



# Creating a human rights support solution with Room to Heal

July 2021 – July 2022

## 1. Context

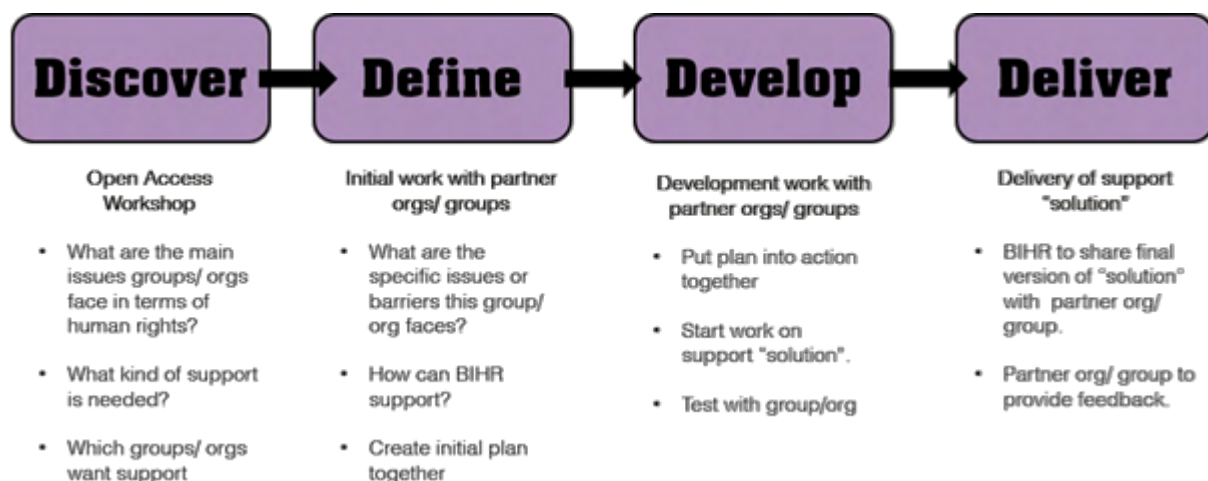
The British Institute of Human Rights is a small, independent charity working UK-wide. Our mission is to enable change through human rights by supporting people and organisations to use human rights advocacy and approaches in their everyday life to achieve positive social change. This sees us [working with community groups](#) to enable them to use human rights advocacy to tackle social justice issues affecting the people they support.

In July 2021, [BIHR embarked on a new programme of work](#) to support community groups and voluntary groups across the UK. The aim of this project was to co-design human rights support “solutions” with four partner organisations using human rights.

One of our partners was [Room to Heal](#), a London based charity who support people who have survived torture and organised violence to rebuild their lives in exile. At the heart of their work is the cultivation of a healing community through which people can overcome the legacy of their traumatic experiences. This is complimented by a holistic therapeutic programme and intensive casework support.

## 2. Our involvement

Co-design is at the core of this project. Our approach to co-design used the below 4-stage process to ensure that the views and opinions of our partners and the eventual end “users” of the solution are central to the development.



**BIHR Contact:** Carlyn Miller, Head of Policy & Programmes: [cmiller@bihr.org.uk](mailto:cmiller@bihr.org.uk)

Katie Pealing, Human Rights Officer: [kpealing@bihr.org.uk](mailto:kpealing@bihr.org.uk)

Helen Walden, Research and Communications Associate: [hwalden@bihr.org.uk](mailto:hwalden@bihr.org.uk)

## 2.1 Discover

In July 2021, BIHR hosted a workshop with community, campaigning and advocacy organisations across the UK who were interested in working with BIHR longer-term to support their human rights advocacy.

This session was so valuable for BIHR as a human rights charity, and the feedback we received from the groups and organisations that joined made it clear that having a space to have conversations and build relationships was very helpful.

You can read more about the 'Discover' workshop and our key findings from it [here](#).

## 2.2 Define

Following the 'Discover' stage, Room to Heal were selected as one of our four partners organisations. They were then invited to a 'Define' workshop where we worked together to further define the ideas for human rights support "solutions".

Room to Heal identified a need to be more knowledgeable and confident to use human rights when advocating on behalf of members, but also a need to empower their members to use human rights when self-advocating with public bodies.

### Room to Heal: Solution Statement

As a caseworker of a therapeutic community supporting migrants who have survived torture and violence, I want to better understand the language of the Human Rights Act so that we can better advocate for our members when they ask us to, but also to provide information directly to members so that they may advocate for themselves when they feel able to, or so that we can do this when they ask us to, in order to achieve better treatment by public services.

