day support and monthly supervisions. Once the Peer Mentors were recruited, in addition to Solace induction training, a 4-hour induction training was also provided by the Peer Mentoring Navigator. Four of the Peer Mentors were trained via Zoom due to Covid restrictions and the final 2 received in person training.

The Employment Navigator would identify service users who would benefit from peer mentoring and refer them to the Peer Mentor. The Peer Mentor Navigator would then contact the service user to explain the project and allocate each of them to a Peer Mentor. An initial amount of support was agreed and offered, depending on the service users individual support needs. A review was then completed to either extend the support or close the case. The Peer Mentors would have a final closing session with the service user, prior to her case being closed.

Peer Mentors Role

To make the project more service user led, Peer Mentors were recruited, who either had lived experience of domestic abuse or had challenges around employment. Peer Mentors were paid at London Living Wage level, and this provided our Peer Mentors with employment, and with additional skills to support their own employment prospects once the project ended. All 6 Peer Mentors were trained prior to working with our service users. They received Solace Induction training relevant to their role:

- Introduction to Solace
- Safeguarding
- Health & Safety
- Equality & Diversity

The Peer Mentor Navigator provided tailored training which focused on 8 key areas

- Understanding of the Haringey Employment Project
- Boundaries and expectations of a peer mentor
- Sharing your own experience safely
- Supervision and support in this role
- Listening skills
- Working across differences
- Safeguarding and disclosures in this role
- Peer mentoring processes e.g., lone working, expenses

The Peer Mentors completed a pre-training evaluation form, and a post training evaluation form to rate their knowledge both before and after they had received induction training. All Peer Mentors highlighted that their knowledge had improved following the training in some or all of 8 areas. 100% rated themselves as having either attaining “a lot more” or “excellent knowledge” after the training.

Feedback received from the peer mentors following the training included:

“All topics covered were useful and enlightening”

“I felt it was a good refresher for topics”

“I was already aware of, and informed me of issues and topics new to me”

“It was informative and focused on the practical side which I liked”

What Peer Mentors found most useful was meeting the rest of their colleagues, understanding the role and refreshing their knowledge around safeguarding. Peer Mentors have provided support to service users in key areas including emotional, practical, and social support to support service users work towards their education, training, and employment goals.

The support the Peer Mentors have provided service users with, ranged from improving their spoken English, confidence building, accessibility to training courses and voluntary work. The number of sessions ranges from 1 – 8 sessions. Sessions have been either via telephone, Zoom or face to face in the office or in the community depending on the service user’s needs and preferences, following strict COVID government guidance.



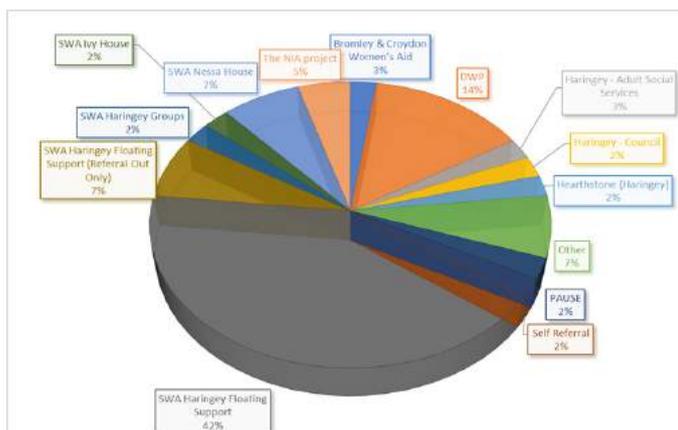
As this was a new project, it was important for us to promote the service, to generate referrals and increase partnership working in the borough. Initially we researched services in the borough and made contact either by telephone or email to introduce ourselves and the service. We attended team meetings with partner agencies to introduce the service. This was carried out on zoom or Microsoft teams.

Below is a table of the partnerships we worked with:



Referrals into the Employment Project

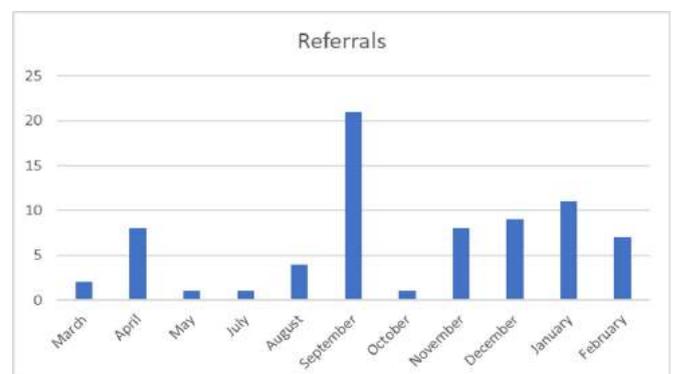
A total of 43 referrals were received to date and we accepted 36. Out of the 7 referrals which were not accepted, 4 women did not want the service and 3 were uncontactable. 33 of the referrals we received and engaged with were confirmed as programme starts with Jobcentre Plus.



