

# Refugee Week

# Refugee Week 2020

## Case Studies



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# Introduction

## About Refugee Week

Refugee Week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees.

Founded in 1998 in response to growing hostility to refugees and asylum seekers and held every year around World Refugee Day on the 20 June, Refugee Week is also a growing global movement.

Through a programme of arts, cultural and educational events alongside media and creative campaigns, Refugee Week brings about positive encounters between communities, helping them to connect and learn from each other, and promoting a culture of welcome.

Refugee Week is a partnership of national and international NGOs and unions, coordinated by Counterpoints Arts, a charity which supports the arts by and about migrants and refugees. In Scotland Refugee Week is celebrated as Refugee Festival Scotland, coordinated by Scottish Refugee Council, and Refugee Week Wales and Northern Ireland are coordinated by Welsh Refugee Council and NICRAS, respectively.

Alongside the national partnership, Refugee Week is realised by hundreds of organisations and groups across the UK who organise Refugee Week events and activities every year. These include arts and cultural producers and organisations, schools, universities, activist networks, refugee support and advocacy groups, faith groups, libraries and local councils.

## Refugee Week 2020

Kicking off just a few months after Covid-19 broke out in the UK, Refugee Week 2020 took place as a digital festival for the first time, 15-21 June.

Despite the rapid move online and all the challenges that followed lockdown, over 350 Refugee Week events and activities were organised by groups and organisations across the UK, a vivid testament to the passion, commitment and responsiveness of the Refugee Week partnership and network.

At a time when community kindness was a lifeline and social inequalities were being laid bare, Refugee Week 2020 brought people together, gave a platform to the voices and talents of people who have lived through displacement, and enabled new audiences to connect with the struggles, experiences and creative work of refugees. The Refugee Week 2020 theme, 'Imagine', felt more relevant and important than ever.

The first ever digital Refugee Week was a major learning curve for everyone involved, and we believe that as a movement we have emerged better connected, digitally upskilled, and better equipped to carry out our work in an increasingly uncertain world.



## **Seven Case Studies**

In these case studies, organisers of seven wide-ranging Refugee Week activities share what they did, what their process was and what they learned. We hope that these seven examples will provide useful inspiration to anyone who is thinking about holding their own activities for Refugee Week, or is interested in learning more about the festival.

These case studies were funded through a Comic Relief Covid Emergency Fund grant awarded to Counterpoints Arts, with the aim of sharing learning about creative and community responses in the Covid context.



## 1. A Day of Welcome & Havens East online exhibition

Jake Rose-Brown, Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary



A 'Basque Boys' football team that took on local teams in Norfolk © Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary

Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary is a local network of schools committed to being safe, welcoming and inclusive places, especially for refugees and asylum seekers. It is part of the national Schools of Sanctuary initiative. In recent years Refugee Week has become a focal point of activity for the schools in our network. In 2018, in partnership with Dr Jeanette Baxter of Anglia Ruskin University, we launched Norfolk Welcomes: a day of learning for Norfolk schools inspired by local histories of refugee migration past and present. Norfolk Welcomes has become an annual event which to date has involved 40,000 schoolchildren and raised thousands of pounds for local, national and international refugee causes.

This year the challenges placed on schools due to Covid-19 forced us to radically rethink our plans. Our local community project evolved into A Day of Welcome, an online initiative designed to support schools and home-learners nationwide getting involved with Refugee Week.

A Day of Welcome took place on the Friday preceding Refugee Week and aimed to:

- build understanding of the experiences and contributions of refugees and asylum seekers
- uncover and celebrate little-known stories of refugee migration



- signpost Refugee Week events which pupils, families and staff may wish to participate in

Migration history is at the heart of our projects and the inspiration for A Day of Welcome was the research from our National Lottery Heritage Funded partner project, Havens East. Havens East uncovered the forgotten stories of some of the 4,000 unaccompanied child Basque refugees who sought sanctuary in the UK during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The research for the project was carried out by volunteer citizen researchers, including refugees and asylum seekers, across Cambridge and Norfolk. Inspired by the Basque children's stories we created resources and activities for teachers, schools and home-learning families to engage critically and creatively with refugee migration. Key outputs of the project included:

- The Havens East online exhibition, which uses rarely-seen film footage and original photographs along with the voices of rescuers and refugees to tell this hidden story of sanctuary
- The Words of Welcome stay-at-home art project. This resource for primary and secondary pupils explores the experiences of Syrian refugees today. It invites the pupils to create an individual piece of art to be shared with, and extend a welcome to, families resettling in the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.



© Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary

As well as Anglia Ruskin University, we also worked with Amnesty International to develop and deliver a webinar for A Day of Welcome. This training for teachers explored the challenges for refugees and asylum seekers in the context of Covid-19 and shared opportunities, ideas and resources to support schools in building a culture of welcome for refugees in their communities. Other partners included UNHCR and Refugee Week,



who helped to promote A Day of Welcome and the Havens East online exhibition.

In a short space of time a great deal was achieved. Creating an online exhibition for the Havens East project allowed us to reach a much larger audience than originally planned and to tell the Basque children's story in a more dynamic, innovative and interesting way than we would have been able to achieve with a traditional exhibition. It far exceeded our initial hopes and expectations. The website also has a life span of three years and as such, that resource is one that can continue to be shared and used by educators as well as the wider community. We already have plans to use it for another project in 2021.

Due to the Covid crisis we had to completely rethink our whole approach to the project. We had initially planned to work chiefly in East Anglia and to have series of school workshops inspired by the citizen research. Schools in Cambridge and Norwich would have responded creatively to what they had learned about the Basque refugee story, creating songs and drama. This was all due to culminate in a public performance and exhibition bringing together the schools, research participants and general public in a theatre in Norwich. Unable to realise those plans, we created the multimedia exhibition as an alternative means to bring the Basque research to life and to share their story with a national audience. Moving online and trying to get schools involved when they were partially closed and working under many constraints proved to be challenging. We also found that promoting and delivering the project online rather than through our existing network of local schools made it more difficult to gauge participation and to evaluate the impact of the project.

Considering the challenges presented by the Covid crisis and the short time scales involved to completely reinvent the project, we were very pleased with its reach and impact. In the two weeks following the launch of the Havens East online exhibition for A Day of Welcome on 12<sup>th</sup> June, the website had 1,618 visitors. 38 schools contacted us to let us know that they took part in A Day of Welcome. The Words of Welcome resource saw 125 individual artworks submitted and these have been compiled into an online exhibition that will later be shared with families of Syrian refugees who are rebuilding their lives in the UK. The webinar for teachers, co-hosted with Amnesty International, proved a great success, with more than 60 educators taking part. This project helped us to build a relationship with UNHCR and there are now plans afoot to collaborate with them on a related project in the next academic year.

