

## Music for Change

It's not easy to counter stigma and discrimination around immigration, but in the course of a week Music for Change found that it was having an impact with its music workshops on the way young people think and respond to migrants refugees and asylum seekers. 'I used to think that refugees should all go back to their own county. Now I think they have the right to be here,' commented one Year 8 student from Dover.

Through its *Safe and Sound* programme, Canterbury-based Music for Change has been work with young people, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers from Europe since 2005. A particular priority are the young, unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers of 16-18 years old who often arrive at ports bewildered, without access to education and needing social support.

It has built partnerships with Migrant Helpline, Kent Refugee Support Group, Finding Your Feet (now KRAN at Riverside) and Kent Refugee Action Network, delivering joint cultural projects, workshops, and running residencies in reception centres for new arrivals in Dover, Margate and Ashford. It also works closely with Music In Detention, delivering music workshops in Immigration Removal Centres across the UK including Dover IRC, Haslar IRC (Gosport), Dungavel IRC (Scotland) and Yarl's Wood IRC in Bedfordshire.

It is also working with local residents to improve awareness and understanding of immigration and the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers, which is an important aid to integration into host communities. Since refugees and asylum seekers are seldom settled in the South East of England, there are few opportunities for local communities to explore these issues resulting in considerable confusion and resentment about refugees and migrant workers. Enabling local people to put a human face on immigration and asylum issues is an important aspect of what Music for Change is achieving, says Community Projects Manager, Douglas Noble.

Music for Change ran a seven-month programme of education, music and performance workshops on schools in Kent, Surrey and Sussex, working in partnership with Migrant Helpline. In Refugee Week 2008, Music for Change and Migrant Helpline ran song writing workshops and activities with around 1,000 children in six schools in Dover, Ashford and Folkestone which resulted in a genuine attitude shift among the young people. This work was supported by Sing Up, the Music Manifesto National Singing Programme, produced by Youth Music with AMV.BBDO, Faber Music and The Sage Gateshead, supported by Government.

Music for Change started in 1997 bringing international music and artists to communities to change public attitudes to developing countries, provide positive role models of international diversity and educate people about different cultures. As well as its community and schools work, and with refugees and migrants, it has been active in training and mentoring artists from other countries.

Refugee artists and musicians have been among those artists who have benefited from this programme. Music for Change works with around 150 artists each year and has a core group of 16 artists which is used for project delivery. Among them is Téa Hodzic, a former Bosnian refugee, who helps deliver many of their programmes with young people and host communities. “Her experience has been key to the impact of our work in schools because she can put a human face on the experience of refugees,” explains Noble. “But a number of our artists would consider themselves as artists in exile. Enabling people to see a migrant as a *person* is an important part of what we are doing.”

The partnership with Migrant Helpline has been particularly fruitful. The two organisations jointly staged an information and ideas ‘exchange day’ which enabled artists to develop their understanding and awareness of current issues in migration, human rights, immigration and asylum and explore what creative activities might be used to communicate on these issues. This was the foundation of its recent programme across three countries and Music for Change now hopes it will prepare the ground for further work in schools and a teachers’ pack.

Music for Change is now building work with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants into all its programme activities. “We are trying to see this work as part of everything we do,” explains Noble. “Hopefully, in doing that, we are saying something about how newly arrived people should be seen as part of rich make up of the community in which we all live.”

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