Referrals were received from the following:

Solace floating support service in Haringey	22
Haringey refuges	3
Job Centre	6
Self-referral	1
Hearthstone	1
Social Services	1
Haringey Council	1
Women's Aid	1
PAUSE	1

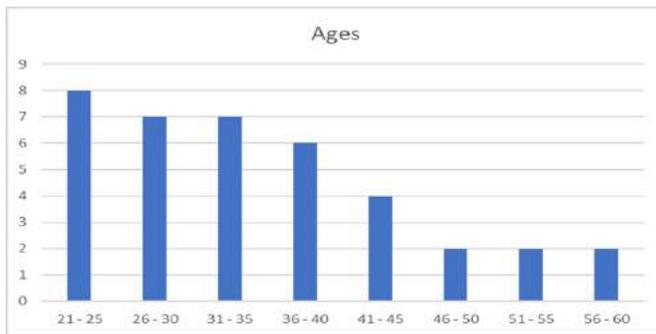
The bar chart below indicates the number of referrals received on a monthly basis



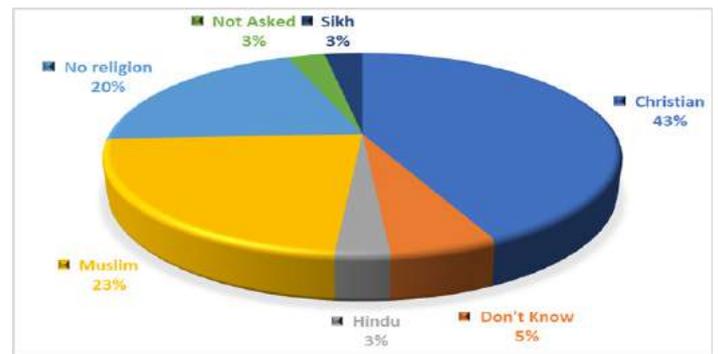
Majority of referrals were received in the months of June and September and the least were in the months of March and May. September was our busiest month for referrals, this was possibly due to children returning to school and service users being able to concentrate on looking for education/training and employment opportunities.

Demographics and Protected Characteristics

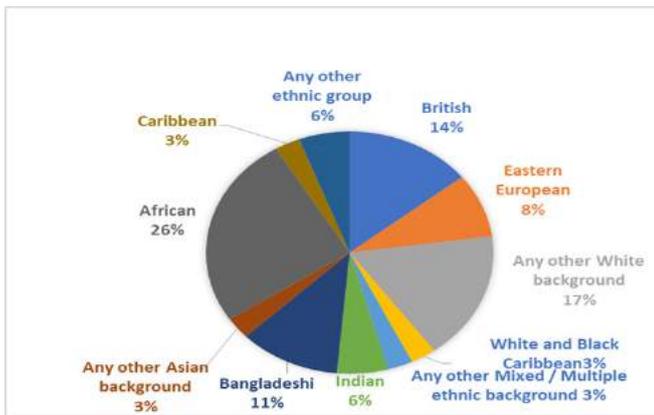
The chart below represents the age breakdown of service users



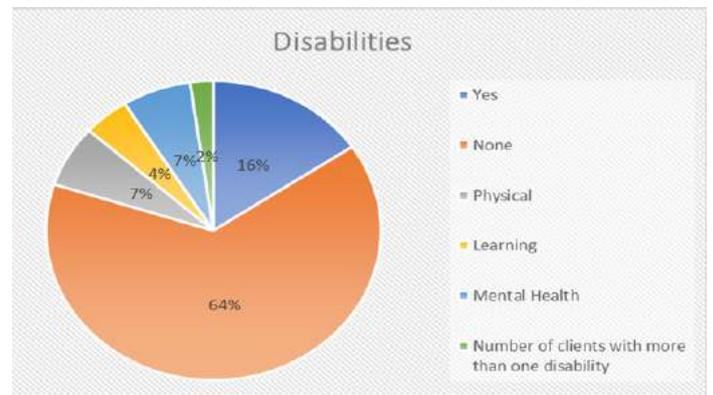
The chart below represents the religious backgrounds of the service users



The chart below represents the ethnicity breakdown of service users



The following table represents the ranges of visible and invisible disabilities



“Solace and the support I received saved my life!! I am hugely grateful!”



3 clients had mental health issues, 3 clients had a physical health issue, and 2 clients had a learning disability, 1 client had more than 1 disability.

