

OURMALA

YOGA THAT PUTS SOCIAL VALUES FIRST

Ourmala helps refugee and asylum-seeking women living in London find strength to move on with their lives through yoga. We also work with other survivors of violence and oppression and the wider community. Ourmala is yoga practice off the mat that puts social values first.

The majority of clients are registered with the UK Home Office because they have fled for their lives. Atrocities, such as torture, human trafficking, FGM, and sexual violence in conflict are common experiences.

Founded in 2011 by yoga teacher Emily Brett, Ourmala (formerly Hackney Yoga Project) has now worked with over 170 refugee and asylum-seeking women and men. They come from all over the world, from countries including Iran, Eritrea, Bolivia, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, and are referred to us by organisations including the British Red Cross and Freedom from Torture.

"We provide a safe space to breathe, where all who come through the door are respected," says Emily. "Our clients say that yoga really helps them heal – to restore their spirit and confidence, reduce anxiety, depression and physical pain, and help them to sleep."

Classes are based on Ashtanga and Mindfulness. They are free and Ourmala refunds the cost of travel to most. (If you're seeking asylum, you're not legally allowed to work and most live in poverty.)

Supporting campaigns to improve the lives of the client group is another important aspect of Ourmala's work. For example, Women for Refugee Women's Set Her Free campaign, which aims to end the detention of women seeking asylum in the UK.

"Mala means 'garland' in Sanskrit and Ourmala represents compassion, interconnection and social justice," says Emily. "Our world, our choices, our human mala...This humanitarian work is a continuation of practice off the mat."

WORK WITH US

You can help us through The Mala Initiative, a vibrant community of yoga practitioners who are using their love of yoga, and privilege, to serve some of the most marginalised and under-represented individuals in our society today, here and now.

For more information, visit ourmala.com

Photography: Carl Bigmore

