

HERE

WE

ARE



At COB, we work online (and - in some cities - in person), building a nationwide network of people supporting refugee rights. This also means we can stay with people seeking asylum as they are dispersed around the country by the Home Office.

This makes COB one of the only services in the UK that stands alongside people throughout their journey: from arriving in the UK to being granted refugee status (and beyond), offering stability and friendship during a tumultuous time.

# THIS IS OUR 2025 IMPACT REPORT.

YOU CAN READ A SUMMARY OF IT AT THE END. HOWEVER, WE RECOMMEND YOU READ THE REST. IT'S EXCITING (PROMISE).

## 1. WHAT'S NEW IN 2025?

a. SAFE HOMES (PG. 3-6)

b. GLOBAL LANGUAGE HUB (PG.7-8)

2. BRIDGE (PG. 9-10)

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8. DIGITAL SKILLS (PG. 18)

9. MESSAGES OF WELCOME (PG. 19-22)

10. THEORY OF CHANGE (PG. 23-24)

11. THANK YOUS (PG. 25-26)

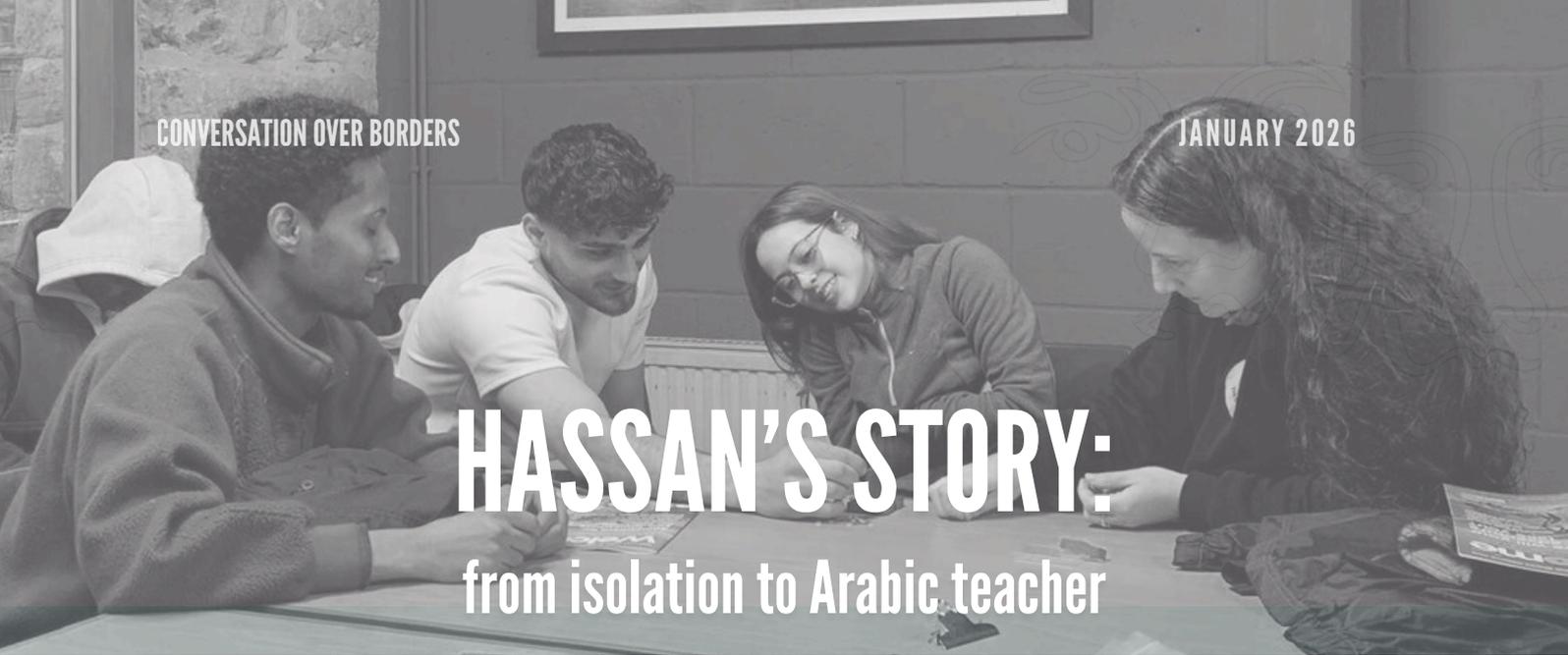
12. SUMMARY (PG. 27-28)

#MessagesOfWelcome

We are very happy to see you have arrived safely. I hope you have everything you need. I know it must be hard leaving home behind, but I hope we can make this your new home. I look forward to you finding all your new favourite things: your favourite foods, your favourite walks, your favourite bench to sit and think. I hope you make many new friends. You've had a long journey. Be kind to yourself and remember everything takes time.