Case Study 1

AA was interested in learning English to gain a qualification in childcare and gain Employment. Although there were ESOL classes available, the barrier for her was childcare, as she had a 1-year-old child. College of Northeast London (CONEL) was able to provide creche facilities for parents who study for 6 hours or more, the ESOL course was only 5 hours.

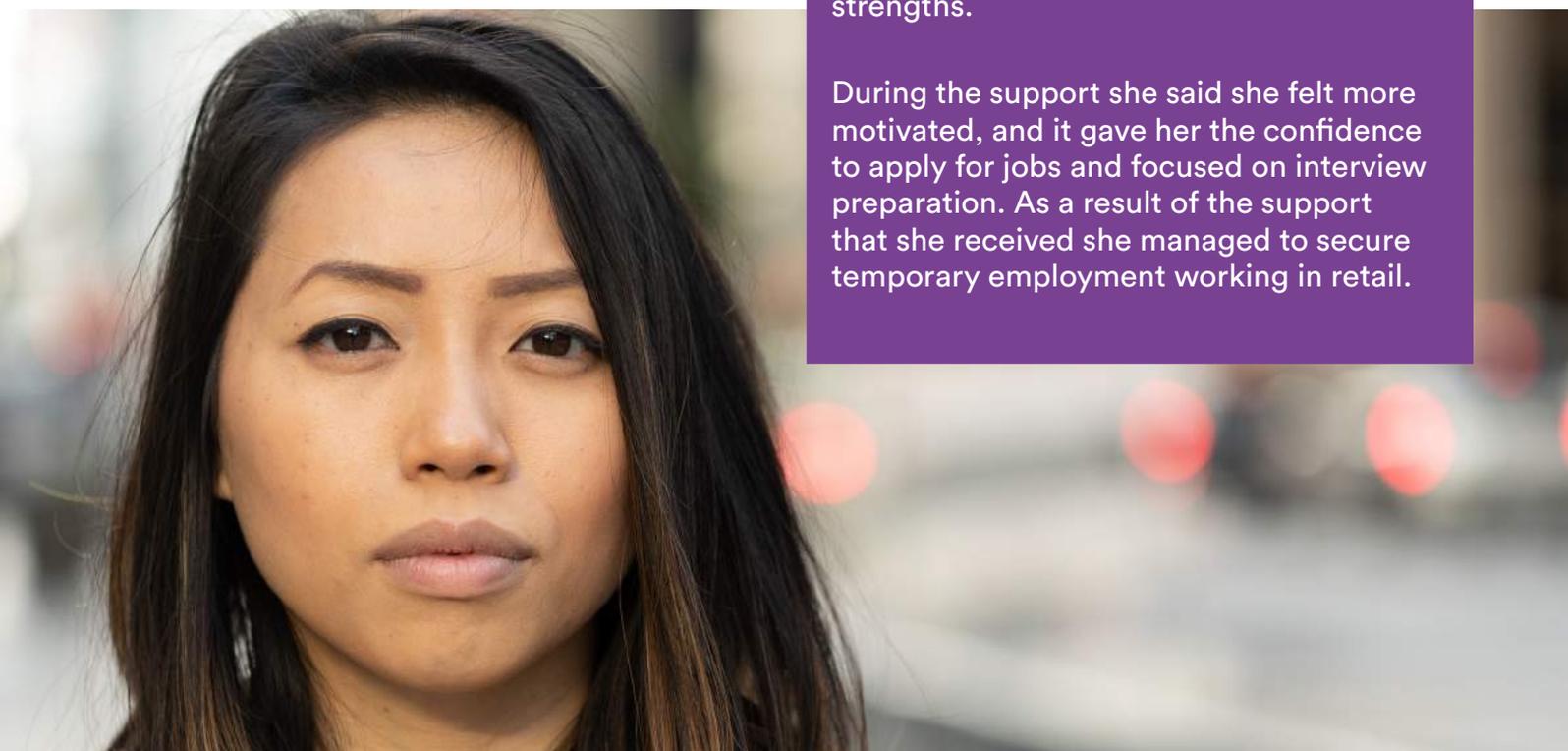
The childcare course she was interested in was only assessable for students with an English qualification. We explored other providers for her, but this was the same. We provided her with all the relevant information to enrol once her child once reaches two years of age and when she can therefore apply for the 15 hours of free childcare.

Case study 2

BB is a single mum with a 6-year-old daughter. She had limited work experience prior to getting married, and since her divorce had been struggling with her confidence to apply for paid employment. She wanted to work within school hours and was open to any type of work as she wanted to improve her financial situation. She was allocated to a Peer Mentor who had previous work experience in schools. Initial sessions held were focused on building trust with the service user, improving confidence and self-esteem.

The service user explained the barriers that she had previously experienced in terms of her confidence and in completing certain sections within application forms. The Employment Navigator showed BB to find websites to use when searching for jobs, they worked on her CV, highlighting her strengths.

