

Refugee Week Conference

Session 1: Monday 07 February 2022

Workshop 1: Healing – Your Refugee Week Activity

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'Healing' is the theme of Refugee Week 2022. You can find out more and see a recording of a Monthly Meet exploring the theme on the Refugee Week website [here](#).

Intro (Emily)

Healing: Theme of Refugee Week 2022

- Where did it come from? We did a lot of consultation in deciding on this theme and how we frame it, we obviously all had Covid in mind and our collective recovery from that. Also the context of political divisions and how we might begin to heal those, and the climate crisis and the urgent need to heal our shared planet.
- At the heart of the theme is the experiences of refugees: inviting all of us to stand with people who may be traumatised by war and persecution, who may be traumatised by the asylum system, in their journeys of healing, and also celebrating the strength that people have to start again against all odds
- Theme is also about taking inspiration from the resilience of refugees and asking what the rest of us can learn from refugees about healing.

Some key questions that have come up in our conversations about the theme

- How can we talk about healing when the trauma is ongoing – when people are living for years in the limbo of the asylum system? – so recognising that healing is also about imagining and working for a different world, where harm is replaced with care in our systems and our communities
- How do I respond to this theme if I'm not a trauma specialist, if my organisation isn't involved in therapeutic activities – and linked to this, how do we engage in healing in a safe way that doesn't retraumatise people?

Healing through community

So one thing I think it's really important to say and that has been a big learning for me is that healing isn't just about formal therapy and it doesn't have to involve directly talking about trauma. We were given some trauma-informed training recently at Counterpoints and one of the main things I took away was the power of small actions that we might feel are insignificant compared to the enormity of what people have gone through, how they can be really important for healing.

Things like having a community where you feel you belong, artistic and creative activities, gardening, feeling recognised and valued – things that help all of us feel well and help us feel that life has meaning.

Mutual care, reciprocity and exchange

It's not necessarily just about people who aren't refugees supporting people who are, but about mutual care, exchange, creating communities where we all feel we belong and can learn from each other, which of course you will all be doing already in different ways.

Simple Acts

Last week we had a consultation session about the 2022 Simple Acts with Refugee Week partners, advisory group and others and we're now working on honing the ideas and we'll share the final 2022 Simple Acts at the end of March. So you're obviously free to run with the theme and respond to it in your way, or you can use one of the Simple Acts as inspiration.

I wanted to share with you the current shortlist of ideas we're looking at:

- Sharing food
- Exchanging messages of kindness and hope
- Walking – connecting with nature
- Growing a seed
- Crafting together

Don't feel limited by this list but if they spark some ideas that's great.

Discussion 1: Ideas for Refugee Week Activities

- Share ideas for Refugee Week activities inspired by 'Healing'
- What resources or support will you need?

Ideas for activities

Exhibitions:

- Photography project, or photo exhibitions in community centre or popup tent (example: UNHCR Emergency Tent was set up in Exeter last year with photos of a Community Sponsorship journey)
- Facilitated immersive exhibition aimed at people in community who have not had encounters with refugees ('Escape to Safety' by Global Link in Lancaster)
- Exhibition, with art, writing, film and music
- Exhibition about food and healing

Theatre, music and storytelling:

- Storytelling: Sharing stories where people want to do this; online storytelling
- Capturing stories and turning into plays and discussions (Theatre for Democracy)
- Story-telling about what has been a welcoming, safe space upon arrival
- Reframing previous Refugee Week storytelling and theatre performances through lens of healing
- Storytelling focusing on histories and cultures of refugees' home countries
- Event led by refugees for non-refugees about their experiences
- Engaging local community through music events in public spaces
- Refugees can offer their understanding of healing, something to learn
- Championing refugee artists
- Music for healing and storytelling in public spaces

Schools, children and young people:

- Family puppetry making workshop/event and then puppetry show, based on children's book and themes of climate emergency and migration (Pegasus Puppetry in Brighton).
- Schools activity with children dressing up as their personal heroes (rather than superheroes!)
- Exhibition with kids art at an art centre in town (secondary school in Aberdeen)
- Book week in libraries; learning through reading books in with themes relevant to refugees to open up discussion. Exhibition. Prizes for children. Targeted to families.

Creating spaces for conversations:

- Human libraries: creating a conversation between people in a safe space to share. Recording to use material in future
- Walk in countryside with choirs and local refugees and refugee organisations, stop at lovely spots and the choir will sing for them

Film:

- Film night
- Videos talking about personal experiences leading to discussion groups to explore resilience

Faith:

- Interfaith Healing Service or having all local faith communities using the same theme on the same day.

Public spaces:

- Commissioning public pieces of art (Southbank Centre and Counterpoints Arts)
- Free day of public activities

Creative workshops:

- Art therapy: creating a safe space for expression through art
- Singing and drumming as therapy – inviting refugees to share creative practices for healing in their cultures
- Working with clay as a means of allowing people to express their feelings through clay work
- Working with refugees making textile dolls as a means to convey stories and feelings (Colombian Truth Commission has)
- Writing workshops where people used writings to express feelings-tell their stories directly or indirectly – digital book to be launched through online and in person events
- Creative writing workshops leading to publication of a book
- Music, visual art, dance, food are all ways of sharing culture and helping to support and heal.

More:

- Collecting cooking recipes of food that remind women of home; cooking classes (zoom, live, printed book) to engage with community.
- Conference about access to legal support
- Returning to ideas which haven't been possible yet because of COVID
- Lobbying work

Reflections

- Healing taking place in encounters with each other as an important guideline
- Act of congregating is powerful
- Challenge of engaging the local/ wider community and getting other people involved
- Importance of sense of safety
- Importance of events being lead by participants
- Importance of networking and collaboration - getting together with others in the local
- Priority is to make connections with local refugee organisations.
- Advantages of digital promotion and events

Questions/ support we need

- Logistic support, interpretation, and possible collaborators
- Question: Are Local Councils involved in Refugee Week? (Yes! Local councils often support, promote and sometimes coordinate Refugee Week events. They also sometimes have small pots of funding that can be tapped into. It's worth contacting your local council about your Refugee Week plans and seeing if they can support)
- Question: Is there funding and support available for groups if needed? Counterpoints Arts (Refugee Week coordinators) can help advise – email tom@counterpointsarts.org.uk, and see also our [fundraising tools and tips](#) resource from a previous Monthly Meet

Discussion 2: Participation, Leadership and Audiences

Who will be involved in leading your activity?

- Event programmer, volunteers, artist leader, experts with experience working with refugees
- Curators and volunteers
- Engaging with people who are directly affected.
- Ideally people from the refugee community leading - e.g. Syrian community.
- Columbian Exile Diaspora. People who are part of these communities will lead events and are events are particularly focused to these communities. Partnering with different regions (Columbian Truth Commission)

How will you help ensure participation and access?

- Hard to engage asylum seekers in bridging hotels unless you physically go there. Different situation from resettled Syrian refugees
- Youth: ask them what they'd like to do and help them to organise
- Offer food, make it free, apply for funding, pay volunteers...

Who your target audience and how might you reach them?

- Everybody in the community
- Reaching different audiences with variety of events e.g. Christian worship service plus event for wider community, social events but also serious seminars
- School children between 7-11 from all backgrounds non-refugee and refugee background