@conversationoverborders





# HASSAN'S STORY:

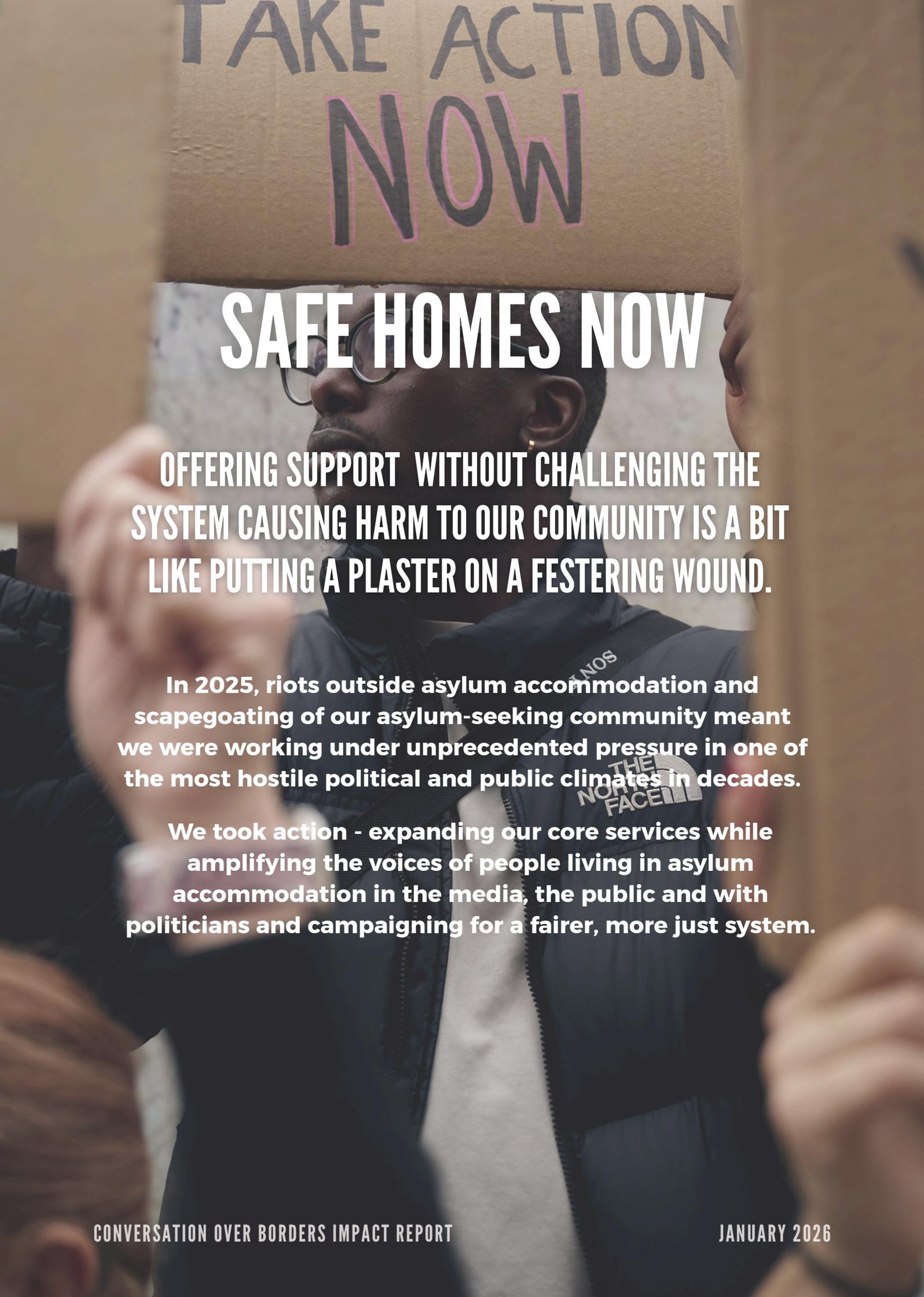
## from isolation to Arabic teacher

Hassan came to the UK **alone at 17**. Separated from family and friends, he faced huge challenges, and was referred to Conversation Over Borders at crisis point. With our support - therapy in Arabic, youth peer support groups, digital inclusion and English lessons - he began to regain his confidence.

A laptop provided through our **Digital Inclusion Project** helped him join English classes online with our **BRIDGE Project**, connect with his mentor Ellie, and get back into college. He joined our **Young Person's peer support group**, where he made friends and his confidence grew.

**"COB helps because you listen to people and learn things you didn't know about different peoples' countries. I want to make friends and talk with people like they are family and learn things. Before, I didn't feel confident when I talk to people, but now it is getting better."**

Now 19, Hassan is thriving. After completing COB's teacher training programme, he **volunteers as an English mentor**, helping other young refugees find their feet, and **teaches a beginners' Arabic course** through COB's new **Global Language Hub** - sharing his skills, earning his first income in the UK and taking another exciting step towards independence.

A person is holding a large cardboard sign that reads "TAKE ACTION NOW". The word "NOW" is written in a larger, pink-outlined font. The person is wearing glasses and a dark jacket. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and signs, suggesting a protest or demonstration.

TAKE ACTION  
NOW

# SAFE HOMES NOW

**OFFERING SUPPORT WITHOUT CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM CAUSING HARM TO OUR COMMUNITY IS A BIT LIKE PUTTING A PLASTER ON A FESTERING WOUND.**

**In 2025, riots outside asylum accommodation and scapegoating of our asylum-seeking community meant we were working under unprecedented pressure in one of the most hostile political and public climates in decades.**

**We took action - expanding our core services while amplifying the voices of people living in asylum accommodation in the media, the public and with politicians and campaigning for a fairer, more just system.**



# SAFE HOMES NOW

**There is a lot of misinformation about the real conditions in ‘hotels’ housing people seeking asylum.**

With our partners at **Ben & Jerry’s**, we built a replica of a **real asylum hotel room** in central London in November, co-designed by our Action Group based on their experiences. Real testimonies and the sound of the riots played over speakers, while members of the public were invited to experience the ‘No Escape Room’ for themselves. The Room will be touring in 2026 - keep your eyes peeled.

Following the stunt, almost all of the MPs in the UK (**634 out of 650**) were contacted by their constituents, **demanding safe homes** for people seeking asylum. Bell Ribiera-Addy MP put forward an Early Day Motion in Parliament in support of **our Action Group’s Safe Accommodation Checklist**, to highlight the urgent need for safer, more humane accommodation, **signed by 15 MPs**.





# SAFE HOMES NOW

**Our Safe Homes campaign advocates for improved asylum accommodation. Led by our Action Group - 35 people with lived experience of the asylum system - the campaign uses media work, political engagement, and public storytelling to shift narratives and mobilise change.**

## APRIL

**We published a report exposing the realities of life in the asylum 'hotels' and outlining three cost-saving solutions to the current broken accommodation system**



The image shows a screenshot of a text message conversation on a dark background. The messages are as follows:  
Sender: "Would you like to talk about the whole situation in this hotel" (09:52)  
Receiver: "We need to rise our voices" (09:52)  
Sender: "Things are not ok in here" (09:52)

## JUNE

**Over 13,250 members of the public and 62 organisations signed our open letter to the Home Secretary, calling for our solutions to be adopted and safe accommodation to be provided now**

## AUGUST

**Amidst more protests outside of initial accommodation hotels, our Action Group bravely spoke to the media - building a counternarrative by sharing their real experiences**

# SAFE HOMES NOW



## NOVEMBER

Our Action Group launched the 'Safe Accommodation Checklist' - a set of minimum standards to be applied across all future asylum accommodation, centring dignity and autonomy

In partnership with Ben & Jerry's, we installed the 'No Escape Room' in central London - inviting members of the public to experience life in the asylum 'hotels' themselves

