



SAY IT LOUD CLUB  
OUR IMPACT 2021

# OUR HISTORY.

A student in Uganda in 1994, Aloysius Ssali set up Say It Loud Club to campaign for LGBTQ+ rights in his home country. By 2003, his work had made him a target and he moved to the UK to continue with his studies. Returning to Uganda 2 years' later, he was arrested on charges of 'homosexual propaganda'.

After a week in a cell, and with 3 months left on his student visa, Aloysius fled to the UK thanks to some money and a passport he had hidden in his sock. But, in 2005, there was no way to claim asylum on the grounds of sexuality. LGBTQ+ people seeking asylum in the UK could be deported on the basis that they could live safely in their home countries by concealing their identity. Aloysius spent 5 years living with friends and on the street, not knowing where to turn for help.

As many of our members still do, Aloysius would ride on London buses day and night, as a warm and relatively safe place to rest. It was on the number 29 from Wood Green to Trafalgar Square that an article in a discarded Metro caught his eye. It was 2010, and the Supreme Court had just ruled that two men - from Iran and Cameroon - could remain in the UK as the country's first LGBTQ+ refugees. The next day, Aloysius called the Home Office and his journey towards asylum officially began.

Aloysius was granted refugee status in October 2010. Not content with finding freedom for just himself, he re-started Say It Loud Club, this time as a community for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. In the 11 years since, he has supported hundreds of people to find safety, accept and celebrate their LGBTQ+ identity, and gain the right to live freely in the UK.



# OUR FUTURE.

Our vision for a world where LGBTQ+ people can express their sexuality and gender identity safely and with pride. Until this is possible, we believe the UK should provide a place of safety for LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, providing an environment in which everyone can flourish as their true self.

## OUR MISSION

Say it Loud Club is the community of LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We engage with our members through one-on-one mentoring, workshops, social events, peer support, and referral to partner organisations for legal, financial, health and housing support.

As a community, we:

- **Encourage openness**, helping our members gain the confidence to openly embrace their true identity, often for the first time.
- **Promote safety**, supporting LGBTQ+ people to seek asylum on the basis of their sexuality and to escape unsafe living situations in the UK.
- **Uphold good-health**, running workshops and advocating for access to improve physical, mental and sexual health, particularly support to overcome trauma.
- **Socialise**, providing opportunities to come together as a community and supporting each other to integrate into new communities and UK society.
- **Advocate nationally** to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers, advocate for a fair and humane asylum process and improve support for our community.

## OUR VALUES

We are:

- **Community-driven:** Our members are at the heart of everything we do, and we are led by the lived experiences of our Director, Staff, Trustees, and Ambassadors. Our focus is on building a community where everyone's expertise, skills, and experiences are valued.
- **Collaborative:** We are proud to be part of a wide network of organisations, comprised of activists, non-profits, and businesses across the UK, who all come together to support LGBTQ+ refugees.
- **Inclusive:** We believe everyone should be able to access Say It Loud Club's support, regardless of gender, race, religion, or circumstance. We celebrate the diversity of our community and want to actively reach out to groups we are not yet supporting.

# HANNAH.

On the 1st of December, 2020, I was a lost and confused individual. When someone told me about Say It Loud Club I knew this was where I belonged. They have helped me mentally and physically, and now I have the courage to practice my leadership skills somewhere that I feel comfortable and loved.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, life was very challenging as it was hard to meet people face-to-face, and it became hard to even talk on the phone as I didn't have the finances for data or a phone top-up. My mental state really worsened as I needed someone to share what I was going through. I didn't know how the world would cope, and worried about the mental health of others who, like me, were stuck in the house with nobody to talk to.

Say It Loud Club kept people together through their online social meetings every Friday. I looked forward to it every week. Even though the events were online, I felt a huge amount of support. The encouragement was massive. Say It Loud Club also gave me financial support so I could buy data to attend the online events and stay connected.

The biggest way that Say It Loud Club has supported me is by allowing me to be a leader. Becoming an Ambassador for the club is the best role I have ever decided to take on. Using my strength and skills to encourage and help people feels like the best accomplishment. The role has taught me a lot - now I can stand in front of a big crowd and defend the rights of my fellow LGBTQ+ community members, advise them, and assure them that together we can fight and we can win.



# GIVING SUPPORT.

After making contact with Say It Loud Club, LGBTQ+ refugees are invited to meet a member of the team. Here they can find out more about who we are, and in turn can share their individual situation. We then help them to access particular services within Say It Loud Club and refer them to external organisations. We partner with a wide range of other organisations which provide specialised support to LGBTQ+ and/or refugee communities, like solicitors, health services, therapists and trauma-specialists, and housing associations and shelters.

Each new member receives around 12 hours of 1:1 counselling, often focusing on topics such as accepting and expressing their sexuality, managing the stress and anxiety of seeking asylum, and feeling at home in a new country and culture. This counselling is usually given by someone who has lived through similar experiences.

108

people accessed 1-to-1 mentoring and counselling, often given by someone with lived experience of seeking asylum as an LGBTQ+ person.

98%

of our members feel more comfortable with their sexuality and/or gender identity after joining Say It Loud Club.

98%

of our members are more open about their sexuality and/or gender identity after joining Say It Loud Club.

“JUST HAVING SOMEONE TO TALK WITH ABOUT EVERYTHING AND FOR THE PERSON TO UNDERSTAND YOU...THAT IS THE BEST SUPPORT YOU COULD EVER ASK FOR.”



# FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM.

Advocating for our members is at the heart of what we do, whether by providing everyday support in liaising with authorities or appearing in national media.

For LGBTQ+ refugees, attending legal appointments, tribunals, GP and hospital appointments, or other routine meetings can be stressful. As well as the challenges of navigating complex, unfamiliar systems in a new language, many fear detention, deportation, or discrimination on the basis of sexual or gender identity when using a service for the first time. We frequently accompany our members to such appointments, providing moral support and helping them to communicate with officials.

DURING MY ASYLUM APPLICATION, I WAS SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE PROCESS, INCLUDING DURING MY INTERVIEW.”

22

LGBTQ+ refugees were granted refugee status in the UK with the support of Say It Loud Club.

88%

of our members say that they have been helped on their journey towards asylum by Say It Loud Club.

92%

of our members report that their life has changed for the better since joining Say It Loud Club.



# MANAGING CRISIS.

We are committed to supporting our members in the toughest of times, whether they need practical or emotional support. Many have fled harassment, violence, imprisonment, and threats of death in their home countries. Upon reaching the UK, they can face similarly urgent crises, including imminent homelessness and food shortages. Last year, with the support of Choose Love, we set up a ring-fenced 'emergency fund' to provide assistance to members in urgent need.

In 2021, with the emergency fund, we have been able to help members buy food and other essentials; pay for hostels when they have become homeless; and travel to urgent medical or legal appointments. We have been able to visit members who have been hospitalised with mental and physical health conditions, and provide emotional and practical support at the time that it is needed most.

16%

of our members were given financial and practical support to purchase food and other essentials.

92%

of our members say that they feel safer in the UK now that they are supported by Say It Loud Club.



“ I WAS MENTALLY UPSET AND, AS I HAD NO WORK PERMIT, IT WAS REALLY DIFFICULT FOR ME TO BEAR MY EXPENSES. SAY IT LOUD CLUB GAVE ME EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND HELPED ME FINANCIALLY. THEY GAVE ME DETAILS OF OTHERS WHO COULD HELP ME BY GIVING ME FOOD AND DRINKS.

# FINDING SHELTER.

Finding safe accommodation in the UK is unthinkable complex for an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker, who might move from a detention centre to hostels, the spare beds of homophobic or transphobic acquaintances from their home countries, or even the streets. While they await refugee status, our members are typically unable to rent or find employment. Once granted refugee status, they are often turned down by landlords and social housing agencies for not having worked for long enough or not having enough of a deposit. A fifth of our members have been street homeless at some point since arriving in the UK.

Say It Loud Club supports LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers to find safe, LGBTQ-friendly places to live. Through our links to housing associations and emergency shelters, we are able to help our members to find accommodation both in a crisis and in the long-term. We provide practical support with moving house, including everything from completing paperwork, to collecting furniture donations, to extra pairs of hands to carry boxes!

SAY IT LOUD CLUB HELPS US TO FIND PROPER ACCOMMODATION, WHERE WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT HESITATION OR DISCRIMINATION.



80%

of our members said that Say It Loud Club had helped them with housing this year.

- 21% to find shelter when homeless.
- 26% with advice when facing eviction or homelessness.
- 32% with referral to a housing association.
- 21% were found somewhere permanent to live.
- 53% with emotional support related to housing.
- 10% with moving house.

# THELMA.

I started off as a member of Say It Loud Club, then became a Trustee after I had been granted refugee status and was well settled in the UK. Now I work for Say It Loud Club, managing the Housing Project and our Ambassadors Programme.

When you arrive in the UK, you're deemed an illegal immigrant and detained. That's the start of a lengthy process to be granted refugee status by the Home Office. Until that happens, you can't rent, access education, open a bank account, or get a job officially. Even when you have your Legalised Refugee Status confirmed, to rent privately or get social housing you have to have lived here a certain time, or be able to show you've been working. It's a Catch-22 situation. How can you show you've been working if you haven't been able to get a job? Or show you've been here without any records?

Those with and without their official papers end up living in shared accommodation, potentially with other refugees, or with friends of friends. Our members are often living in cramped accommodation with people (perhaps from their original country) who are hostile to these statuses. We've had members whisper in bathrooms on the phone to us because it's the only way they cannot be overheard. It's heartbreaking.

Homelessness is an issue for up to 85% of our members. Rough sleeping is unfortunately a huge challenge. During the winter months, it's colder – sleeping rough brings even more health concerns.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of privacy issue is exacerbated. Everyone's been at home more, particularly during the official lockdown periods, which means fewer opportunities for us to liaise with our members and check how they're doing.

There's also a huge mental health toll. Not having a place to feel yourself is always hard – but before we could at least have members come to our base in King's Cross, give them lunch and a forum to talk. That's gone now. Keep in mind the accommodation people are living in is often without WiFi too. We're losing touch with people rapidly, and that's terrifying.



# STAYING SAFE.

Already an isolated and vulnerable community, during the COVID-19 pandemic LGBTQ+ refugees found themselves suddenly cut off from almost all sources of support. COVID-19 information and guidance was not easily accessible to refugees and many felt scared and confused. Say It Loud Club provided appropriate information about lockdown and COVID-19, including support to get vaccinated. We helped those who were isolating by delivering food and essentials. We also provided support to those navigating the changing Home Office processes, including hand delivering urgent letters and evidence when there was no other option.

WHEN I HEARD ABOUT COVID 19 AND PEOPLE DYING, I GOT SCARED AND DEPRESSED. BEING ALONE IN THE HOUSE WAS NOT EASY BUT SAY IT LOUD HELPED ME EMOTIONALLY. THE ONLINE MEETINGS MADE ME KNOW THAT I WASN'T ALONE.

**56%** of our members said Say It Loud Club was their main source of information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

THROUGH SAY IT LOUD CLUB GUIDANCE I WAS ABLE TO CHANGE MY VIEWS ABOUT THE VACCINE AND GOT VACCINATED.



# STAYING CONNECTED.

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, our events were predominantly run in-person. For our members – who sometimes share accommodation with other refugees who may not be aware of their sexual and gender identities – these events are a lifeline, and cancelling them would have been devastating. By moving our meetings and socials online, we were able to dramatically increase their frequency and keep our members connected to one another, running our usual variety alongside online support groups to discuss the unique challenges brought on by the pandemic.

**95%** of our members feel more connected to LGBTQ+ refugees since joining Say It Loud Club.

**88%** of our members say that their mental health has improved since joining Say It Loud Club.

**88%** of our members were given financial and practical support to get online and use services like Zoom.



THE WORRY AND NOT KNOWING WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT DROVE ME INTO DEPRESSION, BUT SAY IT LOUD CLUB HAS BEEN AN IMMENSE SOURCE OF MOTIVATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH COUNSELLING SESSIONS THAT I HAVE RECEIVED.

# NICHOLAS.

I joined Say It Loud Club in 2019. I was seeking asylum in the UK after fleeing persecution because of my sexuality in Uganda.

Say It Loud Club is a home where people of many different identities, races and ethnicities can come together. This played a big part in my life before the COVID-19 pandemic. I managed to socialise with other LGBTQ+ people, making friends, sharing minds, and learning new skills.

