

## Music Development Agency

The CRAFTIE project in Liverpool has been working with a group of 14 refugees and asylum seekers from ten nations to develop business, creative and IT skills as part of the process of building confidence, integration and entrepreneurialism.

The project marks a new partnership between three agencies: the Music Development Agency (MDA), which works with disadvantaged people in Liverpool to provide education and training in the creative industries and to support new entrepreneurs and businesses; Sola Arts a community arts organisation based in Toxteth which is working with refugees and asylum seekers; and Merseyside Refugee Support Network (MRSN) which has been referring students into the project from its network and support services.

CRAFTIE aimed to offer not just business and training development, but to support the process of language development, the development of new skills and competencies and above all confidence. It also wanted especially to support asylum seekers who are often excluded from opportunities because of the lack of refugee status.

The project delivered two training programmes in its first year with participants aged 18-42 from Burundi, Somalia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Congo, Liberia and Algeria. It has not been without its challenges: one of the students was deported midway through the course, others were affected by deportation threats, immigration hearings, and another faced family crisis.

Nevertheless, the project has had some success stories: two of its participants got jobs during the course, and one student, Algerian mother of four Ouardia Rabia, is now planning to develop her own design and textile business with support from the partner agencies. "When someone comes to you and in the course of the project you start seeing them really believing in themselves, as Ouardia has, it really is gratifying," says MDA Enterprise Coordinator, Mark Jones.

Another success story has been Tensin Yonten, a Tibetan exile, who was found to have exceptional creative IT skills. Tensin was already a very skilled Tibetan painter when he came to the UK, trained in the traditional Tibetan style, but has since merged this with Western techniques to create a unique hybrid. After completing training he was subsequently commissioned by one of the partner agencies to develop a *Global Mythbusters* website, and his work was selected for an exhibition marking National Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2008.

For MDA the first year has been an important learning experience in serving the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, enabling it to adapt and understand the needs of a new group of clients. The team has also been learning to cope with the emotional impact of losing students as well as the immensely gratifying process of seeing success and achievement.

The course is attracting increasing numbers of referrals and participants wishing to start or develop their businesses, and is now moving into a third cycle of workshops. In terms of the impact on refugees and asylum seekers, Jones explains: "They are learning how to set up a business properly, and being introduced to a whole range of internet business and marketing tools. It really is taking their businesses to another level. Initially what they may see as a pipe dream, we are giving them the skills and tools to develop and make it a reality," explains Jones.

An important aspect of what the course does is offer self-belief. As Jones comments: "We have seen that people coming to a strange land and having to deal with all the issues that they have to deal with constantly – from the threat of deportation to just the daily challenges of living – respond well and appreciate what other people do for them in terms of learning, one-to-one support and personal empowerment. We seem to provide a oasis of calm and support in otherwise very hectic lives."

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