If you are planning to get involved in Refugee Week, I'd advise you to get in touch with the person or organisation that coordinates Refugee Week in your area. See what is already happening and who is involved. If there is no coordinator local to you, then maybe you could get the ball rolling! There may be projects, individuals and groups that you can collaborate with or, that can be of mutual support. In particular, I have found it invaluable to work with local organisations that support refugees and asylum seekers.



Through your event you may be able to fundraise or collect donations for them, or help promote their work. They, on the other hand, may be able to advise you on designing and delivering your event in a way that respects, includes and reflects the voices and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in your local community.

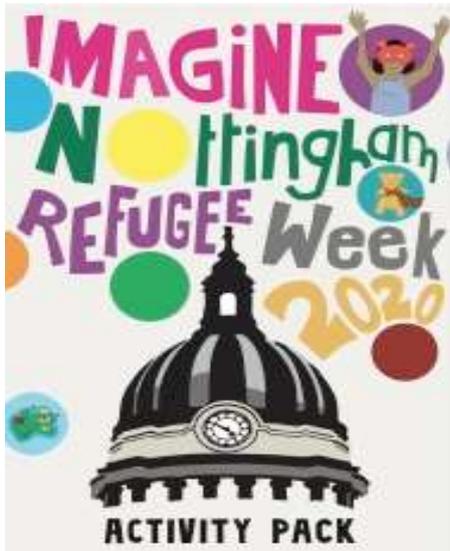
**Learn more about Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary at [www.norfolksos.co.uk](http://www.norfolksos.co.uk).**

**To find out more about becoming a School of Sanctuary, visit [www.schools.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.schools.cityofsanctuary.org).**



## 2. Nottingham Refugee Week 2020

Nottingham Refugee Week Committee



© Nottingham Refugee Week

### Overview and activities

Nottingham Refugee Week (NRW) is a vibrant cultural festival that runs every year in our city from 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> June. It is a Non-Profit Community Organisation run entirely by a volunteer committee, funded by donations and community grants, and committee members come from a wide range of backgrounds, including within the local refugee support sector, refugee community, arts, education and finance. Nottingham Refugee Week has become a vibrant event in the local calendar, with over 30 organisations from across the city joining together to show their support for the city's refugees. This year was set to be all the more spectacular thanks to the generous £10k award the festival received from the National Lottery, and £500 from the Renewal Trust. But as March approached, it became obvious that Refugee Week couldn't go ahead in its planned form due to the impact of Covid-19.

The Committee swiftly made the decision to preserve its major funding pots for the delivery of our planned activities the following year, and so to put most events on hold. However, in order to maintain a presence for NRW in the local and national landscape, the Committee also decided to develop a pared-down two-strand programme that would cater both to a virtual audience via online events, and to the local refugee community who have faced particular financial, social and wellbeing-related hardships during the 'lockdown' period this year.



## Events



17/08/2020  
7:00 pm

**Online Life-Writing Session with Eve Makis**



15/08/2020 -  
21/08/2020  
All Day

**Film: The Sounds of Hospitality. Available online throughout the week.**

### **Our online programme consisted of:**

**Online Life-Writing Session with Eve Makis. Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June, 7pm.** Local author and Writer-in-Residence at Nottingham Trent University delivered this online session designed to inspire people to write their own life stories.

**Film: The Sounds of Hospitality. Available online throughout the week.** As a part of the project “Hospitality and European Film” (which involved several Nottingham-based partners), Michel Gasco and Parisa Delshad made this documentary film, which was released simultaneously through NRW and the project website.

**Podcast: Interview with Christy Lefteri, author of ‘The Beekeeper of Aleppo’.** Author Eve Makis created this interview with the prize-winning author Christy Lefteri specifically for Nottingham City of Literature and NRW 2020. It explored the author’s experiences of meeting and writing about the refugee communities that inspired her novel.

**Student Insights.** Earlier in the year, a group of English students at Nottingham Trent University had the opportunity to meet some of the inspiring people connected to Nottingham Refugee Week, and to reflect on what it means to be a refugee. Students published interviews and podcasts based on this work.

**Yoga in the Garden World Refugee Day 2020. Saturday 20th June 10am to 11am.** This lovely session was run online by Bahia Yoga, who generously raised funds for the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum Covid-19 appeal via online donations.

**HOST Nottingham Online Open Evening. Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June 7.00 – 8.30pm.** This session enabled people interested in hosting refugees to hear the experiences of those who have hosted and been hosted, and to find out how they too might offer this in their homes.



**YANA Community Mums and Children Singing Workshop Online. Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 4pm.** YANA (You Are Not Alone) Community is an Iranian Charity community that supports single mothers, and helps members and their children organize workshops, activities and cultural events. This wonderful online singing event enabled mums and children to learn a song together.

### **Podcast from author Eve Makis: The World Is for Everyone.**

Developed specially for NRW, Eve Makis explored how grassroots creative projects such as those run earlier in the year with the PAMOJA group at NNRF can empower and bring about lasting social change.

### **Refugee Roots celebrates Refugee Week. 17<sup>th</sup> June, 10am-2pm.**

Nottingham-based charity Refugee Roots ran a morning-long virtual event that included online toga, live music from Erika Wood, a live cooking tutorial with Md Mominal Hamid, a virtual lunch and an art class.

**Self-Love Creative Activity Pack.** Self-Love project is devised and facilitated by artist Meera Osborne. The activities aim to alleviate isolation, build trust and self-esteem and share skills. Resources from the project were available to download online.

### **Craft and Creativity Pack**

NRW worked hard to recognize that the Covid-19 crisis affects people differently – and that includes refugee communities, who may not have ready access to internet or computer facilities.

With this in mind, NRW decided to develop a Creative Pack that could be physically distributed to refugee families and other families in need around Nottingham, which would provide them with craft and creative activities, and the resources they needed to complete them. For this purpose, a £1000 grant generously offered towards NRW festival activities from NNRF was reassigned to this project, given its direct and tangible impact on the wellbeing of refugees in Nottingham a way that was not being met by any other organisation during the lockdown period.

The development of the pack was led by City Arts, who provided an in-house designer to develop the materials. Alma Solarte-Tobon and Alison Denholm led on sourcing the materials, while committee members also contributed activities to the pack. City Arts also brokered a partnership with the Nottingham Community Cohesion and Safety Service at Nottingham City Council, who contributed their own further funding and resources in



order to make a total of 600 packs available for distribution to families across Nottingham.