During the support she said she felt more motivated, and it gave her the confidence to apply for jobs and focused on interview preparation. As a result of the support that she received she managed to secure temporary employment working in retail.





Evaluations from Employment Navigator strand

At case closure service users were emailed a feedback survey to complete. Out of the 36 evaluations that were sent we received a total of 28.

The questions and responses are in the table below:

Session	Not confident	Slightly confident	Neutral	Very confident
Q1. On a scale of 1-5, how would you describe your level of confidence and abilities				
CV Building	7%	23%	7%	38%
Interviews	0%	23%	7%	52%
Networking	7%	7%	30%	30%
Job Searches	7%	14%	14%	53%
Q2. On a scale of 1-5, how effectively do you think we have addressed some of your barriers to work?	0% not effective	7% slightly effective	14% neutral	61% effective, 23% very effective
Q3. On a scale of 1-5, do you feel that you have been supported well throughout your time with the service?	0% never	0% rarely	14% some of the time	14% some of the time, 70% always
Q4. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your service experience?	0% very poor	0% poor	7% fair	84% Very good

Testimonials

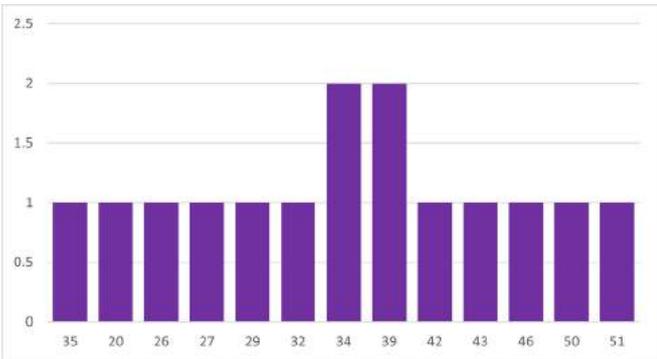
- *“I’d like to give thanks to Solace. It was all extremely helpful, and I am grateful.”*
- *“The service was good. I was able to get a voluntary job also and I really love this. Helping me open up with people. “The service was amazing. Everybody I met was friendly. “*
- *“The worker was great, and I was grateful for the offer of support however I was not in the right state of mind to fully use the service. I was too all over the place because of what had happened to me.”*
- *“The worker coached me through everything. I am feeling positive about life and my future right now.”*
- *“I learnt how to find a job.”*
- *“I feel more confident. I really appreciated the help and support – THANK YOU!”*
- *“I would have preferred to do the course in person rather than online but that was Covid’s fault!”*



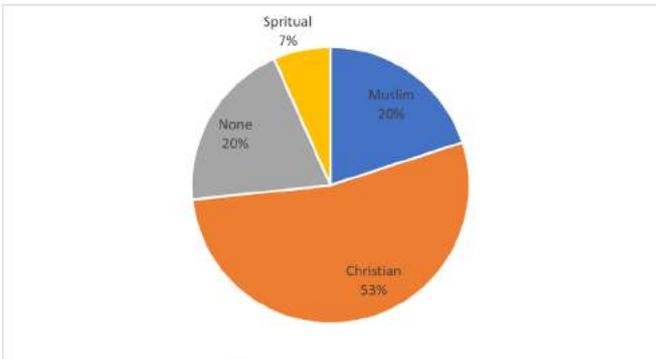
Referrals into Peer Mentoring strand

Referrals into Peer Mentoring strand from the total of 36 accepted referrals received, 15 of these were supported by Peer Mentors.

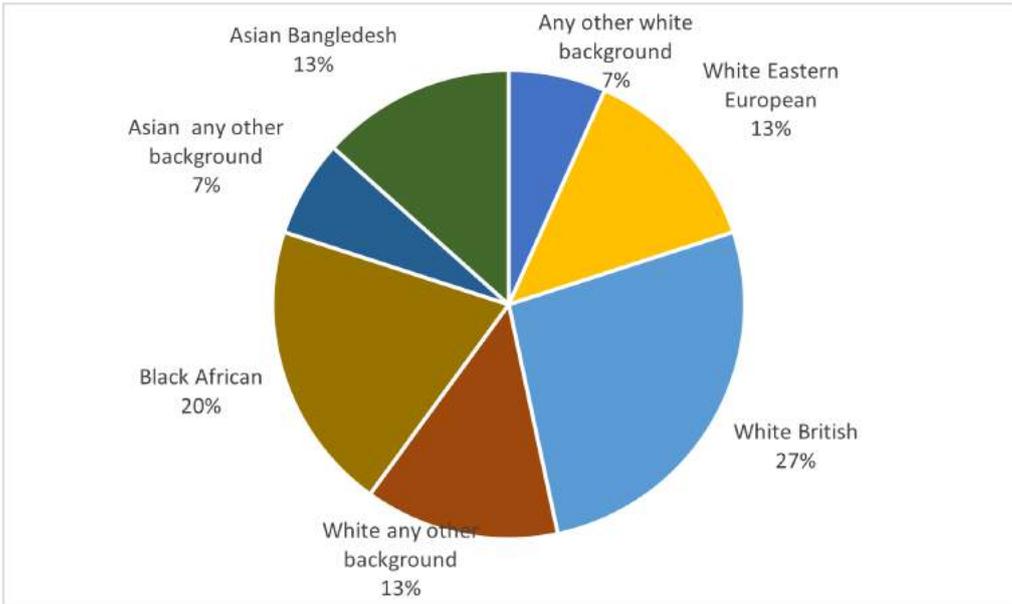
The chart below represents the age breakdown of service users