Our lived experience Action Group members did more paid media and social media work - amplifying their voices to a wider audience

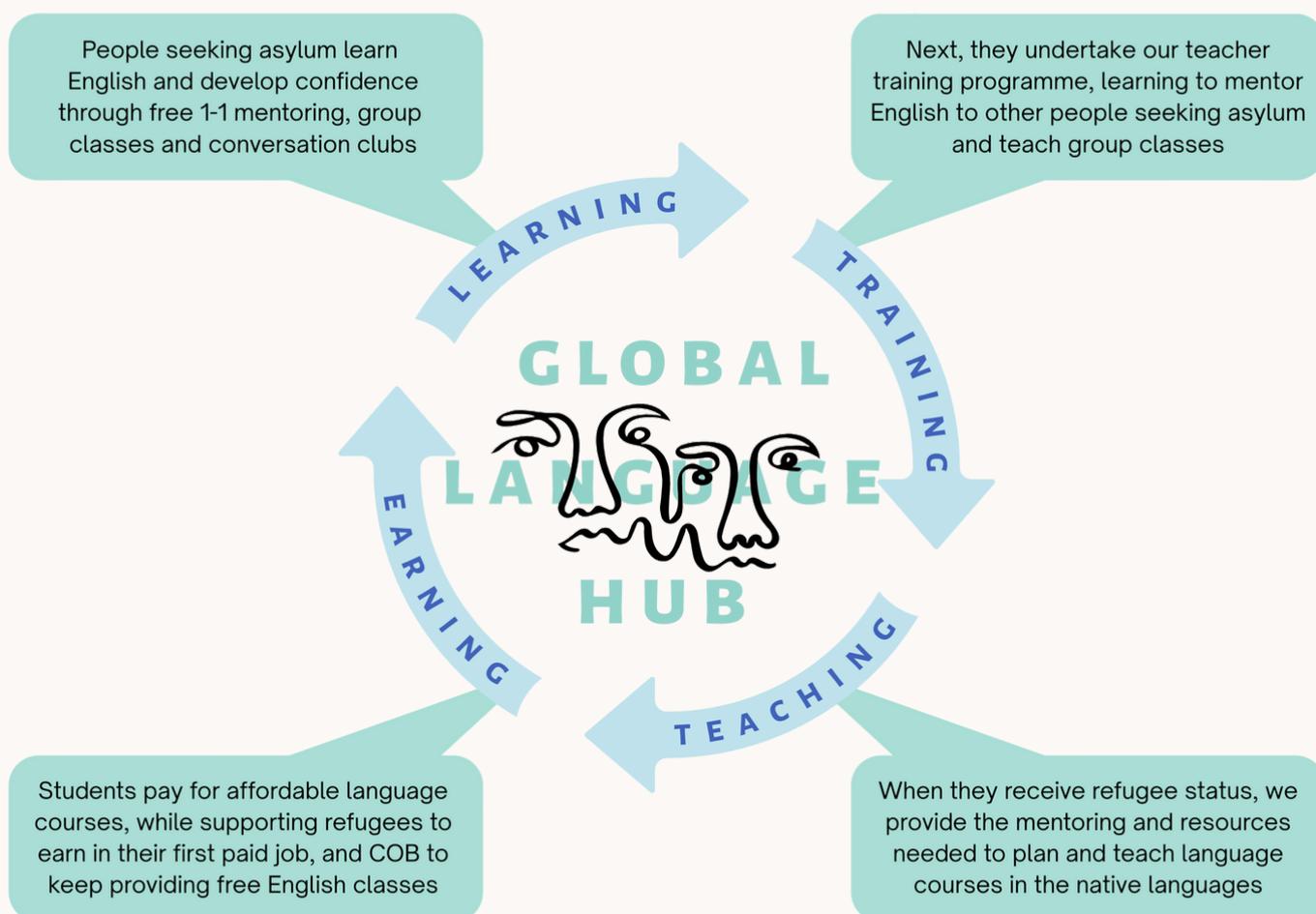
The Safe Accommodation Checklist was put forth in Parliament as an Early Day Motion signed by 15 MPs

## DECEMBER

634 MPs (out of 650!) were contacted by their constituents, asking them to stand with the Safe Accommodation Checklist in Parliament

# GLOBAL LANGUAGE HUB

Supporting refugee learners into paid teaching roles



**“I HAVE WANTED TO LEARN ARABIC FOR YEARS AND THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE HUB SEEMED LIKE THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO TRY.**

**I LOVE THAT COB HAS SUPPORTED CLIENTS TO BECOME TEACHERS OF THEIR OWN LANGUAGES AND IT IS SO REFRESHING TO SWITCH ROLES AND BE TAUGHT RATHER THAN TEACHING. THE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN AMAZING SO FAR!”**

# GLOBAL LANGUAGE HUB

Supporting refugee learners into paid teaching roles

**The Global Language Hub is a circular employment model that closes the loop from learning English to earning through language teaching.**

Refugees who have learnt English with us through BRIDGE are trained to teach their first languages in paid roles – creating pathways into work while rebalancing how language, knowledge and lived experience are valued within our communities and the wider public.

Students pay for affordable, refugee-led language courses, creating paid work for newly recognised refugees and directly funding our free English classes.

**In Autumn 2025, we piloted the Global Language Hub with two beginner Arabic courses to great success, and we'll be launching courses in more languages in Spring 2026.**

**"I STARTED VOLUNTEERING IN 2022 AS AN ENGLISH TUTOR AND I AM STILL FRIENDS WITH MY STUDENT FATIMA - IT'S BEEN A REALLY LOVELY WAY TO MEET A NEW FRIEND AND HELP THEM OUT.**

**AFTER OUR SESSIONS I DECIDED I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN SOME OF HER LANGUAGE AND AM NOW TAKING PART IN AN ARABIC CLASS MYSELF - THE TUTOR IS ENTHUSIASTIC AND REALLY HELPFUL. I THINK COB HELPS PEOPLE WHO MOVE HERE INTEGRATE BUT ALSO HELPS EDUCATE PEOPLE FROM HERE AND THAT'S A REALLY WONDERFUL THING."**