The packs were distributed in the first instance via PAMOJA Women Together Group at NNRF; the Red Cross in Nottingham; Nottingham Arimathea Trust; NEST; and Refugee Roots, who ensured that packs went in the first instance to refugee families. A further 500 packs were distributed to families in need across Nottinghamshire via the Community Cohesion team, many of which were made available via food banks.

The packs contained an array of art and craft materials – including paints, brushes, sketchbooks, crayons, papers, masks, pipecleaners and glue – along with a booklet specially designed for Nottingham Refugee Week, featuring creative activities exploring ways in which we can still use our imaginations to connect with the world around us at this challenging time.

The booklet remains available for anyone to download for free on the Nottingham Refugee Week website:

[https://issuu.com/cityartsnotts/docs/nrw\\_2020\\_activity\\_pack\\_-\\_no\\_pack\\_references](https://issuu.com/cityartsnotts/docs/nrw_2020_activity_pack_-_no_pack_references)



© Norfolk Schools of Sanctuary

## Event organisation and involvement

Events were organised by independent partners across the city, including yoga groups, writers and arts organisations. Many of these groups were already committed to NRW events and so simply reformatted their original offerings into online delivery, while others, such as the writer Eve Makis, developed new materials specifically in response to the altered cultural climate. These partners were inspired to get involved via ongoing calls for participation that we had put out during the year – including our annual information and networking event, to which we invite all cultural partners across the city each December; and subsequent online calls issued from March onwards. The Committee coordinated with each event organiser to advise on online delivery, and to assist in the creation of standardised materials with which each event could be advertised online. We were able to prepare the online programme in just over a month, while the activity pack took a month to design and around a month to order / prepare / distribute materials.



## Achievements

- A volunteer-run committee comprised of many people facing serious challenges to their working practices during lockdown was able to continue to function and to deliver a small but meaningful programme of events.
- We were able to preserve our funding for the planned events next year while also repurposing existing pots of money to urgent usage this year.
- We were able to reach 600 families, including just under 100 refugee families, across Nottinghamshire with bespoke Refugee Week-themed craft and activity materials during lockdown thanks to partnerships with the Nottingham Community Cohesion Team, and through community distribution networks facilitated by Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum, Red Cross Nottingham, Refugee Roots, Nottingham Arimathea and Nottingham Educational Sanctuary Team.
- We were able to access expanded audiences through the online medium, from beyond the city and from beyond the usual communities who engage with NRW.
- We were able to explore new mediums such as podcasts and online resource packs for the delivery of material that will be accessible to communities beyond Nottingham, and that will endure beyond the duration of the festival.

## Challenges

- Our status as a volunteer-run committee meant that we did not have access to the support experienced by those within paid roles and funded organisations – such as Business Zoom accounts, furlough schemes or ready guidance on expected practices. Nor were there ready replacements within the organisation when members of the Committee became ill (as was unfortunately the case for one of our key committee members).
- The need for more frequent online communications / meetings were sometimes difficult to accommodate, given the demands of the shift to online working and childcare that many of us were facing in our paid day jobs.
- Our website required a complete overhaul in order to accommodate the programme of online events. This required some unexpected expenditure and time; fortunately, we were able to accommodate this.
- We had to consider balancing the needs of our usual RW audience with the more urgent material needs of refugee communities in Nottingham, given the relatively small pots of funding available to us. As such, we chose to focus our funding on resources of direct benefit to the refugee community, and fortunately, were able to source partners through the City Council who enabled us to expand our project to other families in need.



## **Reach and impact**

- With our craft pack: 600 families across Nottinghamshire, just under 100 of whom identify as service users of refugee support organisations. With the assistance of the City Council Community Cohesion Team, we were able to focus our distribution of the remaining packs on less affluent areas of the city, operating via food banks and community outreach schemes.
- Online: numbers for online events were typically higher than would be the case for physical events during NRW. For instance, HOST Nottingham, which organises hosting for asylum-seekers and refugees at local homes, ran an online event which comprised 28 screens and 35 people present, many of whom were unfamiliar to HOST. This is a far higher number than would be present at a physical event, and has resulted in at least five new hosts offering accommodation: an improvement on the result of physical events.
- The reach of events across the general public was likely smaller than in a typical Refugee Week. However, our more focussed efforts targeted at different areas of the community – specifically refugee families, and in-need families – arguably had a greater impact on wellbeing and community cohesion. Many members of PAMOJA, a women’s group at Nottingham Refugee Forum, for instance, posted images of their children enjoying the craft packs and decorating their homes with pictures from it. At the height of lockdown, this undoubtedly had an impact on family wellbeing.

## **Lessons learned**

- The online medium can be effective as a means to reach wider communities beyond Nottingham, as well as those beyond the refugee support sector. However, it is less effective in the service of refugee communities themselves, who may lack access to technology and who are already experiencing community isolation. The medium also translates better for conversational and information events than it does for entertainment such as dance and music.
- Online meetings can be an efficient way to get the team together. However, a proliferation of online demands can stretch volunteers too thinly, especially when they have daytime jobs. Daytime meetings are therefore inappropriate for volunteer committees. Monthly online meetings in the evening seemed the best balance, with remaining work completed via email and phone call.

## **Advice for future Refugee Week participants and organisers**

- Be realistic in terms of what your particular group can achieve. It may be tempting to compare yourselves to larger festivals that are supported by paid workers and formal organisations, but there is room for Refugee Week to take different forms that work best for your city and your context.
- The National Lottery Awards for All scheme is a great funding source, and a relatively straightforward application process! They



also demonstrated admirable flexibility when it came to altering our plans for the year and rolling funding over into the next.

- If you set yourselves up as a non-profit community organisation, ensure that you create a solid database of information – including social media logons, financial details, working documents, contact lists and marketing materials – that can easily be passed on when the committee alters each year. This will avoid each year’s team having to ‘relearn’ the job!
- Don’t forget about the National Refugee Week website. It has lots of handy resources that you can use!

**For more information about Nottingham Refugee Week, visit [www.nottinghamrefugeeweek.org](http://www.nottinghamrefugeeweek.org) or email [nottinghamrefugeeweek@gmail.com](mailto:nottinghamrefugeeweek@gmail.com)**



### 3. Refugee Week Radio Show

Association Pepita Productions



© Association Pepita Productions

Association Pepita Productions is a France-based organisation that arranges artistic projects ranging from theatre and poetry readings to writing and film workshops. Most of our the projects are run by myself, Daniel Pearson, and my wife Loredana Acquaviva. Our main project for 2020, working with the local council, was to create a street library that would hold readings and theatre shows in a deprived suburb of Paris whose inhabitants, for the most part, are second and third generation migrants from Algeria who had left their country to come and live in France after the Algerian war.