The chart below represents the religious backgrounds of the service users



The chart below represents the ethnicity breakdown of service users



3 clients had mental health issues, 3 clients had a physical health issue, and 2 clients had a learning disability, 1 client had more than 1 disability.

Case study 1

CC is single woman and is a carer for her parents. She has a physical disability and mental health issues and was on the waiting list for counselling. Her aim was to find voluntary work. From the outset, B voiced that she found it hard to trust people due to past experiences, and valued professionals being honest with her.

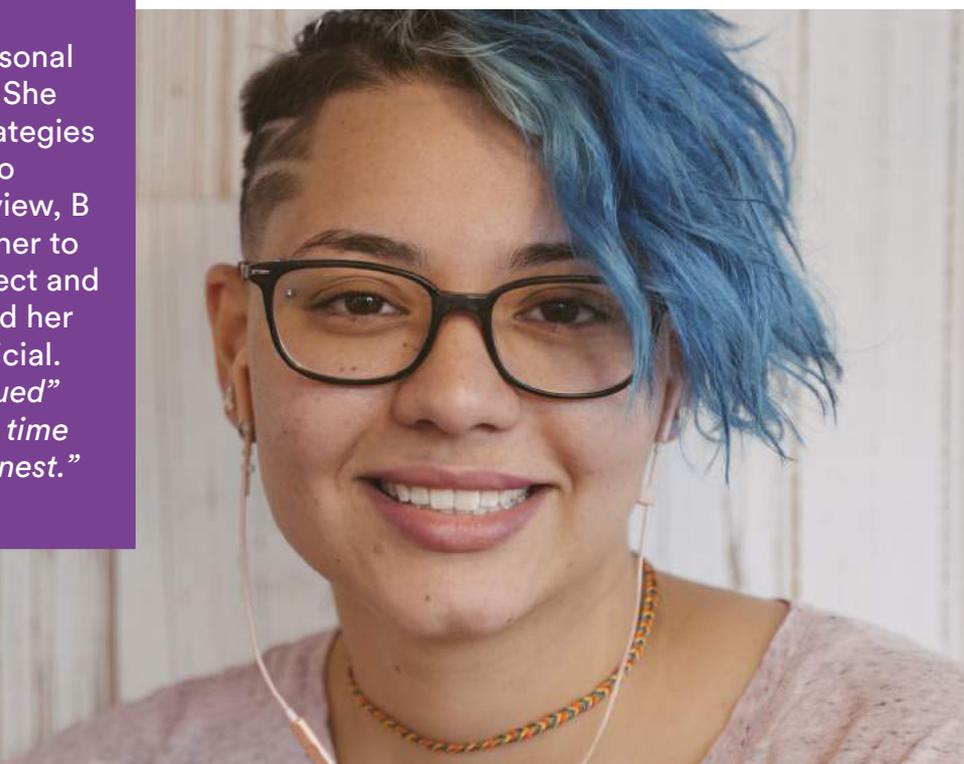
The first session was primarily around discussing the remit of the peer mentoring role, and what the Peer Mentor could support her with. Boundaries about confidentiality and safeguarding were made clear, and B was enthusiastic about further sessions. As sessions progressed, it emerged that it was difficult for B to focus on tasks to get her closer to her goal, for example, updating her CV, or looking for voluntary work.

The Peer Mentor supported B in identifying whom she could access appropriate support from in her personal and professional support networks. She supported B on problem solving strategies such as breaking down big tasks into smaller manageable ones. In her review, B agreed it was not the right time for her to continue with the Employment Project and peer mentoring, however she viewed her time with the Peer Mentor as beneficial. She spoke of *“feeling heard and valued”* and *“appreciating the peer mentor’s time and the fact she was upfront and honest.”*

Case study 2

DD is a single parent of an 8-year-old child residing in Haringey. C has been unemployed since her child was born and in service with Solace since 2020. C was referred to the Haringey Employment Project via Solace’s Haringey Floating Support service. C had only two sessions with her Peer Mentor as the third session had to be cancelled due to C contracting COVID 19.