## 2.3 Develop

Over several months, members of the BIHR team worked alongside the caseworkers at Room to Heal to develop the human rights support "solution".

**BIHR Contact:** Carlyn Miller, Head of Policy & Programmes: [cmiller@bihr.org.uk](mailto:cmiller@bihr.org.uk)  
Katie Pealing, Human Rights Officer: [kpealing@bihr.org.uk](mailto:kpealing@bihr.org.uk)  
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## Mapping

Firstly, in December 2021 BIHR held a workshop with Room to Heal staff. The purpose of this workshop was first to upskill staff on the Human Rights Act and how it can be used as a tool for advocating for and with their members. Second, during the workshop we mapped what staff need and want from a human rights “solution”.

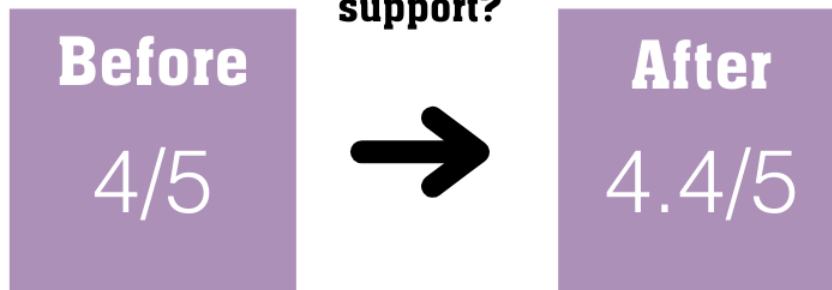
Staff were asked before and after the workshop to rate themselves out of 5 for the following questions.

Prior to this workshop

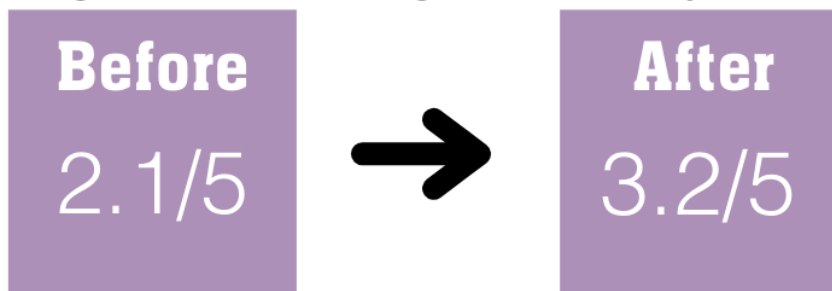
**75%**

**of Room to Heal staff  
had never used the  
language of human  
rights in their work.**

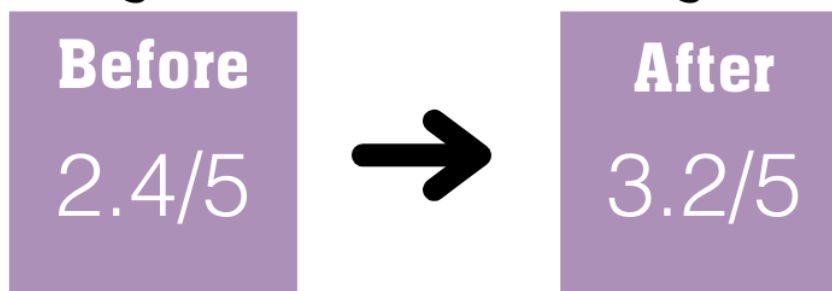
**How relevant do you think human rights law is to your everyday work and to the people you (or your organisation) support?**



**How confident do you feel about using the language of human rights law in your work?**



**How would you describe your level of knowledge about rights under UK human rights law?**



**80%**  
**of Room to Heal staff  
said that a letter  
template and guide  
would be most useful**

In order to further define what this solution would be, we asked a number of mapping questions during the workshop.

Things which Room to Heal staff identified that the resource must include were: case studies; guide to writing letters using stronger arguments on human rights; and examples of how to use and talk about the three-stage test to challenge breaches of non-absolute rights.

## **Situations where staff at Room to Heal would want to use human rights language included:**

Housing Health care Entitlement to benefits  
When members face discrimination  
When significant harm is experienced as a result of decisions by public authorities such as the home office, NHS or local authorities

Participants were also asked which rights they believed should be included:

- 90% of participants said that the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence should be included
- 80% wanted the inclusion of the right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment
- 70% wanted the right not to be discriminated against to be included

## **Creation**

Developing the resource involved ongoing dialogue between BIHR and Room to Heal. Co-production was at the heart of this work, ensuring that the views and ideas of the people who would use the resource were listened to throughout the design process, from the initial conception to their views on the final draft.