Loredana is a filmmaker and had her first feature-length documentary aired on French Television last year. Whilst we were in the UK at the end of 2019 researching ideas and looking for characters for a new film project based in Kent and its transition through Brexit, we came in contact with the Kent Refugee Officer for the Diocese of Canterbury Domenica Pecoraro who suggested we talk to Tom Green from Counterpoints Arts. It was during this period that the Coronavirus broke out and just weeks later we found ourselves suddenly confined to our apartment in Paris.

Before meeting Domenica we knew nothing of Counterpoints Arts and the incredible work they do. Our journey into presenting an event at the 2020 Refugee Week started with a Skype call with Tom Green. Now facing the immediate cancellation of all our projects, the anxiety and fear had started to set in with ‘What to do now?’ Talking with Tom was a really welcome distraction from ‘the new norm’ and he planted a seed in our minds that we should try and arrange an activity for the Refugee Week and with that we decided to get involved.

What to do?

We set about brainstorming what we could propose and how it might realistically work in an online environment. We quickly became bogged



down in a circle of the same ideas. For instance asking people to send us their photos of life during this insane period of our lives and we thought we would arrange an online exhibition and have a competition. Then we saw that the Guardian Newspaper was doing it, as well as everybody else. We changed tack and decided that we wanted something more connected to Refugee Week. We live in France and in 2017 we had witnessed the arrival of refugees to the streets of Paris especially to the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, which is the district we live in. Like many others we would take our spare food and bundles of clothes, and we would see associations giving French lessons in the streets by the canal at Stalingrad. So we decided to focused our ideas into looking how we could link France and the UK through the crisis they both face.

Loredana is also volunteer for a small digital radio station called *Radio a'Leagre*, and occasionally she helps to present a show for the Italian community who live in Paris. During the Lockdown *Radio a'Leagre* continued to broadcast using *Facebook Live* to transmit their shows as the studio was shut. Taking inspiration from them we thought we could try and create a radio show for Refugee Week and ask the organisations that would be presenting events during Refugee Week to get involved and promote their activities. This would also present an opportunity to open it up not just for the UK and English speakers but by asking French Refugee Associations to join in as it would open it up for French speakers too.

The show would go live daily, and each morning we aimed to have two different guests who were holding an event during Refugee Week and have them tell us about themselves and about their organisation and how the public could get involved in their events. At the same time we asked some French charities working with refugees to join us and discuss what they do. We'd also use free world music tracks to break up the conversations and let the audience digest.

The first major issue we faced was whether it was technically possible for us to do it. Neither of us had ever used *Facebook Live* before. Luckily we were able to call in some help from *Radio a'leagre's* technical guy who talked us through step by step what exactly it was we needed to do. It involved downloading a studio app called *OBS Studio*, which enabled us to link up to *Zoom* and *Facebook Live* together. We also needed to create a Facebook page and a *Zoom* account for *Pepita Productions*. Once these were in place we had some online tutorials from our technical guy who helped us run a few test broadcasts [Editor's note: it is also possible to stream *Zoom* live to Facebook directly using a *Zoom* pro account].

When we knew what was possible the next step was to contact all the organisations holding events during the Refugee Week and ask them if they'd like to be part of the show. There was a lot of good will and positivity during this period and most of the organisations where very open to joining us. Once the daily line-ups where confirmed we researched and worked out the structure of the interviews, chose the music for the playlist and scheduled all the *Zoom* meetings.



After a couple of last-minute cancellations and a scramble to find replacements the planning went pretty smoothly. To make sure all the guests knew what was happening with the show and to make sure we had no technical issues we asked all the guests to join us half-an-hour before the show was due to go live.

With every show we learned so much about the problems and issues caused by displacement and the organisations working to help those affected by it. For anyone thinking of holding event for the next Refugee Week then don't hesitate to get involved. You'll have full support from the team at Counterpoints Arts. They really will take away any apprehensions you have and help you realise the event you want to hold. Along the way you'll meet some amazing and fascinating people.

Our guests throughout Refugee Week were:

Usman Khalid, Haven Coffee

Pauline Blanchet, Aral Sea Productions

Jess Thompson, Migrateful who were running online cooking events with Refugees.

Blandine Lebrun from a French initiative that helps Refugees in Paris called Tandem-Réfugiés..

Catja de Haas, The Giant Dolls' House Project

Pierre Henry, Director, France-Terre-Asile

Barbara Kentish, People Not Walls

Ben Solanky, Empathy Action

Tosin Adeosun, Counterpoints Arts

Kate Scarlett Duffy and Syed Haleem Najibi, Phosphoros Theatre

Pierre Roques, Utopia56

Domenica Pecoraro, Kent Refugee Projects Officer at the Diocese of Canterbury

Juliette Fae, Ensemble C'est Possible

Dr Benjamin Dix, Positive Negatives



## 4. Migration Matters Online Festival 2020

Sam Holland, Festival Director



### **Bringing Migration Matters Festival online for its 2020 celebration as part of Refugee Week**

Now for those who don't know, Migration Matters Festival has been going since 2015 (2016 as Migration Matters Festival) and brought about by independent producer and theatremaker Sam Holland and former Theatre Deli programmer-producer Sarah Sharp. The aim was to respond to the growing concern at the treatment of refugees and sanctuary seekers in Sheffield and the UK and to provide an enjoyable programme as well as platforms for anyone with lived experience of migration or displacement. The festival has successfully brought over 20,000 people and programmed around 200 events in the year it has been running and while it has been a wonderful and rewarding experience pulling it together... there's a reason they say the events industry is one of the most stressful professions to work in. 2020 has clearly taken that to the next level, not just for events but for just about any industry.

That said when you're a grassroots voluntary organisation still learning the ropes of planning and delivering an ambitious annual programme, the Covid-19 pandemic presented new challenges our team never thought we'd need to address, but also opened up surprising avenues for bringing people together from all walks of life. Back in March when it became apparent that we would need to abandon or at the very least postpone our planning for the festival, we believed it might be an entire year before we could revisit all the work we'd done in the lead up to that point. Our programme was all but booked, our community partners in place to work with groups across the city and our team ready and raring to announce the 2020 festival to Sheffield and the rest of the country. In what felt like just a few days that plan turned on its head.

We then found ourselves suspending our operations and taking time to reflect on what this meant for the festival but also the communities and people we support and empower year in year out. The main concern was about safety and feasibility, not just safety from the pandemic but online safety and security in a virtual setting where people aren't as familiar. Could our soulful festival pull together a range of activities that could inspire audiences while we're all locked down and unable to physically see other people?

Crisis and emergency meetings seemed to flooding most of the channels and networks we are a part of, but within the team there was a collective assuredness and feeling that during a time where arts and cultural activity seemed to be lost, there needed to be something to fill that void. It therefore



felt like a duty, a necessity that prompted us to power on into a huge unknown.

From working with Sheffield's venues, artists, citizens and organisations, it became all about how to effectively use Zoom, Vimeo and our very own website to best reach and publicise a string of online events that could still celebrate peoples cultures and unite people of all backgrounds under the banner of migration, identity and sanctuary.

This process would take us on a rapid and at times chaotic journey of converting everything we knew and applying it to a digital landscape with its own technical jargon and language. These challenges were faced head on, and while this took head scratching and a tenacious willingness to soldier on, a new adapted programme took shape.



Left to right: © Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, © Alim Kamara, © Si Rawlinson

Before we knew it we had activities such as an immersive childrens theatre adventure via Zoom, an online exhibition, dance, writing and theatre workshops, a podcast series about refugee experiences, educational talks delivered by university academics, a global hip-hop and music event, a spoken word double bill and a Uganda based DJ all forming part of a 45-event festival.

Perhaps most exciting was while our previous mantra and values centred around bringing the diverse communities from across Sheffield together, in a celebration of the cultures that have enriched the city, the online format allowed us to do so much more than that. For the first time we could connect with Refugee Week initiatives across the UK and feed into other programmes, sharing ideas and collaborating like we hadn't been able to do so before. Even more than that Sheffielders could be watching content with participants from Canada, Singapore, Taiwan or Palestine and people from a further 95 countries that tuned into the festival.

While it was never plain sailing for the festival throughout the week with countless technical issues emerging, this was always going to be inevitable and I'm proud we set a precedent for how festivals can adapt and make that move. It is essential in these unprecedented and alarming times, that we have something that reminds us of the importance of being together, even when we are advised to stay apart.



Tellingly, the success of this year's online festival has inspired us to retain a digital and online element going forward so that while we continue to bring Sheffield together, we can extend this invite to the rest of the world.

Moving forward, we are tentatively planning next year's 2021 programme but of course taking into consideration the possibility of further postponement and adaptation. However, if this year is anything to go by and the wide-ranging activity that took place over Refugee Week, this is such a vital opportunity for organisations, individuals and anyone who recognises the importance of the week to get involved.

Part of the reason Migration Matters came about was simply the lack of anything close to an organised Refugee Week in Sheffield, and so for anyone considering getting involved in this incredible week and celebrating the contribution refugees, sanctuary seekers and all migrants have brought to the place they live then I hope they can take inspiration from the roots of the festival.

Our team do not have extensive event management experience, and it is through working in close partnerships with arts venues, charities, organisations that support the ethos of the festival that something like this is possible. From the get go we have managed to work with some amazing people across Sheffield notable places like Theatre Deli who have given in-kind venue, programming and funding support since its inception. We have also have close ties with other venues like DINA (a digital arts space), The Art House (a vibrant gallery space) and The Showroom Cinema (one of the UKs most prominent independent cinemas). We also ensure regular round the year communication with the city's refugee and asylum support sector, linking with causes like City of Sanctuary Sheffield, Refugee Council, Assist Sheffield, Lesbian Asylum Support Sheffield and a whole host of other essential causes who ensure that we are making the festival accessible to the people who need it most.

Early on, we realised that the huge ambition would need financial backing and so from 2016 we launched an arts council bid, which has incrementally built up since we launched allowing us to do more and more each year. Along with the enormous support from the Arts Council we have built ties with the University of Sheffield who have contributed financially and also provided resources like volunteers and academics. We have managed to secure other funding from places like Evan Cornish Foundation (a Yorkshire based funder), Lush Ltd (who fund projects deemed to spread awareness of human rights), Sheffield Town Trust and also had support from local initiatives like the Sheffield College, Sheffield Cultural Consortium and even a local opticians, Daybell and Choo. This is an often relentless job however to ensure you achieve that vision it takes that investment to ensure people's time is adequately compensated and to alleviate pressure on those who are leading the activity. It also means you're supporting artists, venues, organisations and the local economy.

Though what you learn through organising these events, is that even with the backing and investment things will never go 100% to plan. That was



definitely the case with our first online festival and although numerous events saw one or two issues in delivery, we see this only as a good thing, and encourage people to assess failure/mistakes as growth. It is vital that people don't scare themselves into inaction. If you have an idea, find out how best to resource it and pursue it.

We personally cannot wait to reconnect with the Refugee Week initiatives and organisations across the UK to further bolster the enormous impact this week already has and crucially to celebrate the voices of those who have been displaced especially at such a challenging time.



## 5. Phosphoros Theatre's Refugee Week activities

Kate Duffy-Syedi



© Phosphoros Theatre

### What did we do?

Our Refugee Week 2020 activities fell into two categories: public facing events and participatory workshops with refugees around the UK (with plenty of intersections in between). Our largest project was the production of a 35 minute short adventure / comedy film called 'Strung Out', created under lockdown conditions but totally unrelated to the pandemic. The film, framed around the search for a missing musical instrument, focussed on friendship, identity and the stickiness of the label "refugee". As well, we had a screening of our 2018-20 show 'Pizza Shop Heroes', in partnership with Migration Matters Festival, with a post-show Q&A, a roundtable in partnership with Counterpoints Arts and an artist workshop that explored using autobiography. Alongside this, we delivered eight online drama workshops that explored human rights, and shared online a recorded poem with contributions from all the groups we met. We also presented a film we had made in collaboration with CARAS, Protection Approaches and People's Palace Project to an online audience of councillors and community groups local to Wandsworth.