# BRIDGE

**Belonging, Resilience, Integration, Dignity, Growth, English**

**6000+**

**1-1 ENGLISH  
MENTORING CLASSES**

**100%**

**OF REFUGEE LEARNERS FELT  
MORE CONFIDENT SPEAKING  
ENGLISH AFTER 8 WEEKS**

**BRIDGE stands for  
Belonging, Resilience,  
Integration, Dignity, Growth  
and English.**

**It is a bridge between people  
in our communities who  
might otherwise  
never meet.**

**87%**

**OF ENGLISH MENTORS FELT BETTER  
ABLE TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
PEOPLE FROM BACKGROUNDS  
DIFFERENT TO THEIR OWN**



# BRIDGE

**Belonging, Resilience, Integration, Dignity, Growth, English**

**This year, we renamed our founding English & Befriending Project. Why? Because it has always offered more than English - and it was time to reflect that.**

For over five years, the project has **built lasting friendships** between people seeking asylum and local volunteers. It has supported people to **find work and housing**, improve their **mental health**, and navigate **life in the UK**. Above all, it enables people to take meaningful steps forward in their new lives, while nurturing a community that **looks beyond negative media and political rhetoric** about people seeking asylum to centre humans as humans.

Alongside **one-to-one mentoring**, learners take part in **group English courses** and informal **Conversation Clubs** - including spaces for LGBTQ+ people, women and non-binary people, and young people. These clubs offer **safe, welcoming environments** where participants can practise English, build confidence, and feel a sense of belonging.

**“MY MENTOR IS A VERY GOOD PERSON AND SHE ALWAYS TEACHES ME SOMETHING NEW. IF THERE IS SOMETHING I COULDN’T UNDERSTAND AT COLLEGE, SHE WAS THE ONE WHO EXPLAINED IT VERY EASILY.**

**I AM PROUD SOMETIMES BECAUSE IN COLLEGE THEY ASK ME ‘WHERE DID YOU LEARN THIS?’ AND I SAY ‘FROM MY CLASSES AT CONVERSATION OVER BORDERS.’”**

**"IRIS GROUP - CONVERSATION OVER BORDERS HELPED ME SO MUCH. I CAME TO THE IRIS GROUP FEELING DEPRESSED, LONELY, AND ASHAMED OF MYSELF, ESPECIALLY WHEN OTHER PEOPLE SPOKE BADLY ABOUT ME.**

**BUT NOW I FEEL FREE AND HAPPY. I FEEL COMFORTABLE AND CONFIDENT IN MY IDENTITY. I KNOW THAT I AM NOT ALONE, AND THAT ALL PEOPLE ARE EQUAL, EVEN THOUGH WE ARE DIFFERENT.**

**I NO LONGER FEEL LIKE A SHAMEFUL PERSON."**



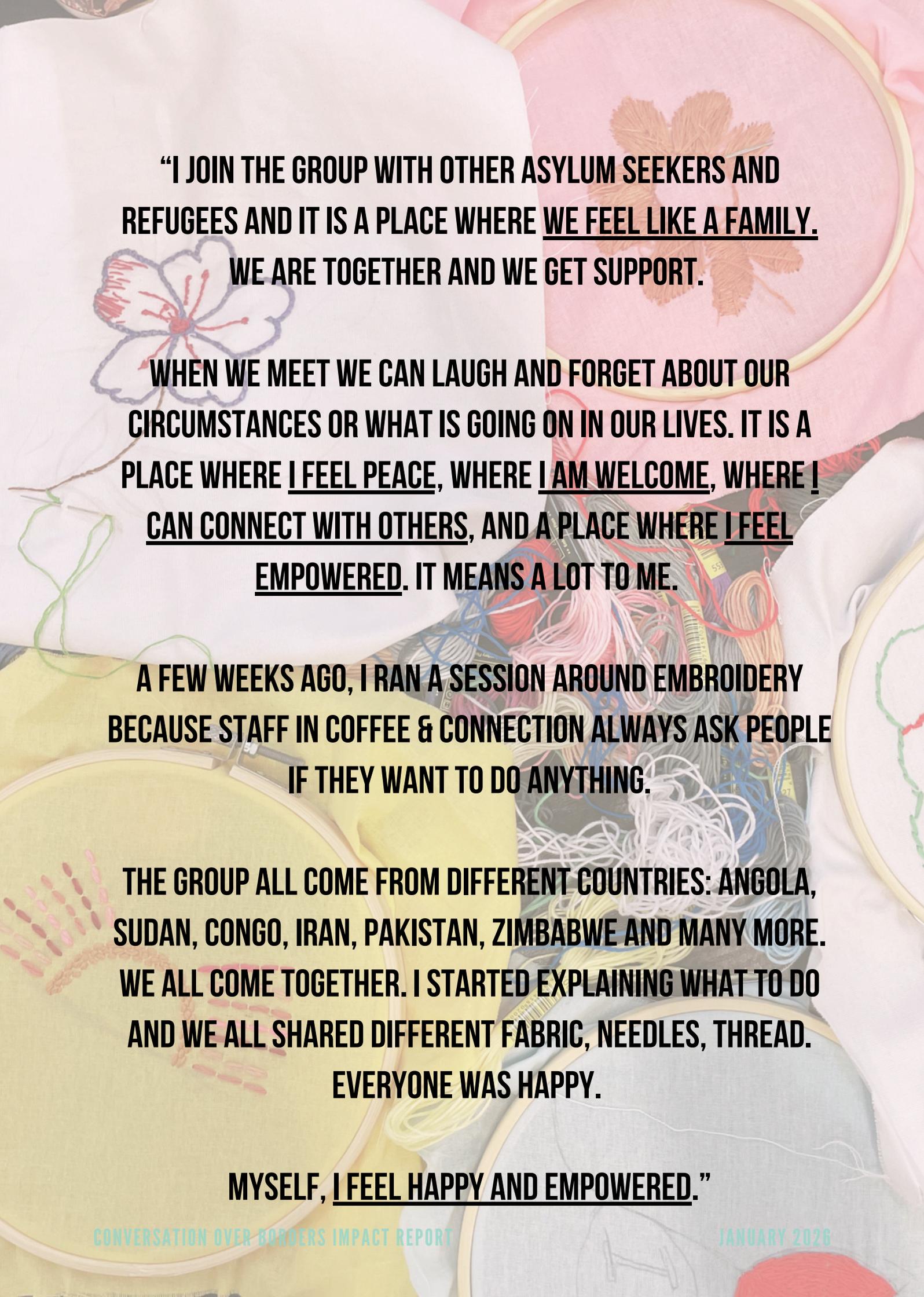


# IRIS: LGBTQ+ SUPPORT

IRIS exists because **LGBTQ+ people seeking asylum face heightened risks** that continue in the UK asylum system, including **harassment, discrimination and violence** in shared accommodation.