A further session was scheduled but was sadly cancelled due to a death in C’s family. Despite the obstacles C felt fully supported during her sessions with her Peer Mentor and stated in her evaluation *“I am ready to get back into employment. It has been such a long time since I have worked, and I now have the confidence to do it and break the cycle of 8 years”*.





Evaluations from the Peer Mentoring strand

All service users voiced in their final review meeting they felt they had benefited and attained skills through peer mentoring in the following areas:

- reduced isolation
- knowledge of childcare
- IT skills
- access to community facilities such as libraries,
- how to enroll on courses,
- practicing interview questions
- improving spoken English.

In their feedback surveys service users were asked the following questions:

Activities	Responses				
1.How effective has peer mentoring been in helping you achieve your goals?	45% felt they had fully achieved their goals.	28% felt peer mentoring had “helped a lot” with their goals.	28% felt it had “helped a fair amount”.		
2.If they felt peer mentoring had benefited them in any of the 6 areas					
Feeling less alone/ isolated	Self-esteem (feeling good about myself)	Self-confidence (confidence in my abilities)	Communication skills	Feeling positive about the future	Learning new skills
73%	91%	100%	55%	91%	55%

Some of the new learning skills attained included:

- Improving English
- Learning how to effectively look for jobs
- Things to think about when starting a business

“It helped me in every aspect of my life. I have drawn from it. The emotional support from the peer mentor and the physical support of the emails, facts, links and information from the caseworker. It has helped build my confidence to get back out there and into employment to build a better life for me and my son.”



Testimonials

- *“On a personal level it has helped, having someone to talk to with a shared experience. She showed me what I was feeling was ok. I feel I have new light on how the future could be, and I know not to put too much pressure on myself. She has helped me reflect, and just do things for me and my kids”*
- *“It has been a positive space for me, she has taken time out just to listen to me for an hour. Listen to my thoughts, how I feel, not judge me like friends and family do. She remains on the same level, just listens”*
- *“We discuss application, how to answer questions. We also search on websites for jobs together – it has been helpful.”*
- *“It has helped a little to discuss ideas with someone else who has experience. It has helped with my confidence and to feel more positive”*
- *“I want to thank you for your cooperation, support, warm attitude, and your time. I gained new experience and new knowledge thanks to your project. I wish you success and all the best.*
- *“My peer mentor was amazing. She was everything I wanted and more”*
- *“The most useful aspect of peer mentoring was having someone to help and support me. The practical support with CV was good”*
- *“My peer mentor from Solace was different. For the first time she listened and supported me. I would like more sessions with her”*



Exit feedback from Peer Mentors

A key target of the project was to provide employment to the Peer Mentors, to increase their professional development and support with their own future employment goals. Unfortunately, 2 of our Peer Mentors left due to health issues and returned to studying. Our Peer Mentoring Navigator left in December before the end of her contract as she found alternative employment and one of our Peer Mentors applied for the position and was successfully recruited for the remaining few months of the project.

One of the key successes in this project has been the impact that the project has made upon the Peer Mentors. It has increased and improved their own self-esteem, confidence, and given them a sense of positivity about the future. All respondents reported back improvements in these three areas, which are key building blocks to support to navigate the world of employment. They have maintained motivation when working towards their own employment goals and gained resilience.

Peer Mentor A

“My time at Solace Women’s Aid in my role as peer mentor has been very valuable and enjoyable.”

“This role has given me the opportunity, confidence and learning to develop my skills and experience.”

Peer Mentor B

“I felt very supported by my line managers. Both were very understanding and extremely supportive and encouraging. Regular supervision and team meetings also helped with this.”

“The service users’ needs were at the center of our work, and the organization as a whole.”

“We worked well together as a team, and I felt very supported.”

Peer Mentor C

“I was able to support the service users by listening to them and sharing my personal experience, where appropriate, to enable them to move forward on their training and employment goals. However, limited time was always a major factor in the role.”

“I certainly did feel supported by the Peer Mentor Navigators and senior management on a professional and personal level.”

“It was clear that the aim was to support service users to regain control of their lives by accessing training leading onto employment.”

“The honest conversations and positive feedback from service users I feel indicates that the organisation focus is driven by meeting the needs of women and children.”

Challenges and barriers

The original application included Solace and Hearthstone to work in partnership and the Employment Navigator was proposed to be co-located there. Due to Covid-19, unfortunately, this did not happen, and we looked for other co-location opportunities. Due to numerous lockdowns throughout the Covid 19 Pandemic, we eventually managed to secure a co-location with Wood Green Job Centre, during quarter 3 of the project. We were hoping to also arrange this at Tottenham Job Centre, but unfortunately this did not materialise. We did however receive 3 direct referrals from being co-located at the Job Centre.

