

All Change Arts

When All Change developed a photography and film project with failed asylum seekers in partnership with its local Asylum Seeker support service, case workers commented that it was the first time they had seen some of their clients smile. When a group of them went off for a coffee together it was a sign that all-important friendships had been forged in a group where isolation is endemic.

All Change has been developing a programme of arts activities with refugees and asylum seekers in Islington, London, since 2001. It was a natural evolution from its wider programme of dance, drama, music, visual arts, photography, digital arts, film and video in housing estates and community centres and with marginalised and excluded people across north London.

One of the main strands of work is *Still Here*, an umbrella for a series of initiatives developing digital arts and photography work with young people, individuals and families from refugees and asylum seekers communities.

Among this family of projects was *Real Postcards* led by Brazilian photographic artist Leticia Valverdes, who worked with family groups and individuals to take images of London landmarks for a set of new postcards.

Other work in this series has included a project with Eritrean and Somali women and children beginning with textile and craft workshops, and developing to offer photography and computer skills enabling participants to create meaningful digital images, featuring missing family members, landscapes and items of cultural significance.

All Change has also worked with young refugees and asylum seekers as part of *U Chooz*, a project to empower homeless or potentially homeless young people through photography, digital arts, music and creative writing,

“We’re providing a space where people can come together using creative activities that people can get into gradually. Photography work has been really important to the groups. Being able to take photos of their family and take these home addresses some very simple needs. We are also providing food and enabling people to develop language skills and friendships,” says All Change’s Artistic Associate, Suzanne Lee. “Exhibitions of the work are also telling their stories and helping to break down preconceptions about why refugees are here.”

All Change has developed a strong partnership with Islington Refugee Integration Service and other local partners such as Islington Council and the local healthy living project, through its work with Hilldrop Area

Community Association. “They have really seen the benefit of what we have been able to do,” says Lee.

All Change secured a Home Office grant to prepare its team and freelance artists to develop specialist skills to work with refugees and asylum seekers and has recently developed a training toolkit for other artists.

All Change is now integrating refugees and asylum seekers into all new projects. The partnership with Islington Refugee Integration Service is taking the work into new dimensions. Planned future projects include an oral history project on refugee heritage in Islington, and a filmmaking project with young refugees in schools looking at domestic and cultural violence in partnership with the local domestic violence team.

“Partnership has been a really important aspect of our work,” says Lee. “We use the arts and our expertise is making the connection with other service providers. It is engaging refugees and asylum seekers and meeting their needs and developing their learning.”

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