LGBTQ+ asylum seekers are frequently **forced to hide who they are** to avoid abuse, while also **trying to prove their identity** to the Home Office, placing them in an impossible bind.

In 2025, **174 LGBTQ+ clients** accessed online and in-person peer support groups and trauma-informed therapy through IRIS - providing a safe, affirming space where people can connect with others who understand their experiences, reduce isolation, and begin to **build a sense of safety and belonging**.



**“I JOIN THE GROUP WITH OTHER ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES AND IT IS A PLACE WHERE WE FEEL LIKE A FAMILY. WE ARE TOGETHER AND WE GET SUPPORT.**

**WHEN WE MEET WE CAN LAUGH AND FORGET ABOUT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES OR WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR LIVES. IT IS A PLACE WHERE I FEEL PEACE, WHERE I AM WELCOME, WHERE I CAN CONNECT WITH OTHERS, AND A PLACE WHERE I FEEL EMPOWERED. IT MEANS A LOT TO ME.**

**A FEW WEEKS AGO, I RAN A SESSION AROUND EMBROIDERY BECAUSE STAFF IN COFFEE & CONNECTION ALWAYS ASK PEOPLE IF THEY WANT TO DO ANYTHING.**

**THE GROUP ALL COME FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES: ANGOLA, SUDAN, CONGO, IRAN, PAKISTAN, ZIMBABWE AND MANY MORE. WE ALL COME TOGETHER. I STARTED EXPLAINING WHAT TO DO AND WE ALL SHARED DIFFERENT FABRIC, NEEDLES, THREAD. EVERYONE WAS HAPPY.**

**MYSELF, I FEEL HAPPY AND EMPOWERED.”**



# COFFEE & CONNECTION

Research shows that many women seeking asylum face heightened **cultural and religious barriers, financial exclusion** and **caregiving responsibilities**, restricting their ability to learn English, make friends and settle in the UK.

Coffee & Connection offers a **safe, welcoming space** for women and non-binary people in Manchester, alongside an **online Conversation Club for practising English**.

The peer-led support groups give participants the chance to **socialise, ease isolation**, receive **information about housing and healthcare**, receive toiletries and sanitary products to **reduce period poverty**, and express themselves **creatively**, while accessing **childcare** and **bus passes** - reducing the barriers that isolate them and forming a supportive community around them.

44

women attended the groups (+ their children!)

100%

of women experienced reduced isolation as a result of the group

97%

felt happier after attending the group



# YOUNG PERSON'S PROJECT

Navigating the asylum system as a young person can be really daunting. Sometimes, a lot of support can be **withdrawn** or **changed** when a young person seeking asylum turns 18.

Any young people who join our service have access to **uncapped support, for as long as they need.**

Our Young Person's Project supports refugees and asylum seekers aged 16-21 to **build confidence, language, and social connections.** Through English classes and peer support groups, young people develop the skills they need to rejoin **education, make friends, learn about life in the UK** and **move forward** with their new lives.

Our leadership pathways support our young people into **becoming leaders of the group space**, delivering their own topics.

41

young people  
attended our peer  
support groups

91%

experienced  
reduced isolation as  
a result

100%

enjoyed the groups



# FARSI SERVICE

**At COB, we follow the demands of our community.**

We have always had a strong identified need for more support in Farsi - which led to the development of our Farsi service.

The service provides a **weekly support group** and **1-1 therapy in Farsi** to a consistent group of Afghan and Iranian people seeking asylum and refugees, offering **culturally appropriate care** in their own language. Participants also receive **translated resources** to help them navigate life in the UK, ensuring that support is accessible, safe, and meaningful.

The service is **designed and led by Dr Leila Delroba**: an experienced psychotherapist from Iran, who first joined Conversation Over Borders as a learner in 2020. In 2025, the support group was accessed **296 times** and we provided **187 1-1 therapy sessions in Farsi**.

46

Iranians and Afghans accessed the service consistently in 2025

296

total attendance at the groups

187

trauma-informed therapy sessions in Farsi

# DIGITAL INCLUSION

We connect people seeking asylum to the online world by providing refurbished laptops, phones, SIM cards, and internet boxes.

160

PEOPLE PROVIDED WITH TECH  
TO GET THEM ONLINE

85%

SAID THE DEVICE MADE  
ACCESSING EDUCATION EASIER

79%

SAID THE DEVICE ALLOWED THEM  
TO ACCESS OTHER SERVICES  
MORE EASILY

Access to the online world is fundamental so that people can join online learning, access key services like the GP, stay in touch with loved ones, find work and participate fully in everyday life.

