

Building meaningful lived experience engagement: Lessons from a Solace & Migration Yorkshire collaboration

As an organisation supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds, we recognised the need to embed Lived Experience (LEX) engagement (in this case refugees and asylum seekers who have received services from Solace) into how we design and deliver our services. To make this happen, we partnered with Migration Yorkshire, whose role includes supporting inclusive practice across the region.

Migration Yorkshire supported a recently formed lived experience user group at Solace to review how welcome people feel when accessing Solace services. Our goal was to go beyond consultation and instead build a reflective space where service users could directly influence the organisation's work.



Rawand Ahmed
&
Pascale Gayford

This Wasn't A Quick Win

It involved co-developing group guidance and shared aims, inducting participants, and ensuring regular, confidential spaces for honest conversations. We created feedback loops with the management team at Solace and used real stories to influence internal policies—like expense reimbursement and communication protocols.

Staff capacity was a challenge. Like many in the sector, we lacked dedicated time and staff to consistently support this work. Recruiting and retaining participants, and ensuring their voices were heard between meetings, also took sustained effort.

The project reminded us that meaningful co-production doesn't happen by accident. It requires investment — in time, resources, relationships, and organisational will.

Acknowledge that funding is needed for the work and create an appropriate budget. If funding for the work isn't available, be realistic about what can be achieved but don't give up. Consider how much time can be dedicated to the work from existing budgets for example and set expectations that match the time available.

Look for what you can do and don't be daunted if you can only do some of what you want to do. Partner with other organisations and share expertise and resources. Offer induction and support for participants. Be clear about what people can influence—and follow through. Most importantly, embed inclusion work into your wider organisational strategy so it's not seen as optional, but as essential.

At Solace we set up an anti-discrimination and inclusion sub group which is chaired by a trustee and which is made up of staff, volunteers and a member of Migration Yorkshire staff has been part of this sub committee for the last two years. The aim of the committee is to support the growth of anti-discrimination and inclusion across all areas of Solace's work.

Collaboration across the sector is key. We need to share learning, pool resources, and support each other to build approaches to LEX engagement that are sustainable, representative, and genuinely transformative.



Solace would like to thank Migration Yorkshire for their support with this work!

www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk