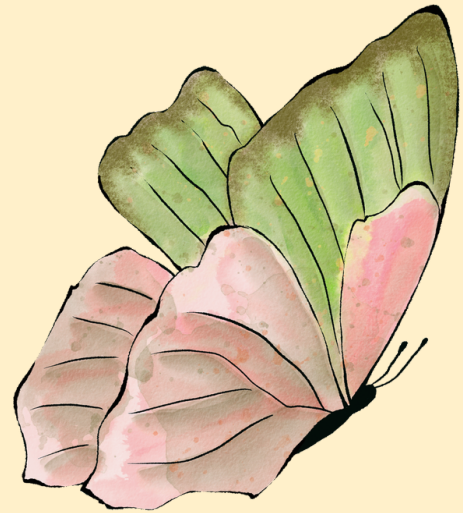
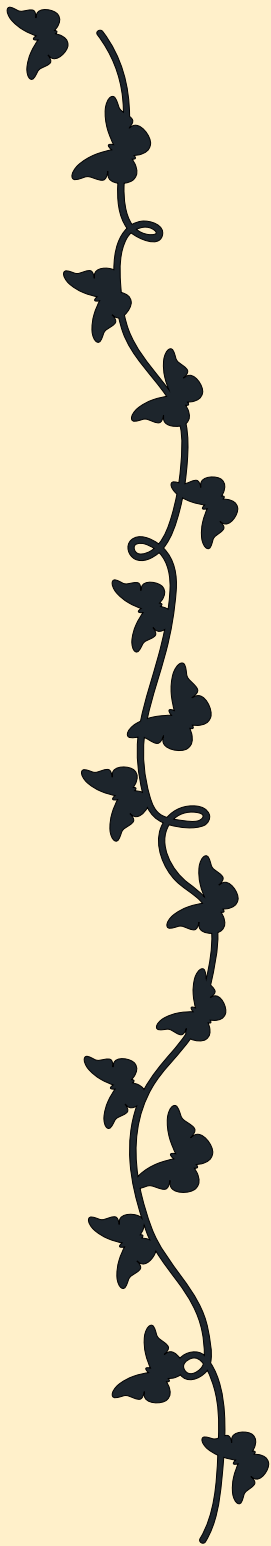




Migrant families Baby Loss Mini Series

August 2026



willow's rainbow box

Introduction

This series shares stories from migrant women who have lost a baby in the UK. Some of these stories may be upsetting to read. Please take care when reading them.

We chose to create this series because migrant family experiences of baby loss are underrepresented - and these stories need to be known. As a charity specialising in pregnancy after loss, we believe that if we can break the barriers, tackle inequity and normalise conversation at the point of loss, that this may help when families go on to experience a new pregnancy.

Amneet Graham - Chair and Founder of Willow's Rainbow Box

Before we share the stories, we would like to share this poem by Zenab Barry: THERE IS NO HEARTBEAT.

“There is no heart beat”

A phrase that I heard twice.
The shock made me cold like ice.

“There is no heart beat”

Proof that you are no longer here.
Because a sound we could not hear.

“There is no heart beat”

In a second, you moved from here to there.
You were here but not really here.

“There is no heart beat”

The immense pain felt,
left my eyes constantly wet.

“There is no heart beat”

You were gone.
All was done.

“There is no heart beat”

You were not made for this world.
A decision made by The Lord.

“There is no heart beat”

A fact difficult to process.
There seemed to be no recess.

“There is no heart beat”

You are there - where you belong.
Your time, I could not prolong.

“There is no heart beat”

There is you;
And there is no you.

“There is no heart beat”

As a mortal, I surrender;
To the laws of the Decider.

“There is no heart beat”

I accept.
I patiently accept.

Zenab Barry - Founder of
Canvas Bridge and Author of
lessons from Depression

Story 1

This is a story of a baby loss experience from a woman who has moved from India to the UK. This story was shared via video interview and this story has been written (and verified) using the transcript.

My miscarriage is quite recent. I tested positive for pregnancy and had my 8 week appointment with my midwife. At the 12 week scan, the embryo had only 6 weeks of growth. And there was no heart beat. They called it a case of miscarriage and I was immediately followed up to the early pregnancy unit. They asked me to come to the hospital to take the medication and the next steps. My body and mind could not accept it, so I refused the treatment and said I need some time. After 10 days, I asked them to book another scan. The night before the scan itself, I started bleeding spontaneously. When I got to know at the 12 week scan that the fetus is only 6 weeks, I sat down and did all the possible calculations that it could have been. My periods were quite irregular so I kept giving myself the benefit of the doubt. I spoke to all the women in my family and they said that they have had cases where the scans showed some other measurements for their baby's growth but they ended up giving birth to healthy babies. So I kept giving myself hope. But when I started bleeding, I didn't expect much. We went to the hospital and they did the scan again. The fetus was already near my cervix and not near my uterus. After the scan, they gave me all the options they usually give. Even after that, I did not accept. I said, let my body do what it wants to do. Let it come on its own. They gave me the medication, but then I said, i will take it when I'm ready. I never took it. 30 minutes after leaving the unit, from the department to the main gate, I bled so much that it took me 35 minutes just to reach that gate. I felt something was wrong and went back again.

They mentioned if I'm bleeding a lot and changing pads every 15 minutes or every half hour, I should call them. I said, it's only been 30 minutes and on my way I have changed 3 pads, just let me stay here. At that point, I started cramping, or I would say getting contractions and that contraction was exactly like labour. It was at that point they gave my husband and I a room. I kept circling the room, walking, moving and I was in so much pain and agony at that point. I threw away every piece of cloth I was wearing. I started behaving like some insane person. I don't know what I was doing, scratching the bed, scratching my husband and then at one point I felt my uterus expanding. I was in so much pain and so much emotion coming out of me. I was making very loud noises and didn't even press the button to call the nurse. I was so loud that 4 nurses came running into the room. They saw what happened and when it finally came out...a huge feeling of relief.

This sounds very ridiculous, but they kept giving me paracetamol and ibuprofen for the pain. It never worked. I didn't have the words to say, but, whatever. I was hospitalised for a day in the gynae department. They said incase I need surgical intervention, I should not eat anything. I didn't eat anything. The next morning, I kept bleeding and passing large clots. I was fussing and then they did take good care of me when I was in their hospital and kept checking on me again and again. The hospital does cremation. Firstly I gave permission, but then I spoke to some of my family members and they said I was already more than 12 weeks so I need to follow a religious procedure and do a burial. I requested them and they were ok with me taking the box. After a week. I was called into hospital again and they asked me to fill in more forms. It was very, very, very painful because i was supposed to come out with he baby, but I was just coming out with a box.

I still have the box and I intend to bury it inside a plant and keep the plant with myself so that I feel like there's still life and there's still hope. For support, I have my husband and I've spoken to all types of people, every person I could possibly speak to. I am talking to the mental health nurse and they are helping me with a few resources.

To add to my grief, I lost my grandmother just 2 days ago.

The most difficult part of being a migrant and experiencing baby loss was, I think if I would have been home, or had more support in terms of family members. They would have taken care of me. My diet, food, everything would have been taken care of. My best friend is also pregnant at the time and we kept talking and she's back home.

I understand the NHS has protocols and they only give us a scan through the first 10-12 weeks. In other countries, if I had the funds, means or ability to do things the other way, I could have had my first scan within 6 or 7 weeks when the heartbeat starts and I would know if it was a viable pregnancy. I could have had that back home. I would have been able to take the decision quite early, rather than carrying the pregnancy till 14 weeks and raising all the hopes. I don't know if that would have been easier or not, but my body went into that mode of being pregnant for 3 months and now I don't have the hormones, I feel disgusting and I don't like my body anymore. That was tough.

On my first midwife appointment, I felt the midwife was quite arrogant and she spoke few words. She kind of sounded very racist, I would say. My first midwife appointment was on the second day after the Easter holiday so she came 20 minutes late. I could clearly see she's not happy me seeing her. In some contexts, like gestational diabetes, she kept referring like 'this is very common in your people.' Then she asked us about what is our visa status and then what are your plans after that?

'Do you plan to go back home'? I'm like, why would I go home? I am trying to improve my life and we are trying hard to get a job which will sponsor us. I was really, really upset after that and she was rushing through the appointment and she did not even answer some of my questions. I went to her with a list of questions and she did not even answer those. All of these things I would have done differently - I would have had more support, more people around emotionally taking care of me. It's hard to be away from family in that situation

In the hospital, the nurses were okay. I was in a lot of distress. I had to have blood drawn from my arm and they tried doing it twice and thrice and after they were done. they just left it open and i'm like, what is this? I was about to faint when that happened. I don't know if I should complain. How can they be so careless and leave? I'm already losing a lot of blood down there and again they're adding things to the list. The nurses were really sweet, they kept checking on me and were really kind and sensitive about my situation, which I really appreciate, but this one situation - I have blood all over my arm, my husband is sitting and crying in the corner, I haven't eaten since the morning. I just felt I wanted to die in that moment.

What would have made my situation easier? If I could have been scanned at 7 or 8 weeks. It would have prepared me better to accept the outcome on my terms. After 3 months..there was so much planning, future plans, everything and then it's just like no, it's not happening. I'm just angry those plans did not come through.

Story 2

This is a story of a baby loss experience from a woman who has moved from India to the UK. This story was shared via video interview and this story has been written (and verified) using the transcript.

I was trying for a second baby. I wasn't actively trying through all the years after my son, but it was always there in my mind to have another baby because in this country, we don't have any family or very close friends because we are first generation. So I was thinking it's important for my son to have someone when we are not there to call his own. I share a very nice, beautiful relationship with my sister, so I always wanted him to feel that love, connection with the siblings. I always wanted to have a girl, maybe, that was in my mind, that I have another child. We were trying for a few years and finally, I was pregnant and so we were really very happy.

Then, during the 12 week scan, it was during Covid time so my husband was not allowed. It was only myself who was in the hospital and I was like, very prepared. I was thinking that I'm going to stay for a long time, because in hospital you might have to stay long for your scan. It was much longer because of Covid. They were not taking many appointments and not a lot of people available.

When my turn came, I remember the nurse's name was Hope and I was like, what a beautiful name. I was filled with lots of hope but then her face dropped suddenly and she said 'I can't hear any heartbeat.'

My heart sank a lot. She asked 'are you sure you're 12 weeks? Maybe you're very early on.' I said I think so and she said we'll wait one more week and see. She called another nurse and they also said they could see something but no heartbeat.

For the next week, I had the intuition. I was not very hopeful and those 7 days were very difficult. I went back and they checked again and said there was no improvement and they are sure it has not developed to have a heart beat. They said I have to take it out and somebody came. At that time, it was very confusing. I also had to deal with it myself because my husband was not with me. It was a turmoil of emotions - what to do... I was not conventional age at 37. I thought maybe i'm a bit older now to have a baby so that's why this has happened. When something happened, we tried to blame it on something.

The hospital were trying to give me as much information about what was going to happen next. They gave me 3 options. I was not sure what to do. At that point in time, I did not inform my family. I was thinking that I will only tell when 3 months have passed - the first trimester - and I was going to tell them then. Then all of a sudden I could not share their joy at the beginning and now I'm left with nothing and I cannot even share my sorrow. That was the most difficult and my husband was not there with me - that point in time was really, really difficult.

Being alone in this country and then in a new hospital. The most difficult part was not being able to share because you don't have your immediate family. Over the years, you do grow friendships, but still these are very personal things you may not want to share even with friends. I have shared with very close friends, but it's very different than sharing with your very close family like my sister or mother. Physically, I was not very sure. When I was given 3 options, which would be best medically?

Which would be less painful? Which would be more painful? When they took out the fetus, they were first saying they would do local anaesthesia. They convinced me for a long time that during Covid, it's very difficult to get the resources. So when they told me I had 3 options, they convinced me that this was the option.

I immediately called my friend who normally I would not share with, not a very close friend, but because I didn't know the information and wanted to know what is the best option and she is a gynaecologist. I had to force myself to share that news with her and then she told me local was going to be very painful, but then they said unfortunately because of Covid, all the beds are full and that is the only option. At that point, I was very scared.

On one side, you are emotionally so vulnerable and you were also thinking about how it's going to be very painful - so it's like dual pain for me. When I actually got admitted, somebody came to me and said 'no, no were going to give you total anaesthesia. You will be unconscious so it's not very painful. That appointment came after one week and all of that week I was in total trauma - like, what's going to happen? It's going to be so painful because I never had it or experienced it before. My sister is younger and doesn't have any such experience and I did not share with my mother. It was difficult for me to understand what was going to happen.

If my mum was there, you know, at least I would have been a bit comfortable within myself, or sure what's going to happen, or at least cry my heart out. She would have also given me some comfort with household chores.

Even medically, I think I was forced to do my household chores, or go back to work after. They gave me just one week and said you have to get those hospital notes and I didn't want to go through this so I joined back to work.

There was no after care. Nobody called on me and checked on me. I only had the appointment where they took out the fetus and they said, "are you okay?" They gave some instructions about if I get any bleeding but there was nothing more than that.

They said if I need any help, I can always come back and there are some numbers I can call. Being in this country, like a lot of things, you don't know where this information is going so you are not sure about it or how the processes work. Not sure whether my information is going somewhere or whether somebody is really there to hear me out. I am not confident about that and that's why I cannot rely on those phone numbers.

If it was my own country, I would know all the rules and regulations. I would have family to rely on and they would have checked on me.

Story 3

This story takes the form of a Q&A.

What did you feel was the most difficult part of being a migrant and experiencing baby loss in the UK?

Not knowing what to do and how the system works. It can also feel like a very lonely and heavy experience. There was also an unfathomable fear or discomfort when it came to even asking where the staff member was going to take the foetus, and whether it was okay to ask for an opportunity to bury my baby - as burning is not part of our cultural and religious norms (i.e. referring to my second miscarriage)... It was also frustrating to hear some health care professionals refer to my babies as "it" or "the miscarriage".

How did the care you receive meet your expectations?

I have mixed feelings about this one; but a full analysis of these feelings are being compiled in a book that I intend to publish soon.

What things would have been useful or helpful to make your situation easier?

Peer support, more relevant information (not just general leaflets), psychological safety that would have enabled me to understand what would or could happen to my baby after the health care professional took her/him away, telling me all my options and rights in terms of what could happen to my second baby, more support and time and space to heal.

Story 4

The author of this story is from Argentina and their partner is from Albania. They met in London and sadly experienced the loss of their baby. Here is their story.

We had so many mixed emotions when we found out we were going to become parents. It was beautiful but scary at the same time, so difficult to describe. Happiness led us to spreading the news as soon as we learnt it and I felt so much warmth in my heart every time I told someone and saw their reaction. Everyone was filled with joy.

I'm from Argentina and my partner is from Albania, we met in London and neither of us has family around here. We knew it was going to be challenging to raise our child without the help of our families, but we were also sure that we could do it.

I was personally very happy to have such a smooth and beautiful pregnancy. I thought 'I don't have my family or close friends here, but at least I'm not having any issues with the baby and I'm glad I can just continue my life normally'. I really don't need that much extra care. It would be different if it was a risk pregnancy and I had to spend the whole time at home or in bed - that would be more challenging. This really kept me going.

Weeks passed by and Antonio and I were doing perfectly in every single check-up, appointment and test. A perfect and beautiful pregnancy. I had started feeling my baby move (sometimes a lot!), especially at night. He was active when I was relaxed, working at my desk or getting ready to sleep.

I had him and he had me – we used to have chats, go places together and eat nourishing and tasty food prepared by daddy-chef.

Until one night, at 27+5 weeks, I couldn't feel my baby's movements. I thought he was just chilling or resting that day, so I went to sleep. Next day I felt strange, as if I could sense that something was wrong and I said to my partner that we had to go to hospital "now". We went there only to find out the most heartbreaking, soul-tearing news: Antonio had no heartbeat.

We were admitted to the butterfly suite of the hospital the next day and the (what felt like) long birth process began. During this time I only had my partner next to me, I didn't want to see any London friends. I just wished at least someone from his or my family could be there with us, but that was quite difficult. The trip from Argentina is long and expensive, and his family in Albania had no visa to come to the UK- we were planning to arrange it later on so they could meet the baby once he was here.

We found ourselves alone, with no one to hug while experiencing the most painful time of our lives and no one to help us. My partner kept in touch with our families, they were all super anxious and very very sad that they were not able to be here with us.

The whole experience would have been so much different if at least one member of either of our families could have been here. We would have had someone to support us, to listen to us, to bring us a glass of water... But we had to do everything by ourselves. They were all planning to come to meet the baby, but our little angel left us too soon and that was not possible.

Bereavement midwives were amazing and provided a lot of support and information about external resources to turn to in case we felt we need extra care.

Having to go through this 5-day experience at hospital (considering I had never been hospitalised in my life) was very tough, especially because English is not my native language. I had to constantly explain how I felt by translating myself and try to understand medical terms in a different language, but the staff at the hospital was very helpful and explained to us every single thing several times, as many times as we needed.

My mum couldn't cope, she felt so upset and powerless, and being far away from me just made things worse. She couldn't be there for me the way I needed, and that was yet another hurdle we had to overcome and a direct consequence of living so far from my home country.

My partner's mum was extremely anxious, asking why the doctors don't do this or that, which just added to our distress. I think we are very brave, first for deciding to have our child far from our family and, second, because unfortunately we had to go through this awful experience as immigrants, in a system and language that are not our own. But nothing could be done to change that, so we grew strong. We held each other hands tighter and we continued our lives together.

Thank you Antonio for giving us that strength. We will love you forever.

Story 5

This story was submitted to us from someone who wrote a complaint to an NHS Trust regarding the care they received during a miscarriage.

The following is a detailed account of the events, interactions with various healthcare services, including Maternity Assessment Unit, 111 service, GP and the Early Pregnancy Unit.

Week 9 of pregnancy: Last period date 22/05/2025

22/07/2025

In the morning I felt dizzy and noticed light pink discharge. Based on the information I found online, I understood that this does not necessarily indicate anything serious and that I should monitor the situation for any changes. In the afternoon the spotting continued, but the dizziness subsided.

23/07/2025

The following morning, before going to work, the spotting was minimal and barely noticeable. However, after returning from work (office-based, non-physical job), I noticed my underwear was heavily stained with red blood and I started to feel abdominal pain similar to painful period cramps – it began near my left ovary. I put on a sanitary pad and attempted to call the Maternity Assessment Unit. I first called at 12:20.

Following the options provided by the automated system, I selected "Midwife Community", but the second automated voice listed options and numbers so quickly that, despite several attempts, I couldn't make a valid selection and gave up.

I tried again at 12:57 and 13:00 to call the general number, but no one answered. Finally, at 13:07, I got through and explained I was 9 weeks pregnant and experiencing bleeding. The person on the phone told me to contact my GP, as they only deal with pregnancies from 16 weeks onwards.

I called my GP surgery, explained my situation, but they had no availability for that day and asked me to call back the next morning at 8:30. Since the bleeding and pain had subsided, I spent some time playing with my 16-month-old daughter.

At 15:05, when I squatted down to my daughter, I felt something flow out of me. I checked and saw a significant amount of blood on the pad, along with three long, narrow clots ranging from 5–20 mm. I also began to feel constant lower abdominal pain.

My husband and I immediately went to the hospital where we were directed to the Early Pregnancy department. There, I was told they couldn't help me without a referral. I kept asking for any form of help or information, and they eventually asked me to wait.

After some time, a doctor came to see us and reiterated that without a referral they couldn't see me, and that I should go to either my GP or the Emergency Department. She also said they had no appointments available for the coming week.

We decided not to go to A&E, fearing it would take all night. I was too stressed and panicked to stay on my own, and my husband couldn't stay with me as he had to look after our daughter – we have no one else here who could stay with me at the hospital or with our child.

We returned home and planned to contact the GP the next morning. At 7pm I went to bed to rest. I was still bleeding heavily and in pain. I couldn't sleep, cried through most of the night out of stress for my unborn child, and finally fell asleep around 11pm.

24/07/2025

I was woken by my daughter before 6am and discovered that, despite wearing a large overnight pad, I had soaked through the mattress with blood. More blood came out when I went to the toilet. I was still experiencing lower abdominal pain. This triggered a complete breakdown – I had a strong panic and crying episode. My husband immediately took care of our daughter and tried to calm me down.

Afterwards, I washed, got dressed, and still felt very weak. At 7:09 I called 111. A woman answered and asked me a series of questions: how many weeks pregnant, date of last period, type of pain – I described it as similar to a very painful period, covering the entire lower abdomen.

She asked if I had fainted – I said no; if my shoulders hurt – no; if I had bled the equivalent of a full cup – I said I didn't know, possibly yes or maybe half. I had a fully soaked pad, significant blood on the bed, and more in the toilet. She asked if I had to change my pad every hour – I said, to the best of my memory, that I was on my second pad of the day and it wasn't yet full.

After all these questions, she told me that my life was not in danger and I should contact my GP. I panicked again, crying into the phone, saying I just wanted any kind of examination to find out if my baby was still alive. She repeated that they couldn't help me as it wasn't life-threatening and referred me to my GP.

I called the GP as soon as the surgery opened at 8:30. My call was answered immediately. The receptionist remembered our conversation from the day before and told me I could be seen at 9:40.

I was seen at 9:34. I described everything mentioned above. She checked my blood pressure, pulse, and temperature.

The doctor printed my findings and instructed me to take it to the Early Pregnancy Unit. I told her they had said they had no appointments that week and that I couldn't wait that long when we didn't know what was happening. She said she couldn't promise anything but wrote down reasons for urgent tests, stating that I was bleeding heavily, and hand wrote "SCAN" on the form.

Without reading the form, I followed her instructions and went straight to the Early Pregnancy Unit. My husband dropped me off at the hospital entrance and went to park with our daughter.

I went directly to the reception, where I was immediately told that a GP referral doesn't mean anything there and that they still couldn't help me. I broke down. I panicked, cried, and pleaded that I was bleeding heavily and just needed someone to help me. The receptionist kindly took me into a side room and said she would fetch help. After maybe 5 minutes – I lost sense of time due to being completely overwhelmed – the same doctor I'd spoken to the previous day came back.

She calmed me, offered water, and listened to me cry and recount the events of the past day. I repeated that I was being sent from one place to another, no one wanted to help me, and all I wanted was to know if my baby was still alive. She promised to help and said she would try to arrange something. I waited, what felt like hours but was likely about 30 minutes, until she returned, asked me to describe my condition again, took notes, and then informed me that I had been accepted for a scan within the hour.

My husband looked after our daughter, and I waited around 40 minutes before being called. During the abdominal ultrasound scan, the doctor, seeing my distress, asked if I wanted the screen turned off. I refused. Unfortunately, during the scan I could already tell nothing was visible. I was asked if I consented to a trans vaginal scan – I agreed. After preparing, the scan was performed, and again I could see nothing. The doctor confirmed what I feared:

there was no sign of a pregnancy. I had miscarried. I was given time to calm down and get dressed. I was then asked to wait in the corridor for a blood test. Staff asked if I needed anything or if someone was with me – my husband was on his way to join me.

The same doctor as before took my blood sample and explained they wanted to measure my HCG level and that I should return on Monday (28/07/2025) for a follow-up test. She also explained that the exact timing and cause of the miscarriage are unknown, that what I experienced was not a period, and that everything inside looked normal – the body was simply clearing out after the loss, which could take up to two weeks. If bleeding or pain worsened, I should contact a doctor.

While I have no complaints about the care provided by the Early Pregnancy Unit once I was finally seen, nor about the GP's involvement, I am devastated that it took an enormous number of stressful calls and visits before I was given any help at all. 9 weeks of pregnancy is still a pregnancy. If the baby had still been alive, the amount of stress I was subjected to could have harmed the foetus – and it also endangered my own well-being and those around me. I do not know whether this trauma will affect me long-term or whether I will need help from a specialist.

I am horrified that I had to beg for help while blood was running down my legs. This is inhumane and unforgivable. In the early stages, I was offered no assistance – not even information or mental health support. This country puts so much emphasis on mental health, yet when a woman loses a pregnancy – a deeply traumatic experience made worse by hormonal changes – she is completely abandoned by the system. I was fortunate this was not my first long-awaited pregnancy, that I was mentally stable before this tragedy, and that I had the support of my husband and daughter. But not every woman is so lucky, and for some this could have had tragic consequences.

I am finishing this letter 10 days after the events. In the meantime, I had my second HCG blood test, which confirmed the loss of pregnancy. On some days, my mental state resembled clinical depression – apathy, hopelessness, fear, profound sadness, no desire to work, eat, or live.

As I stated earlier – I did not expect to be examined on the spot, but I did expect someone to show empathy and offer at least mental support to a woman most likely experiencing a miscarriage, rather than treating her as though she were just menstruating.

I understand that medical procedures must follow certain guidelines, and that resources can be limited. However, the lack of empathy and the bureaucratic obstacles I encountered during such a vulnerable and traumatic moment of my life left me feeling abandoned, humiliated, and emotionally broken.

No one should have to beg for help while experiencing the loss of a pregnancy. The absence of even basic support in the early contacts – whether informational or psychological – was devastating and unacceptable. I believe the system failed me, and I fear that others may go through the same without any change.

Final Words

We thank all of the people who have trusted us with their stories to share with the world about their experiences of baby loss. We know that this series may have been difficult to read, but we hope that it opens up conversations. We hope it helps people to think about the support that migrant families need on this journey and we hope that it helps normalise conversation around baby loss in different communities.

If you would like to get in touch after reading this, you can contact us via our email address:

hello@willowsrainbowbox.co.uk

We know this series may trigger several emotions. We are here should you need to talk or get any further support after reading this series.

Thank you for reading.