At BIHR, we produced multiple drafts of the resource with Room to Heal giving feedback at each stage. We identified that the guide would require an introduction to the Human Rights Act, information about the three rights which Room to Heal suggested were most important, case studies, plus a guide to writing letters using human rights language and an example letter. BIHR brought our expertise in the Human Rights Act and its everyday application to ensure a clear and accurate explanation of the rights was included in the resource.

**BIHR Contact:** Carlyn Miller, Head of Policy & Programmes: [cmiller@bihr.org.uk](mailto:cmiller@bihr.org.uk)  
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## Testing

Testing the support “solution” was done in two stages. The first draft was shared with Room to Heal to give them the opportunity to provide feedback. We also invited additional organisations from within the sector to a testing session on Zoom in March 2022. Seven organisations attended the testing session and a further nine organisations agreed to provide feedback. Organisations were based in London, North-West England, Northern Ireland, the Midlands, Wales and Scotland. Areas of specialism included legal advice, LGBT rights and HIV care, women's groups, immigration detention, honour-based abuse and survivors of torture.

**100%**  
of respondents said that they would use the guide or that the guide would be helpful to others

We accompanied this testing session with a survey to give feedback on the resource. We had a total of 12 responses.

We asked participants how they would use the guide. These are some of the answers:

**“ It will be good tool for caseworkers and volunteers ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ For new students and staff ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ To inform my clients about their rights ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ For training new volunteers or caseworkers ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ To empower clients on their rights ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ Part of induction training for new caseworkers ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

**“ To ensure that my team are aware of the different rights to enable them to quickly identify when a service users rights aren't being met ”**  
Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

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## Changes made based on testing

After the feedback from the testing session, we made the following changes:

### They said...

“[There's] nothing I find hard to understand but English is my mother tongue. It may be a lot to take in for those who don't speak or read English fluently.”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

“Having something to go away and read will enable [clients] to understand what caseworkers] are doing. You can only retain so much information.”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022



### We did...

We simplified the language to make it more accessible, particularly to clients and peer advocates. We also amended the language to apply to both individuals acting on their own behalf and those supporting them.

### They said...

“I've advocated on behalf of a client in this situation and relied on the Equality Act – what are the advantages of using the Human Rights Act instead?”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022



### We did...

We added in additional information about the Equality Act and how it works and compares with the Human Rights Act.

## They said...

“  
More advice on what to do next. For example if the LA response is unsatisfactory. Maybe seek support from local politician?  
”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

“There are often cases that have been handled by very keen support orgs who do not have in-depth knowledge of the law they are using and things can get messy and more difficult. I think that there needs to be advice to seek legal advice before taking action if it is available  
”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022



## We did...

We also added information about obtaining legal advice as well as escalation to ombudsmen and MPs.

## They said...

“  
More case study examples please  
”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022

“  
Another template that an individual could use to advocate for themselves, which a caseworker could support the individual to use  
”

Room to Heal Testing Session Participant, 2022



## We did...

Examples involving LGBT support were specifically requested in the testing session.

We added a second example letter covering relocation in relation to specialist medical care and LGBT support groups. For both example letters, we created an alternative version for self-advocates.

## They said...



## We did...

We added a table listing all the rights and whether they are absolute or non-absolute.

## Translated versions

During the testing session, we asked participants what barriers the people they support face when it comes to accessing their rights. The below word cloud shows their responses.



Overwhelming feedback from testing session attendees was that they would like a guide that clients can use to advocate for themselves and their peers. They said they would like to use the guide as a tool to "empower clients" and stressed the importance of clients having ownership of their cases.

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Feedback was that it would be useful to have the guide translated into different languages, with Amharic, Arabic, Kurdish Sorani, Tigrinya and Farsi mentioned as key languages. In response to this feedback, we used data gathered by the Home Office on the nationalities of people seeking asylum. As the Home Office do not collect data on the languages spoken by people seeking asylum, we researched the most commonly spoken languages by the nationalities. From this, we identified the following as the top languages spoken by people seeking asylum:

- Farsi
- Arabic
- Kurdish Sorani
- Tigrinya
- Amharic
- Albanian
- Pashto
- Vietnamese
- Urdu

We approached a number of translation companies for quotes and arranged for the resource to be translated into Farsi, Arabic, Kurdish Sorani, Tigrinya, Amharic and Albanian. This means that the guide is in seven different languages, including English. This ensures that the guide is truly accessible to those who will use it.