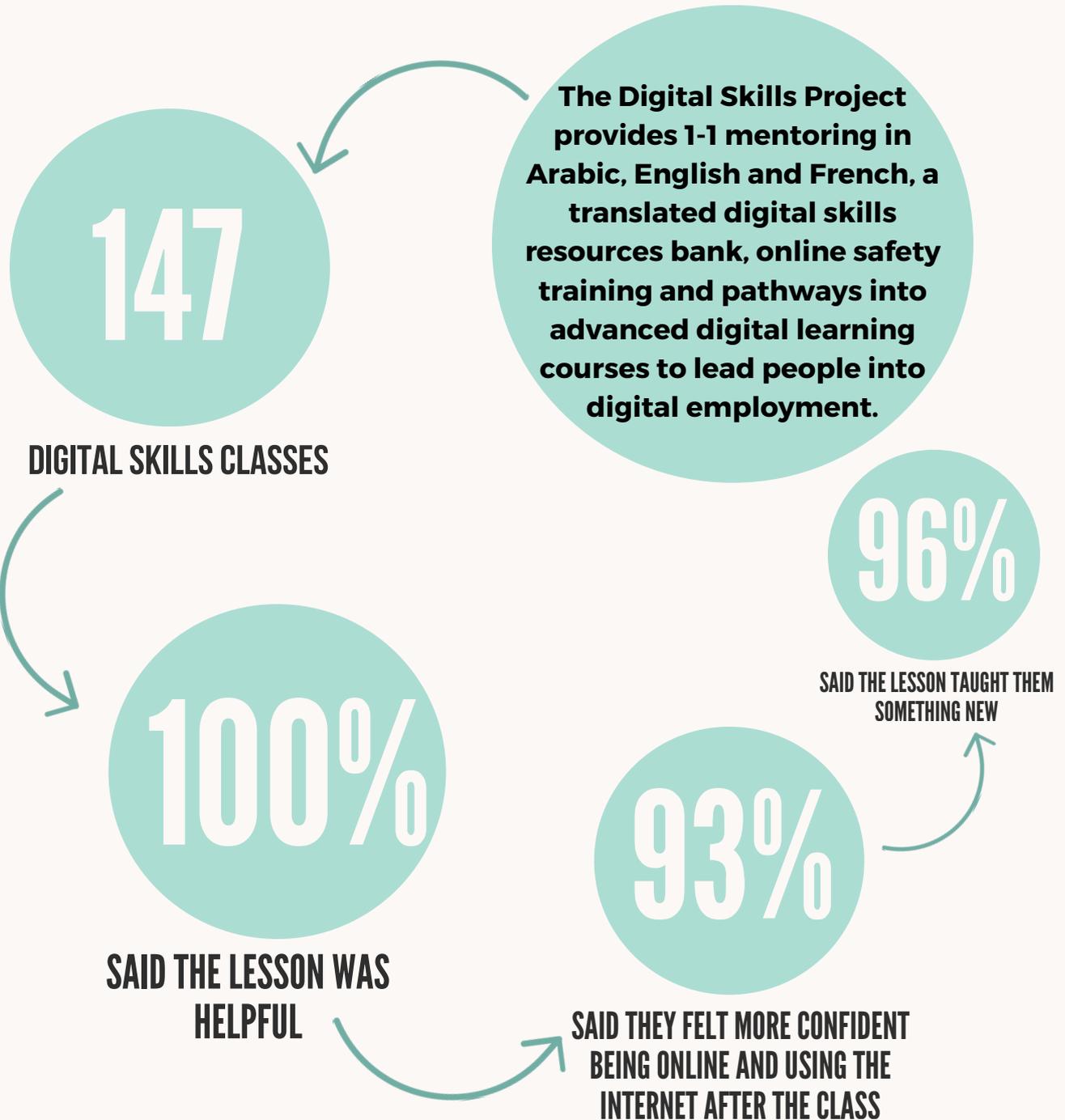
88%

SAID THE DEVICE HELPED THEM FEEL  
MORE SOCIALLY CONNECTED

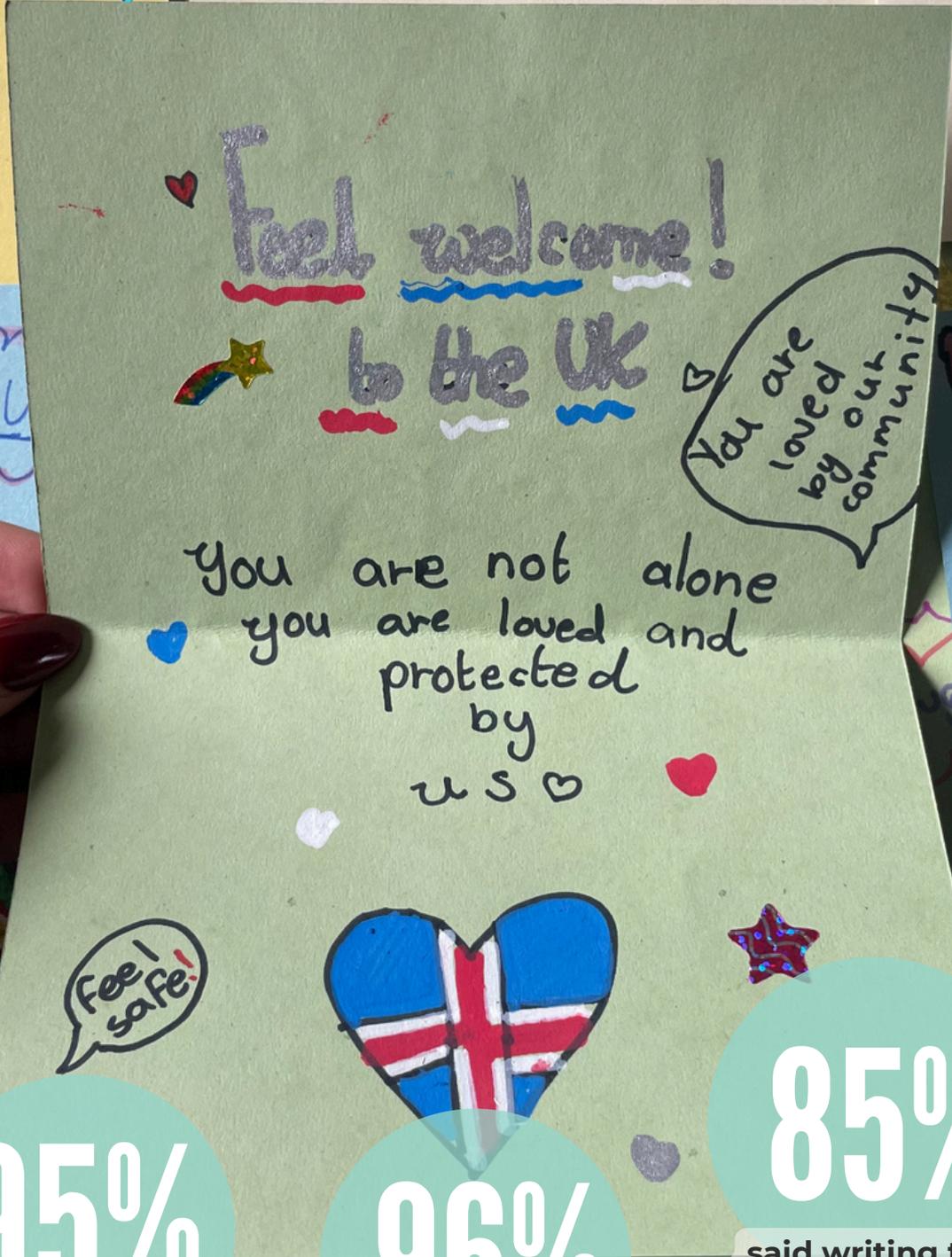
# DIGITAL SKILLS



**A three stage digital skills programme, from basic to advanced, delivered in partnership with iDEA Foundation.**



# MESSAGES OF WELCOME



**95%**  
of students enjoyed the workshops

**96%**  
said they learnt more about the asylum system

**85%**  
said writing the messages made them think about the importance of welcoming someone new to the UK



# ABOU BAKR'S STORY:

from learning English to speaking in schools

When Abou Bakr first joined our **BRIDGE Project** in 2023, he was 21 and feeling very alone. We provided **wellbeing support, peer group support, a laptop and SIM card** through our Digital Inclusion Project, and **weekly 1-1 English classes** with a mentor who became a friend.