## **What inspired us to get involved?**

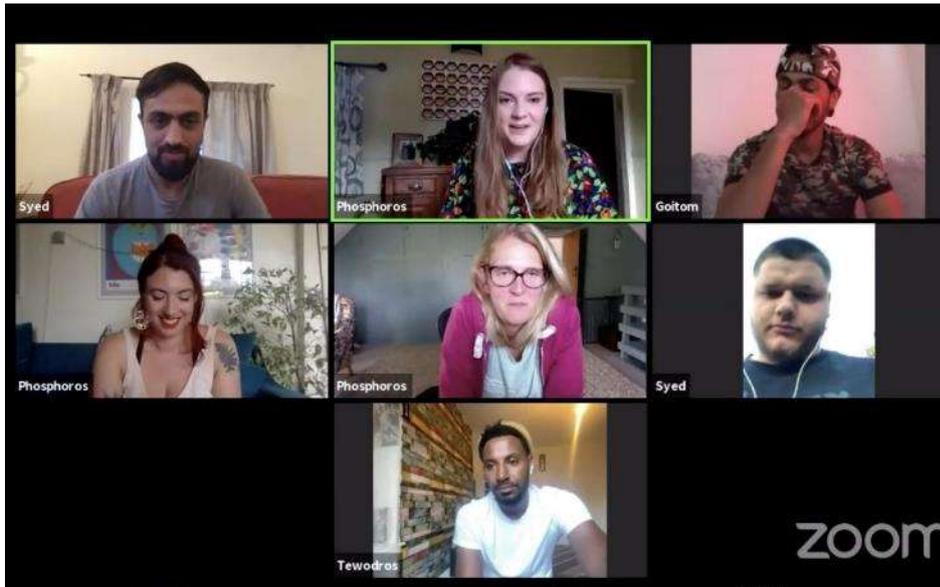
One of the biggest events in Phosphoros Theatre's calendar is Refugee Week. The festival enables our whole team to focus solely on sharing our work and spreading our message as widely as possible, as well as meeting refugee young people at pre-show talks and workshops and recognising their lived experience through our performances. Whilst moving online would inevitably be a challenge, we saw using film as an exciting opportunity to stretch how we make work. We were particularly keen to focus our creative outputs away from COVID-19 (early in lockdown we had made a short film series in response to lockdown called 'But everything has an ending') and retain attention on wider issues facing refugees and asylum seekers, including structural oppressions such as the Hostile Environment Policy. Regarding our participation work, given that we had swiftly moved our weekly activities with young people online in March, we felt confident we could still deliver drama workshops over Zoom.

## **Managing our activities**

Our whole team was involved in getting our activities off the ground, and we largely split our responsibilities between creating 'Strung Out' and organising and delivering the participatory work and other events. Our three Artistic Directors focussed on writing and executive producing 'Strung Out' (Dawn), producing the week's events (Juliet) and overseeing the participatory work (Kate). We also worked with an excellent TV producer, Rebecca Bullen, and a film editor, Michael Lynch, who worked alongside 'Strung Out's director Pavlos Christodoulou and cast members Emirjon, Teddy, Goitom, Mohamed and Ali. The one person who was present in every single activity was Syed, who did everything from driving scripts across London, overseeing socially-distanced filming, delivering workshops, performing in 'Strung Out', contributing to the roundtable discussion and artist workshop and more.

## **Our most important achievement**

The most important achievement was using an exciting new medium (film) to create a piece of work that addressed some of the important political and social issues around refugee identity relevant to our company. We all agreed we wanted to use the time available (and funding, from the Arts Council's Emergency Grant and City Bridge Trust, via the London Community Response Fund) to aim for the same quality that we would want onstage. We wanted to push the boundaries of what we could do, similar to what we aim to do with our live shows. We had over 1000 shots to film, exclusively shot on mobile phones in London and Derbyshire and managed over Zoom, so it was a huge achievement resulting from perseverance, high expectations and collaboration.



© Phosphoros Theatre

## Biggest challenge

Aside from the material challenges of creating performance work with (mostly) remote direction and a lack of high quality camera kit we experienced similar challenges to others leading online workshops. Our work is intimate, gentle and is strengthened by conversations that happen in the “in between” moments, over a cup of tea or a discussion at the edge of a session. We lose this quality online. Additionally, we always have multiple staff members who can provide extra support to those new to speaking English, but this is harder to do in an online space. Fortunately one of the young people we met who spoke very little English was from Afghanistan, so Syed was able to lead activities in both Pashto and English, but this was merely coincidental and would have been much harder if we had not had the ability to have a slower, 1:1 conversation away from the main group, as we would do in person.

## Our reach and impact

We reached 3,500 people through online performances, 90 people in discussion events and over 60 people through workshops. We had viewers from 39 countries, which was an exciting difference from our usual UK-based activities. 7 of our 8 workshops were for refugee young people, and 1 was for refugee women. Collecting poetry from workshop participants demonstrated the engagement they had with the themes, and many group leaders from our wider network reported they had watched (and enjoyed) ‘Strung Out’ and/or ‘Pizza Shop Heroes’ in their online sessions. Sign ups to our Young Company demonstrated appetite for more online drama work with us. After our roundtable discussion, focussing on challenging hostility in the arts, we shared a set of recommendations online, to extend the dissemination of our discussions with colleagues in the field.



## **Our learning**

The most significant thing we learnt was the value in delivering drama workshops online with young people we may never meet. Up until Refugee Week our online workshops had only been with existing members of our Young Company (in London), who we will hopefully reunite with in the near future. After successfully replicating the quality of engagement during Refugee Week we were inspired to invite members to our Young Company from around the UK, and have since welcomed more than 15 young people from as far as Glasgow.

## **Advice for people new to Refugee Week**

Our advice for those new to Refugee Week would be to make sure local refugee communities are able to engage with your activities. Go to the grassroots to learn how to make your programme accessible, inclusive and relevant, and, importantly, not repeating what is already on offer. If you're not from a refugee background, build into your funding application planning a process of working alongside and in partnership with refugee artists, professionals and communities, to ensure your activities are responsive and collaborative. Lastly, always be wary about asking for free work from refugees, whether artistry, emotional labour or consultancy.



© Phosphoros Theatre



## 6. Coventry Welcomes

Christina Okorie, Korie Agency



Due to COVID-19 Coventry Welcomes Refugee Week delivered online for the first time this year. This was done by partnering with different organisations and individuals who work with refugees & migrants in the city. We utilised social media to share pre-recorded workshops. Our partners ran poetry workshops, launched podcasts, pre-recorded cooking sessions and craft workshops. We managed to get the young people involved by hosting an open mic night. We hosted panel talks as well. Our partners used creativity to attract the audiences and tell the stories with those who had sought sanctuary in the city. Partners included Coventry City of Culture 2021, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, Positive Youth Foundation, Positive Images Festival, Coventry City Council Migration Team, Foleshill Women' Training, Sahyadri Friends Group, Chrysalis Craft Coventry, Coventry Migration Forum, Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group, MiFriendly Cities, St Francis Employability, Warwick STAR, The Peoples Backpack Podcast, African Network, Stand and Be Counted Theatre,

The most important achievements for Refugee Week were the quality of the workshops and events that we ran online. This can be seen through the comments and shares we received from people who participated. We adapted well to the changes of having to go digital in a short period of time. We had over 10,000 people watch and engage in our videos through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Vimeo, Zoom, and the website. With over 300 people attending the five live events. The best achievement was having one of our partners CARAG receive donations from the public to continue to do the work they do. Their new podcast 'Still We Rise' continues to highlight the struggles felt by those seeking sanctuary in the city. Even after Refugee Week we still have people visiting our social media sites.