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## 2.4 Deliver

### Launch

We launched the resource on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022. Feedback from Room to Heal and participants from the Testing Session was that the launch was best to be done on social media, rather than holding an event.

### Sharing the human rights support “solution”

All seven versions of the guide are [available to download for free on BIHR's website](#). Feedback from the testing group said that the guide would be most easily accessed as a PDF. We sent the guide to Room to Heal and all of the organisations who had provided feedback during testing. We asked them to share with their networks.

We shared the resource on our Twitter page, with tweets that have had over 3800 impressions. Feedback from the testing session was that the resource could be shared with a number of different networks. We shared the resource with networks including the Asylum Support Advice Network and the Access to Advice Network. We also shared the resource with organisations that included local Citizens Advice, Crisis, Project 17 and Just Right Scotland.



## 3. Outcome

Evaluation processes for this project have been largely qualitative, based on the verbal and written feedback provided by those involved.

### Feedback from Room to Heal

The aim of our partnership work with Room to Heal was to create a resource for caseworkers to use the language of the Human Rights Act when advocating for clients, as well as a resource that can be used by self-advocates to challenge treatment by public services.

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We received the following feedback from staff at Room to Heal:



## Wider feedback

We do not yet know the full impact of this resource, as it only launched relatively recently and is still being shared. We also recognise that building knowledge and confidence to speak up for human rights may take time. Therefore, we intend to update this report once we have been able to gather further information from people who have used and shared the resource on how it has been used in practice.

Below is a sample of wider feedback that we've received:



**BIHR Contact:** Carlyn Miller, Head of Policy & Programmes: [cmiller@bihr.org.uk](mailto:cmiller@bihr.org.uk)  
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“

We sent out the report and a few colleagues commented on how useful it was, in particular the templates for supporting letters for professionals. I also found the templates really helpful and want to thank you for including that.”

Mental Health & Wellbeing Manager,  
Refugee Women Connect

“

Wow this is a fantastic document, thanks so much!

Project 17

“

## The Resource in Action

I shared the Guide with the London Refugee Support team at the British Red Cross, in addition to the UK wide Family Reunion Integration Service. I think the guide is extremely helpful and I have used it twice in the last couple of weeks.

Both were in regard to challenging statutory services refusing to offer interpreting for clients, when needing to access key and urgent services such as making a homeless application. By using your guide and making the L.A aware that they were in breach of the Human Rights Act, interpreting access was then offered and the clients were able to fairly apply for their entitlements.

Casework Coordinator, British Red Cross”

## 4. Goal and Next Steps

The goal of this project was to work alongside Room to Heal to develop a human rights support “solution” for the people they support. The solution, a Guide to Using Human Rights as a Tool for Advocacy, was co-developed over a period of several months, ensuring that the views of people who would be using the resource were listened to throughout.

The staff at Room to Heal have seen improved knowledge of human rights and confidence to use them and are now looking at how they can integrate human rights even further into their work. The nature of the resource means that it can also be used by the people they work with, to self-advocate and improve their confidence in using human rights.

Various avenues have been identified for sharing the Guide widely with key stakeholder groups, including with advice organisations and the voluntary sector. BIHR will be continuing to spread the word about this valuable resource over the coming months.

**BIHR Contact:** Carlyn Miller, Head of Policy & Programmes: [cmiller@bihr.org.uk](mailto:cmiller@bihr.org.uk)

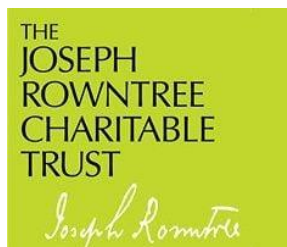
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There is also scope to get the Guide translated into a further three languages, to ensure that it is accessible for the majority of refugees and asylum seekers who would use the guide to self-advocate.

This has been a pilot project where BIHR has intended to enable groups to address the day-to-day issues where rights are risked, creating positive change within imperfect systems. We will be looking to re-run this programme with new partners to co-develop a human rights solution, whatever that might look like for them.

Thank you to our core funders [Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust](#), [the Tudor Trust](#), and [the Bromley Trust](#), for making it possible for us to explore our work with communities, and helps us co-design support solutions that mean we can all make change through human rights, together.



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