Despite being moved by the Home Office to three different cities in under a year, Abou knew he had one place that never changed: **the Conversation Over Borders community.**

Abou has always been passionate about IT, so he **joined our Digital Inclusion Team as a trainee techie**, learning to refurbish donated laptops for other learners and providing **1-1 Digital Skills mentoring** in French.

After receiving refugee status, he stepped straight into **paid work** with us, **training as a lived experience speaker** and **sharing his story with schoolchildren across the country** through our **Messages of Welcome project**, helping other young people understand the realities of the asylum system.

...lymeria...  
k is the best  
I hope you  
welcome. our  
is your...  
free and safe.  
be your journey

You need to know that it does ~~not~~  
~~where~~ ~~or~~ ~~what~~ have you done!  
Remember you are loved and under  
God's love, care is infinite for you  
Read this whenever you feel sad  
God bless you! ❤️  
Some is...  
you are WELCOMED  
here ❤️

# MESSAGES OF WELCOME

Wasn't  
wish you

welcome  
to  
UK

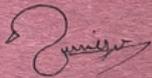
all GLAD,  
UK! I hope you  
while your  
onna be hard  
new world  
now, there a  
bout you. And you may

we see you

Welcome to the UKs. ❤️ 

we would like to reassure and let you know that you, your family and your friends have been recognised for enduring many unimanagerable challenges by leaving behind your homes and loved ones, **not** out of choice but out of necessity. The journey you are on is not an easy one, as you will feel pain, fear, loss and uncertainty which can feel overwhelming. But just know this - **you are not alone.**

I see you and your community and the other refugees, I and my community will welcome you with warm embraces so you will know that we welcome you into our nation, and you and your community will always be supported.



PS:  
PPS:  
ANISTAN  
UK  
YOU  
me on  
Citizen. I  
ed in  
❤️  
RMINE

stay  
strong ❤️  
- Marwa

Welcome!  
I am happy you are here, I  
Wish you the best in  
this country! Hopefully, you



# MESSAGES OF WELCOME

Our Messages of Welcome project builds a culture of welcome by **educating young people about the UK asylum system** and encouraging the public to write **messages of solidarity** to people newly arrived in the UK.

The project began as a public campaign in response to the August 2024 race riots, mobilising communities to stand against hate. Since then, we have collected and delivered thousands of **messages of hope** to people seeking asylum in almost every UK city where asylum accommodation is provided.

In 2025, we expanded the project to focus on the next generation. Trained **speakers with lived experience** from the Conversation Over Borders community delivered **Messages of Welcome workshops** in schools and universities across the UK. Through **sharing their own stories and demystifying the asylum system**, they supported young people to write their own messages of welcome, helping to nurture a more **informed, compassionate and welcoming generation. In 2025, 253 students** took part in the workshops.





# WHAT'S OUR

## Problems

Communities of people from different countries living in the UK have few opportunities to meet and connect with and support each other, leading to a lack of understanding and social cohesion

People who have been displaced or trafficked to the UK struggle to access essential services due to language barriers and digital exclusion, leading to increased risk of mental health, inequality of opportunity and economic inequity

People who migrate to this country are dehumanised in the mainstream media narrative to act as a scapegoat for political failings, leading to discrimination and social isolation and loneliness

## Stakeholders

**Forcibly displaced people**

**General public**

Our values

Volunteers

Platforms

## Activities

### Digital inclusion

We provide digital devices, internet data and digital literacy support

### The Wellbeing Project

We provide religious, cultural and linguistically relevant 1-1 counselling, peer wellbeing support groups and practical support