The most important challenges were getting video on social media on time. It was very hard to make sure that everyone could have access to our events and workshops. We struggled to interlink Facebook and Instagram together



to cross link events. Many organisations had limited tech knowledge and didn't have the funds for making projects accessible online.

We reached a wide audience of people within the City of Coventry and around the UK. We had partners and followers sharing our work on Twitter and Facebook.

Through Refugee Week we learnt how to run events and workshops digitally. We learnt how to use social media to attract an audience and tell the stories that need to be told. Allowing those with lived experience to have a voice and not only participate but also lead on projects with support from partners. Our audiences were also then able to understand the impact that change will have on refugees. We also made sure that each event online whether live or pre recorded had captioning. This was important to increase social inclusion and make sure we were delivering on access to our events. We managed to make 80% of all content online accessible using captioning/live captioning.

## Dr. S. F. Naseriniaki, Director of Chrysalis Craft Coventry CIC



Chrysalis Craft Cov CIC

I ran the online craft making with upcycling material to create a decorative hanging light and a session on different ways to make face-coverings (face mask) with different materials and a variety of methods. I also participated in the Belgrade Theatre Imagine translation poem, presenting the content of the poem in my language Farsi Persian. The projects where translation was central to highlighting different languages in my opinion gained the most positive feedback of the whole event.

I have experience working with those who have refugee or asylum status over the last seven years. My own personal experience of the system has helped me as an art therapist using arts and craft for wellbeing and healing the mental health issues. As part of Coventry Welcomes I used different techniques and art skills to help this target group to build their self-esteem and confidence and breaking barriers between people with different background and languages. I also attended many of the online activities during the Coventry Welcomes week including the Maokwo Bearing Gifts event and the Stand and Be Counted theatre talk and discussion.

With the Craft sessions I had been studying to deliver the right information most simply and easily to understand and follow by different individuals in the right amount of time. I also tried to make it a fun, interesting and creative session. This as I learnt had more challenges being online. My



target group was the BAME and mainly Refugees and asylum seekers as well as migrant women who are dealing with their day to day life concerns.

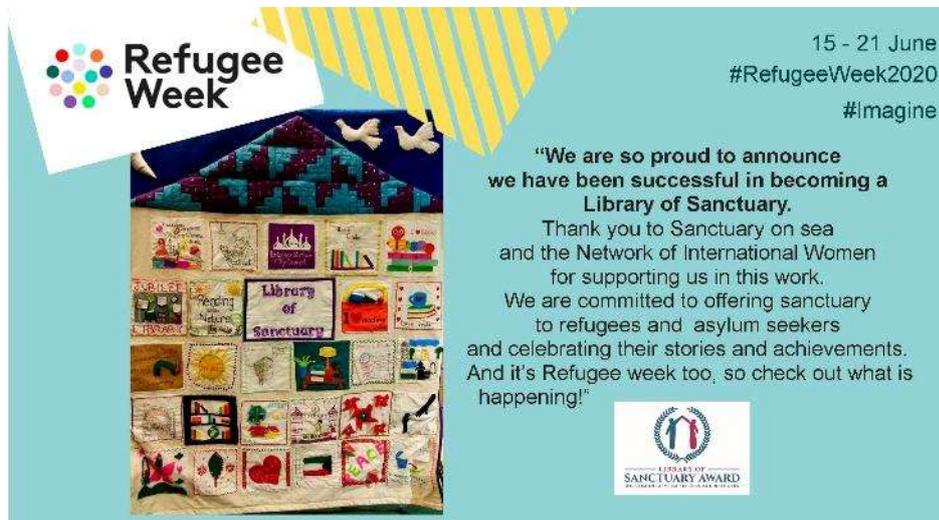
I had a challenge to deliver my activity via recording film and through social media. I had some difficulties to learn about different tools. But, it was a great challenge and I feel that it helped me to learn how to work remotely with my audience and reach a wider community while releasing the recorded learning material video online. This is only going to help me long term in delivering sessions in the future. This experience helped me to realise how to reach my target group widely through the social media and also, the advantages and disadvantages of delivering online. The experience has gratefully, improved my technical skills to be able to deliver the correct way of teaching via recording and to make sure the tasks were simple and the use of materials were accessible so that anyone could create the outputs. I learnt that it is important to avoid using very complicated terms and vocabulary, avoid using slangs and speaking clear and simple as possible. This is important when English is not your first language. Otherwise a person can lose interest and get bored easily if there is a long conversation or using specific terms and vocabulary which makes them feel that they are excluded.

I would love to send my appreciation to the great team of people who collaborate remotely to the event and run the activities followed by schedules. I couldn't make it without the help and support of the program organisers, Coventry City of Culture and the Coventry Welcomes Committee, who was always available and responsibly solving the technical issues and answering to the questions.



## 7. Brighton & Hove Libraries

Norah Carr



© Brighton & Hove Libraries

### What did you do for Refugee Week?

Brighton & Hove Libraries held several digital events and activities during Refugee Week as well as promoting other content from organisations. We had a curated selection of stock for customers to download and information and resources about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and organisation that support them as part of staff awareness training. We announced our Library of Sanctuary Award.

We delivered four story times for under fives, their parents and carers, and a new primary aged story club based on the Refugee Week theme of imagine. We launched a new craft session for children and their adults inspired by the Giant Dolls House project where participants were encouraged to make a shoebox room or house out of scrap materials and during the session questions were asked e.g. what does home mean to you? What makes you feel at home? How would you feel if you had to leave your home and what would you take with you if you could?

A few weeks before Refugee Week we launched a Flash Fiction competition which ran for 4 weeks. 50 words max on the theme of 'Imagine' it was open to all ages and judged in the following categories: Under 12s, Under 18s and Adults. We were very lucky to have three wonderful judges; Onjali Q Raúf the founder of Making Herstory, and author of 'The Boy at the Back of the Class', 'The Star Outside my Window', 'The Night Bus Hero' and 'The Day We Met the Queen', Umit Ozturk, a British journalist of Turkish heritage, community broadcaster, media trainer, linguist, translator, poet, campaigner and a playwright, and Sharon Duggal author of 'The Handsworth Times', broadcaster, creative writing mentor and programmer at New Writing South. We had entries from all over the country and different parts of the world and received 122 submissions in six different languages. It was free to enter, and



prizes were donated by partners with the Library Service also covering the cost of a couple of prizes and translations.

