



The Clinical Context and Model at Baobab

The purpose of this document is to explain the clinical context and model of Baobab's work. This is a clinical document but it is relevant to all roles at Baobab (clinical, operational and casework).

The clinical context

Baobab works with young asylum seekers and refugees the majority of whom arrived in the UK as unaccompanied minors. All have experienced violence, loss and unplanned change in their home countries. Most have had difficult journeys to the UK with further experiences of abuse from State and non-State actors. As a result of such experiences, all the young people Baobab supports experience mental health difficulties.

Additionally, all the young people in Baobab's community experience significant difficulties in the UK in accessing high quality care, destitution support, housing, education, adequate health care and asylum. Many of our young community members' mental health and development is further negatively impacted by the UK asylum process, for instance through wrong age assessments at port, long waiting times for Home Office responses or insensitive Home Office interviews. Many in our community have their initial applications refused, leading to years of waiting in a state of profound uncertainty and instability about their future, with significant costs to their mental health and their development.

Most unaccompanied young asylum seekers suffer specific and particular vulnerabilities including the cluster of symptoms referred to as complex post-traumatic stress disorder. This is a consequence of the interaction of the impacts of their several overwhelming experiences, in their home countries, on their journeys into exile and in exile in the UK. Most also have significant strengths and resiliencies as well as the capacity to develop new resiliencies. Our aim as an organisation is to help them to acknowledge and to begin to work through their vulnerabilities to access old resiliencies that have been suppressed by their traumatic experiences.

Baobab supports our community members to develop new resiliencies and strengths through individual psychotherapeutic, developmental and ego supportive psychotherapeutic work. New resiliencies are also gained through participating as fully as they are able in the life of our transitional, non-residential therapeutic community and with life in the community beyond. It is part of our philosophy that key aspects of resilience develop via five key factors: Belonging, Reflection, Agency, Creativity and Community Membership. Our community aims to provide a variety of contexts where these aspects of resilience may develop and flourish.

The young people referred to our centre range in age from their early adolescence to their mid-to-late twenties. We offer open ended psychotherapy, always working towards enabling people to move towards independence. Most leave to develop independent lives, accessing higher education and work, networks of friends, finding partners and having children - building new families. Our community is diverse and composed of young people currently from twenty-nine different countries. Many have had no education due to war in their home countries or due to deprivation and poverty. We think that education is an essential resource and support the education endeavours of our community members. We offer volunteer support with individual English and Math tutoring, and support for many examinations (such as theoretical driving exam or "life in the UK" tests).

Our central aim as an organisation is to offer opportunities for both rehabilitation and justice and we do this in five key ways: 1) Individual Psychotherapy; 2) Group psychotherapy; 3) Practical case work support; 4) Participation in a variety of group-based arts, sports and educational activities; 5) Encouraging all young people to take part in the life of the Baobab Community, sharing and taking responsibilities and attending our regular community meetings and events.



Our aim is that slowly our young community members move from our transitional community to take part in the life of the community beyond where they can contribute to community life, work and learn and make new and significant relationships and feel free to be themselves.

Introduction To Our Models Of Work

As a non-residential therapeutic community, we expect all staff and volunteers to participate in the development of meaningful relationships and social learning, constructing a holistic therapeutic environment where all relationships with all members of the community matter. We offer multidisciplinary, holistic and integrated support. We are a reflective community and seek to prioritise space for reflection and discussion about each member of our community.

Community Members

The young people in our community have all experienced child and adolescent specific human rights abuses, either directly or as witnesses to abuse suffered by others. As a consequence, our young community members are often mistrustful of others, both peers and adults, and take a long time to begin to be able to share their experiences. Their experiences of human rights abuses are linked with terror, guilt, shame, rage, anxieties and depression. In addition, sharing personal history and experiences can be linked to different cultural practices around family, trusted adults, respect for elders, etc. We seek to build a stable, long-term therapeutic alliance by supporting intercultural understanding and trust through time. Each young person after assessment is allocated an individual therapist, an individual caseworker, and an individual interpreter when needed, all of whom the young person will work with over time.

Clinical Models

We work with several different clinical models including thinking about individual child, adolescent and young adult centred psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic work; thinking about therapeutic group work; thinking about arts based (art, drama, music and storytelling) verbal and non-verbal work. At Baobab, it is essential for all staff to engage thoughtfully with the complexities of child and adolescent development, as well as the specific contexts from which young people have come to the UK and their experiences since arriving. In this context we have found ways of working rooted in the ideas of child and adolescent psychotherapy and developmental help to be especially fitting. This includes working indirectly and in displacement and spending time finding a language for feelings alongside memories and experiences that may seem for some while to be unthinkable and unspeakable.

Alongside individual psychotherapy young people at Baobab are encouraged to join a small group. We run both psychotherapy groups and activity-based groups and often make use of outings to build group connections, relationships and identities. We have found that a mixed model of group work is most effective, combining psychoanalytic, activity-based and psycho-social perspectives. Even if initially classical verbal interpretations can be experienced as intrusive, clarifications and explorations and interpretations in displacement are often acceptable and not rejected. Young people attending our centre will have had unthinkable and unspeakable experiences and non-verbal work, for instance through art and music, is very helpful for our population.

Multi-disciplinary working

At Baobab all young people are allocated an individual clinician and caseworker. As well as clinical support we provide practical and casework support. We support young people through the long and bureaucratic asylum system, often preparing detailed specialist clinical reports that meet the



requirements of the courts to support asylum claims. Our casework team, support our community members to access Local Authority Care, adequate housing, benefits, education and a GP. We work closely with specialist asylum solicitors and Barristers and we also work increasingly with Community Care, Housing and Public law specialists.

Multidisciplinary working is encouraged through weekly staff meetings and regular sharing of information between all members of the team. A weekly ops meeting reviews destitution support and safeguarding concerns, the senior leadership team discusses weekly issues around young people's situations and support, and clinicians and caseworkers have regular case reviews to share all information. Support is holistic and integrated.

Community

Alongside the therapeutic support of seeing an individual psychotherapist or being a member of a group at Baobab, the different individual relationships with the other adults in our community (clinicians, caseworkers, admin team, interpreters, volunteers, workshop facilitators, tutors, etc.) are therapeutic in nature. These relationships are part of our community support which has different degrees of formality, with monthly Community meetings at one end and chats about football over cups of tea in our reception at the other. The community meeting enables young people who have been forced to leave their home community to develop the capacity to trust, listen and explore ideas and disagreements in a safe context.

The External Context

Many young people have little understanding of the detail of the political and social context of their home countries that led to their having to leave their home and seek asylum in the UK, as well as the complexities of the UK social and asylum systems. The onus is on our staff to try to make sense of these different contexts first for ourselves and later for all our young people. This is not simply social support, but to offer key aspects of support sensitive to individual developmental needs. Individual plans are made as we aim to give all young people the experience of being treated as individuals and with respect and involvement from all our staff.

Working at Baobab

At Baobab, staff roles are demanding. Individuals are expected at times to act as advocates and to be closely involved with individual young people. The priority at Baobab is that for all decisions, at every level, the needs of our community members are central. We aim to recruit staff who are kind and generous, creative and flexible, resourceful and rigorous. We value our staff and volunteer team enormously and support them with clinical and managerial supervision. We also believe that despite the challenges of working in this context, being a part of Baobab's community is immensely rewarding work where you will meet some incredibly resilient, funny and thoughtful people.

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