Life became very challenging during the pandemic. Socialising was limited, which had a big impact on my mental health. I was stressed and depressed. Thanks to the good work of the Say It Loud Club team, I could make a call in times of loneliness, and get support in times of need. There were also online events which meant I didn't feel so isolated, and renewed my hope of meeting fellow LGBTQ+ people.

Say It Loud Club shared information about lockdown guidance and how to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Because of this, I knew to use a face covering and hand sanitise, which played a big role in terms of my health.

I am a Say It Loud Club Ambassador, working in Leicester to inform the community about our work and who we are. Through my voluntary work with Say It Loud Club, I have been able to connect with other LGBTQ+ organisations and share stories, which has helped me to live openly.



# BECOMING LEADERS.

One of our core values is to be 'member-led', and we really mean it when we say that members are active contributors to Say It Loud Club's goals and activities. With our founder himself being an LGBTQ+ refugee, we understand that all of our members will have perspectives, knowledge and skills that strengthen our community.

Our new Ambassador Project capitalises on the incredible breadth of expertise within our community, providing structured and supported volunteering opportunities across many areas of our work, including outreach, member support, communications, events, and campaigns. We already have over 30 Ambassadors who have completed an induction training programme, and are planning for another cohort in 2022.

33

members have become Say It Loud Club Ambassadors this year.

94%

of our members feel more confident in talking about their experiences since joining Say It Loud Club.

74%

of our members have volunteered with Say It Loud Club this year.



I NOW HAVE THE COURAGE TO TALK ABOUT MY EXPERIENCES IN ORDER TO CREATE AWARENESS OF WHAT IT'S LIKE TO GO THROUGH THE ASYLUM PROCESS.

# SPEAKING OUT.

We use a community organising approach to delivering policy change. Through involving our members to identify the issues, and inviting them to play an active role in the development and delivery of our campaign strategy, we are empowering members to become powerful agents of change. In addition to grassroots organising, we have begun to engage our online audience of supporters with key political opportunities, and mobilised them to take online action. Our first action was an "email your MP" action to ask supporter's MPs to support the EDM1530 condemning new Immigration Rules targeting rough sleepers. More recently, we have engaged in political advocacy by participating in the UK Home Office's sham 'consultation' on their "New Plan for Immigration". For this consultation we collated the views of our members from previous workshops and offered a comprehensive rejection of the proposed plans.

82%

of our members have taken part in Say It Loud Club's campaigning activities.

95%

of our members feel that their voice is represented in Say It Loud Club's campaigns.



THE RESEARCH PROJECT ON MENTAL HEALTH HAS BEEN A LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ME. IT WAS GREAT TO SHARE MY EXPERIENCE BECAUSE IT ADDED VALUE TO THE RESEARCH.

Say It Loud Club volunteers and members collaborated on a research project focused on the mental health of LGBTQ+ refugees, particularly how mental health is impacted by responses to the trauma that they have faced. We hope that the research will help us to understand how conversations with Immigration Officials, GPs, and other professionals can both positively and negatively impact the mental health of LGBTQ+ refugees. As the first study in the UK to focus on the mental health of LGBTQ+ refugees, we were able to present our process and initial findings at the 2021 International Migration Conference.

# GET INVOLVED.

Join us in helping LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum to find safety and pride in the UK. We have a growing family of supporters across the UK and beyond, every single one of whom is vital to us being able to continue our work. As a small, grassroots charity supporting a large, under-served community, we truly value every individual and organisation that has been part of our journey so far.

You can donate to Say It Loud Club by going to [www.sayitloudclub.org/donate](http://www.sayitloudclub.org/donate). £10 could help us to find an LGBTQ+ refugee a solicitor with expertise in applying for asylum on grounds of sexuality. £100 could help us attend their tribunal to provide emotional support and advocacy. There are more examples of how your money might be spent on our website.

Grants from organisations and funding bodies could support existing and new projects, like our Workshop Programme, Housing Project, Ambassador Programme, or Emergency Fund.

There are other ways to support us besides making a donation! Get in touch if you are interested in joining our volunteer team or to join us in campaigning for LGBTQ+ refugee rights. We publicise ways to get involved in our campaigns on our website at [www.sayitloudclub.org/take-action](http://www.sayitloudclub.org/take-action).



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