The main barrier to this project was Covid-19 and the fear around this meant that service users may not have been ready to pursue these goals at the time. Some mothers whose children were attending school, were being sent home due to outbreaks of Covid in their classes, which added to a very uncertain period. The impact of Covid-19 Pandemic changed how we were able to support to our service users and we were mostly working remotely. We had to adapt and change how we delivered the service. We were able to offer a combination of remote sessions via telephone and zoom and when service users requested face to face support, we were able to offer this, whilst maintaining safety for both service users and staff. This meant our service users were provided with consistent support. Although we received more referrals than Job Centre Plus confirmed as starts, these numbers were not always included, as they were either not in receipt of benefits, or did not have a national insurance number.

The barriers for women were mainly around IT, with not having wi-fi access or devices. A lot of service users were using their mobiles to access workshops, and some were not sure how to set up zoom. The same rapport and trust that existed with face-to-face support was difficult to achieve with telephone or video support and for the women who attended group work via zoom, may not have the same experience as those attending groupwork in person.

Initially the Employment Navigator offered workshops on a weekly basis, and we decided to move these to fortnightly, as we found service users preferred their 1:1 support session and some workshops had low attendance rates. We had planned to include managing finances, maintaining employment, housing options and IT skills in workshops, but decided to provide support in 1:1 session, as service users had individual support needs and were at various stages of their journey.

Particularly for the Peer Mentoring strand, there were many challenges in setting up this project which made it harder to meet the target of supporting 30 women. By the time, all 6 peer mentors were recruited it was already May 2021. Some of the Peer Mentors who had the training via Zoom highlighted that the sound using a microphone, made it harder to focus on Zoom and said they would have preferred it in person.

Another barrier was that the budget allocated to this strand of the project meant 6 Peer Mentors could only be employed for one hour per week. This hour included admin, attending team meetings and 1:1 supervision, and they could only provide 3 sessions per month. Extra funding was available at the end of Q2, and it was then possible to offer weekly sessions. As the budget was limited, Peer Mentors were provided with a handset, on a pay as you go basis. Towards the end of the project, some service users would have liked additional sessions and were sad the project was ending and felt they could have benefited from a few more sessions.

Our Peer Mentoring Navigator handed in her notice and left in December, fortunately one of the Peer Mentors applied and was recruited under a short-term contract. In quarter 3 the contract was extended to end of March 2022, discussions with staff were held as they were on fixed term contracts. However, the Employment Navigator decided not to extend her contract and decided to leave the project as her original contract end date was the 01.03.22.

Although we did not fully meet the contractual targets of the Project, we have made a difference to every woman we have supported by enabling them to gain confidence and life skills necessary for exploring employment and education and training opportunities in the future.

The Employment Project Funding provided by Job Centre Plus and LB Haringey has enhanced and improved the beneficiaries lives by supporting them through work readiness with an aim of getting into employment. The support was delivered through a combination of 1:1 support sessions, workshops, and Peer mentoring.

