

Seeking asylum and mental health—a practical guide for professionals edited by Chris Maloney, Julia Nelki and Alison Summers

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Seeking Asylum and Mental Health – A practical Guide for Professionals

Seeking Asylum and Mental Health Opens with a powerful forward from Dr Waheed Arian - Afghani refugee who sought refuge at the age of 15. His testimony sets the tone for the piece, in which it aims to be rooted within the experience of those that have been forced to flee their home and are attempting to navigate the asylum process. The title establishes its role to be a practical guide for professionals, and whilst it provides an eloquent and robust exploration of the asylum process, in terms of a practical guide it could have benefitted from conclusions at the end of each chapter offering suggestions for practice directly taken from that chapter. The text is interspersed with the testimonies of asylum seekers, refugees and practitioners which make powerful statements. It does feel like a missed opportunity, as acknowledged within the opening statement, that none of the authors have lived experience of seeking asylum.

Chapter one begins with an overview of why a person may seek asylum, providing a comprehensive and empathetic overview. Whilst practitioners may already be versed with the structures within the system it is a helpful reminder and possibly an introduction to training and education in this area as, in general, it is woefully underfunded and under provided. Chapters two to nine then follow a chronological journey from seeking asylum, life within the UK system, the possible reasons why asylum seekers may need mental health support, their ability to access it, how it is assessed, the nuances of interpretation, formulation, diagnosis, and intervention. This narrative approach offers practitioners the opportunity to see the knock-on effects of how disruption and difficulty at any (or all) of these steps can have a major impact on the service user and their ability to have a productive and helpful relationship with services. The next four chapters move into more specialist areas and then the concluding chapter summaries offers a hopeful angle on working with refugees and asylum seekers. A psychiatrist opens the final chapter with her story of creating a project where families had access to an allotment as well as therapy and the incredibly positive outcomes this produced. Not

only for service users but for her as a practitioner as well, adding a positive outlook in what can often seem an entirely bleak system.

The book does not shy away from discussing the difficulty of working within a refugee system that at times (particularly recently) appears hopeless for those seeking asylum and difficult for mental health practitioners to offer support. However, at the same time it shares positive and inspirational stories, definitive suggestions of interventions, such as: medication, therapy and safety planning. It is important to note that this book is written for generic mental health practitioners and there is no one on the author list who is listed as a Social Worker, and so there is less of a biopsychosocial focus than other works designed specifically with social work values at the heart, however, this book could in no way be described as traditionally “medically model” focused. The authors range in background and bring a wealth of holistic knowledge to this piece of work. It includes important lessons, challenges and discussions that are relevant to all backgrounds who work with asylum seekers and refugees.