We tied in some of our regular activities with the #SimpleActs – Baby Boogie music and rhyme sessions linked to #ShareaSong and all our story times to #ReadaBook. During the week we asked staff and customers to recommend their favourite reads about or by refugees which were then put on social media, there were many books recommended, the following are just a few; ‘Palestine +100’ edited by Basma Ghalayini, ‘Lubna and Pebble’ by Wendy Meddour, ‘England: Poems From A School’ edited by Kate Clancy, ‘The Day War Came’ by Rebecca Cobb and ‘Displaced Dishes’ by refugees living in Samos refugee camp. Our eBook and eAudio book supplier curated a collection of books by and about refugees for customers to download for free and we also provided free digital copies of the ‘Beekeeper of Aleppo’ by Christy Lefteri which was the Reading Agency’s title for National Reading Group Day.

Brighton & Hove Libraries gained a Library of Sanctuary award just before Refugee Week. We were the second library to be given the award and were very excited to announce it but held off until 10am on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> the first day of Refugee Week. It created a lot of buzz and publicity and we were able to celebrate the announcement with those who had supported our application including sanctuary seekers and organisation who work with them, local residents and councillors. It also helped us to promote Refugee Week and raise the profile of sanctuary seekers.

We sent out information to staff at the start of Refugee Week about our local City of Sanctuary network -Sanctuary on Sea, links to local and national organisation supporting refugees and encouraged staff to take part in Refugee Week activities while at home and to send in their book recommendations.

### **What inspired you to get involved?**

Brighton & Hove Libraries have taken part in Refugee Week over a number of years. We have tried very hard to make our libraries a welcoming place for refugees and there are groups and activities for people seeking sanctuary to take part in as well as volunteering opportunities. We have shared stories, food and skills and it would be strange if we didn’t take part!! The Refugee Week conferences we have attended are always inspiring including this year’s conference and zoom meeting- hearing people’s stories, journeys, and achievements and sharing different cultures in creative workshops and performances certainly made us want to be involved. We came away with ideas, great enthusiasm and new partners to work.

### **What was your process of organising an event/activity and who was involved?**

We attended a meeting for people and organisations in Brighton & Hove who wanted to take part in Refugee Week and followed this up with zoom meetings once in lockdown organised by Sanctuary on Sea. The idea was to support each other’s events by promotion, marketing and partnering if



appropriate and try not to clash when programming. We delivered some of our regular events but themed those on Refugee Week and Imagine e.g. story time. We knew we already had an audience for our regular events and hoped to raise awareness of Refugee Week to those customers and hopefully attract new people who would be interested and aware of Refugee Week but might not have engaged with our service before. The regular events were delivered by library staff. We also delivered a number of one off events especially for Refugee Week. With the Flash Fiction competition we wanted anyone to be able to submit entries and promoted it generally, but also tagged in local and national refugee organisations, local schools, youth groups, writing groups and book groups etc. Library staff were part of the shortlisting process, partners promoted the competition through social media and their newsletters as well as donating prizes, and making the final decision.

Refugee Week **FLASH FICTION COMPETITION** #RefugeeWeek2020 #Imagine

**Under 12's Winning entry by Sophie Howell**

Dear Reader,  
Help! We're stranded on a raft. Food is scarce, water even more. We're refugees running from Syria's war. You're our only hope.  
Iona 2015

Dear Iona,  
It's been 57 years. It feels wrong to not answer your distress call. We have refugees on Pluto also...  
Michael, 2012

*My FIRST PRIZE goes to this brilliant, funny, bittersweet imagining of a letter, a cry being thrown out into the wilderness and being answered from Pluto. So much to say about it: it is both sad and humorous, real and surreal, impossible and possible. Utterly brilliant.*

*Comments from Under 12's Judge Onjali Raif, author of The Boy at the Back of the Class & The Star Outside my Window*

writing  
Brighton & Hove City Council  
the book hook

© Brighton & Hove Libraries

## What were the most important achievements?

We wanted to offer a varied programme of cultural events and activities for all ages throughout the week. It was important for us to engage with refugees and to show solidarity with the refugee community and organisations who work with them and we wanted to build on our partnerships for future working together. We also wanted to raise the profile of Refugee Week to those who may not be aware of it. We wanted to let the city know that as an organisation we are committed to engaging with those seeking sanctuary and that we value their skills and achievements and want to be a relevant service for them. We managed to achieve all of the above to a certain extent.

## What were the biggest challenges?

We found it disappointing to just have a digital offer and not having that personal face to face contact as in the past. It meant we couldn't involve people from the sanctuary seeking community to curate or deliver any of our activities due to technical constraints, before Covid 19 this would have been a priority but had to be abandoned. Also there was certainly a digital



overload of events both locally and nationally so it was challenge for us to decide what to promote from other organisations during the week. This is a general ongoing challenge not just to do with Refugee Week!

### **Who did you reach?**

As we didn't ticket our events unless people left comments on our social media or gave details when they entered the Flash Fiction competition it was hard to know exactly who we reached, however from the information we did get we know we reached many people and from a wide geographical range; sanctuary seekers who would normally come into the library, teachers who were supporting refugees, parents home schooling, adults who have English as an additional language, schools across the country, Brighton residents as well as residents from Scotland, Wales and other parts of England, organisations who support refugees-local and national and even an arts centre in Leeds! Although it was a challenge to just have a digital offer for Refugee Week it meant we reached more people than if we had events in libraries. E.g. our story times on average had 1,200 hits, the craft session had 1,937 hits and 421 customers downloaded *The Bee Keeper of Aleppo* over 3 months - in a library we would normally have around 10 – 20 people coming to story time. It helped that people could watch the activities as and when they wished once the activity had been posted

### **What impact did you have?**

On a general level we know we raised the profile of our service to show we are committed to developing our offer to refugees and sanctuary seekers. We raised our profile with organisations working with refugees that we are a relevant service to partner with and we brought enjoyment and celebration to many people who took part in our activities.

### **What did you learn?**

Planning for the week is never too early! Partners are a valuable resource. You don't need to create lots of new content...go with what you have as a starting point then build on that. Engage people from the refugee community to help curate and deliver....a learning point for the future is how to do this if it is a digital offer and to prepare in advance e.g. recordings, technical support.

### **What advice do you have for people getting involved in Refugee Week for the first time?**

Do it!! Go to the Refugee Week conferences/zoom meetings and sign up for newsletter etc. Find partners to work with. Consult your community to see what they would like to see and encourage them to get involved by delivering, promoting and taking part.

**To find out about becoming a Library of Sanctuary, visit [www.libraries.cityofsanctuary.org](http://www.libraries.cityofsanctuary.org).**