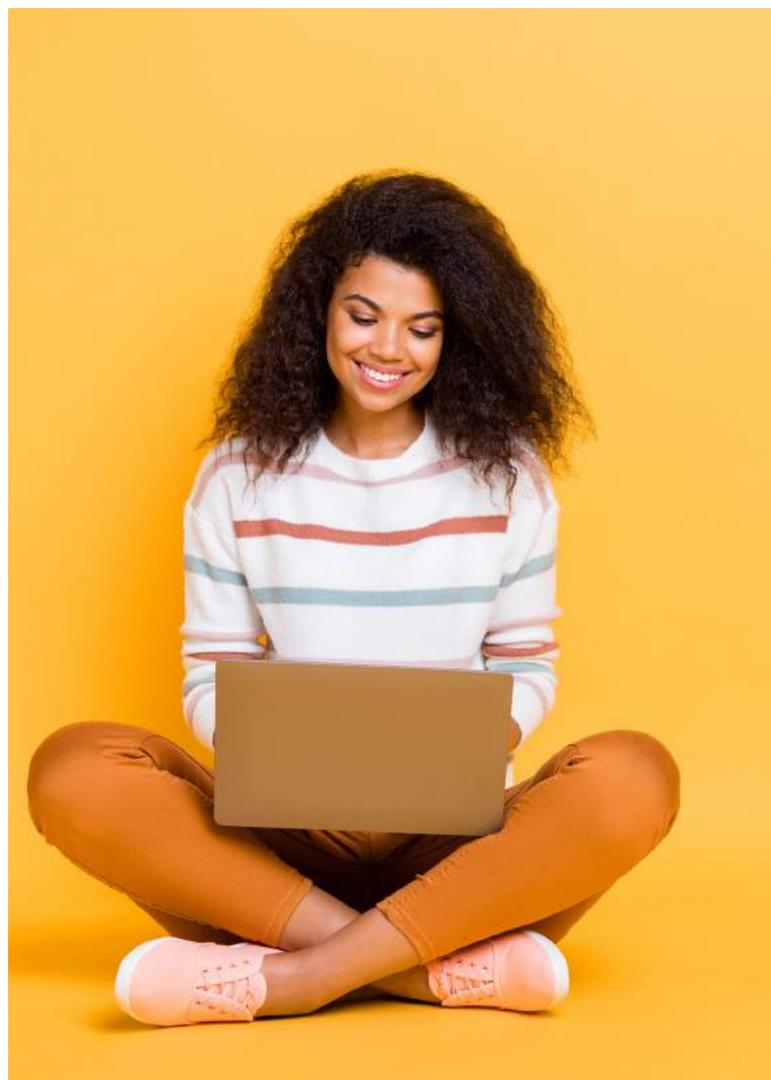
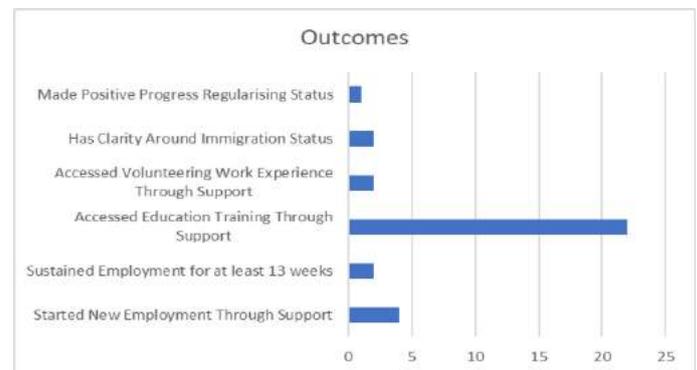
The aims and targets for the project were for 70 women to be engaged, with at least 15 women supported into employment and sustained for at least 13 weeks. The Employment Navigator would support all 70 women, with 30 additionally being supported by 6 Peer Mentors. Women with No Recourse to Public Funds were to be supported to enable them access to employment opportunities. The service users engaged in the programme wanted to feel less isolated, re-build their confidence, learn new skills, and get into paid employment, volunteering, and education/training. As a result of the direct support received through delivery of the Project,

- 4 service users commenced employment
- 2 sustained employment over 13 weeks (as of 28.02.22).
- 22 service users accessed Education/Training
- 2 accessed voluntary work experience.
- 2 service users now have more clarity around immigration status,
- 1 has made positive progress by securing her immigration status

Although not all service users were ready to move into employment immediately, through the support provided they now have the tools to prepare for

work, education, or training to improve their prospects of achieving this in the future. Many service users felt that the programme improved their confidence and self-esteem.

The outcomes for the project are indicated in the table below:



The project was due to commence in January 2021 but there was no leeway to include the mobilisation of the service including staff recruitment, and promotion of the service. There were severe delays in recruitment due to unforeseeable circumstances and there was no allowance for this. Particularly for the Peer Mentoring strand, by the time, all 6 peer mentors were recruited it was already May 2021.

We promoted the service by creating new leaflets and forms, through our Communications Team which we circulated to all our partner agencies. We found that the Peer Mentor strand budget was insufficient for the 6 Peer Mentors, and it may have been more beneficial to employ less Peer Mentors for half a day a week rather than 1 hour. This would have given them more time to support more service users for longer periods where necessary, having time for admin, to attend supervision, team meetings and bond as a team. Training costs were not factored into the budget, and this would have greatly assisted the Peer Mentors with their travel costs. Some of them were ending up with little of the hourly wage left after these expenses. An alternative to employing Peer Mentors would have been to recruit Volunteer Peer Mentors, as they would have been able to claim travel and lunch and work extra hours as and when necessary.

Initially our focus was to deliver workshops once a week however as women were not attending these due to various reasons, we then prioritised delivering these in 1:1 sessions. There also may have been a reluctance to attend the workshops online rather than attending these in person.

If there had been more time allocated for both the Employment Navigator and Peer Mentors, then they could have provided a balance of workshops and 1:1 support to meet the individual needs of the service users.

Staff had fixed term contracts that were due to end on the 1st of March, and we were notified that there a possibility of a contract extension towards the end of Quarter 3. In hindsight it would have been useful to have these discussions earlier on to retain staff and enable us to have more time to operate the service and support service users.





solace

Solace Women's Aid
United House
39-41 North Road
London
N7 9DP

Website | www.solacewomensaid.org
Twitter | @SolaceWomensAid
Facebook | /SolaceWomensAid

Media contacts: media@solacewomensaid.org

Fundraising contacts:
fundraising@solacewomensaid.org

Solace Women's Aid is a charity
registered in England and Wales
Charity number 1082450.
Company number 3376716