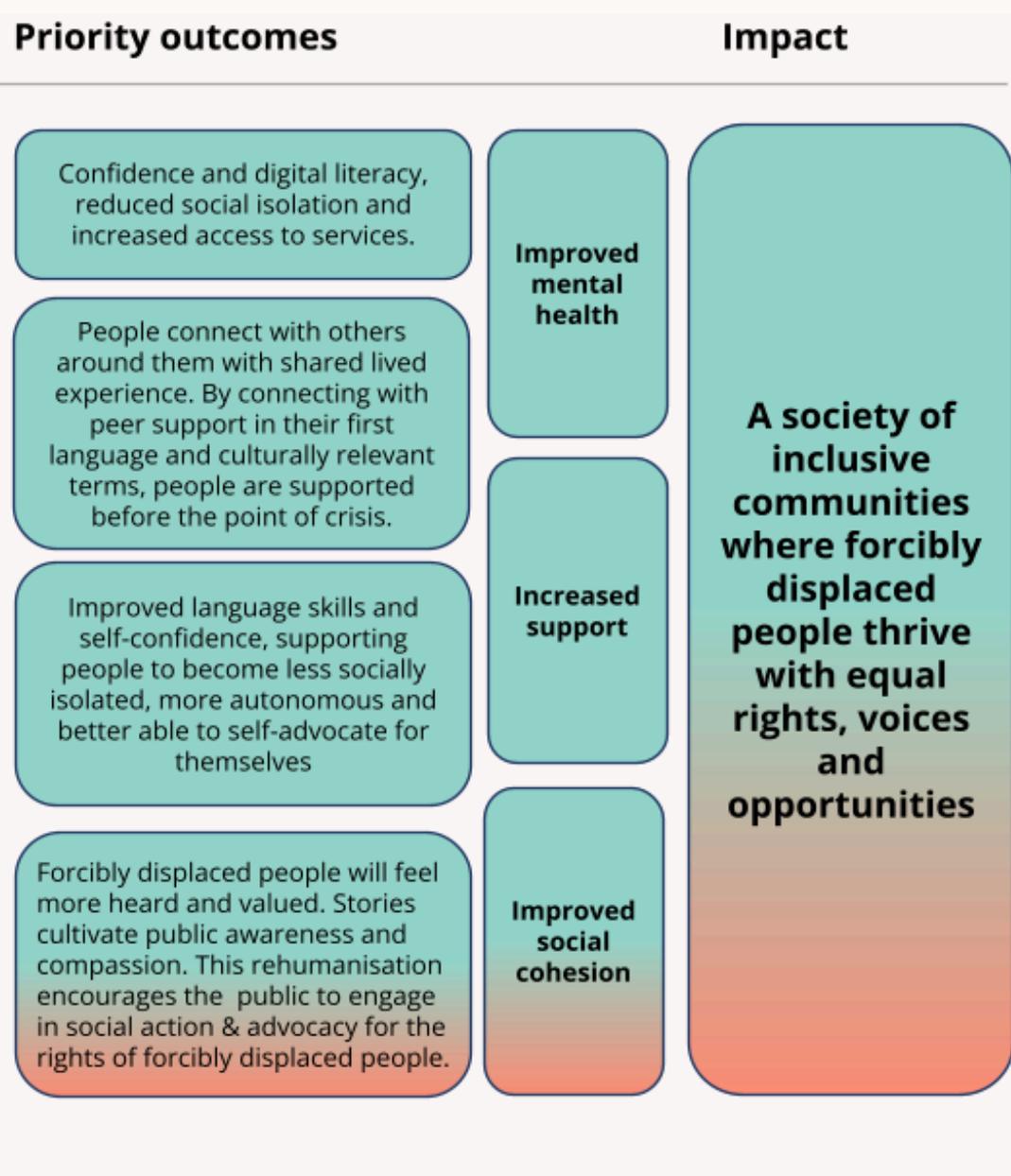
### English & Befriending

We connect people who have been forcibly displaced with people in the communities around them through free one-to-one English Conversation Classes.

### Platforming & campaigning

We provide support and platforms to help forcibly displaced people formulate, process and share their experiences and stories through storytelling

# METHOD?



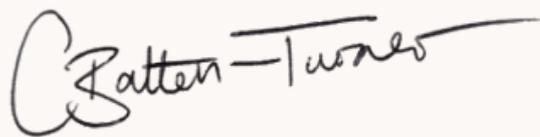
# THANK YOU

To everyone in the COB family - volunteers, learners, group participants, coordinators, staff, Directors, Advisors, campaigners, activists, donors, partners, supporters, friends - thank you.

This work would not be possible without the energy and contributions of every one of you; showing up despite the hostility we see in the media, amongst politicians and increasingly, in our communities. Your efforts to build a fairer UK are more important now than ever.

Here's to peace and progress in 2026.

With love and solidarity,



CEO, Conversation Over Borders



# THANK YOU



THE BLUE MOON TRUST



SOMOS



THE SOCIAL SOCIETY



# 2025 IN SUMMARY

In 2025, Conversation Over Borders continued to build a nationwide community rooted in justice and connection, through our work supporting language, wellbeing, digital inclusion and lived experience advocacy.

The [BRIDGE Project](#) provided one-to-one English mentoring, group English classes, and specialist Conversation Clubs where LGBTQ+ people, women and non-binary people, and young people could practice English informally. This year we launched the [Global Language Hub](#), a refugee-led programme that trains multilingual refugees to teach their first languages, creating their first paid employment after receiving status. This closes the gap in our language learning provision - leading people all the way from learners to teachers, and valuing the multilingual skills of people who settle here in the UK.

The [Digital Inclusion](#) programme distributed refurbished laptops, phones, SIMs, and internet boxes. Our accompanying [Digital Skills](#) programme offered one-to-one digital skills mentoring in English, Arabic, and French, alongside translated online safety resources, online healthcare workshops and a digital literacy bank. We supported hundred of people seeking asylum to get online, opening doors to college, employment and key services such as the NHS.

The [Coffee & Connection](#) project provided a safe, creative space for peer support with childcare for women and non-binary people in Manchester. [IRIS, our LGBTQ+ service](#), supported 174 clients through in-person and online peer groups and trauma-informed therapy, both online and in-person in Brighton.

The [Farsi Wellbeing project](#) provided weekly online support groups, meet ups and trauma therapy for Afghan and Iranian asylum seekers, with translated resources and workshops. The [Young Person's Project](#) supported people seeking asylum aged 16-21 through a peer support group, young person's group English class and the opportunity to engage in mindful, nature based activity in the Peak District.

# 2025 IN SUMMARY

[Messages of Welcome](#) collected public messages from across the UK, delivering them to refugees and asylum seekers, and ran [workshops](#) with lived experience speakers in schools and universities to help create a welcoming future generation.

Our [Safe Homes](#) campaign, led by 35 people with lived experience of the asylum system, advocated for fairer asylum accommodation. We published a groundbreaking report with [three cost-effective solutions to the broken asylum accommodation system](#), produced and circulated a 'Safer Accommodation Checklist' - a set of minimum standards to be applied across all future asylum accommodation - which reached every MP in the UK through a Write to Your MP campaign and resulted in an [Early Day Motion](#) being put forth in Parliament.

We exposed the realities of the UK asylum accommodation through [direct advocacy with national decision makers](#) and [public stunts](#) - building an asylum 'hotel' room in Central London with our partners at Ben & Jerry's, and asking the public to experience it for themselves.

We've [grown and developed](#) our core services while moving into [enterprise](#) and [advocacy](#) and stripping back where necessary to stay strong in the most challenging financial and political context for decades.

None of our work is possible without our team of hundreds of volunteers, people with lived experience of the asylum system, staff, supporters, funders and people engaging in our programmes.

Thank you all - and here's to more justice in 2026.

# ABOU BAKR'S MESSAGE

Welcome dear friend,  
Dear brother,  
Dear sister,  
Dear guest  
Although the journey of life has  
led you astray,  
In foreign countries you have  
wandered widely, seeking the comfort  
of the storm inside,  
Your hearts, inflamed by the pure light  
of hope,  
Guided you in the darkness of the  
night, until here,  
Take place,  
May love and laughter fill everyday  
The smile that spreads on your face  
is so sweet  
May our hospitality shine so strongly  
Gives you hope and brings your  
heart back to life.

#MessagesOfWelcome

