

## *Yorkshire Sculpture Park*

Kurdish youngsters trading dances with a group of Yorkshire Morris Men has been one of the more memorable cultural exchanges in Yorkshire Sculpture Park's recent programme with refugees and asylum seekers.

Through the Wakefield Asylum team YSP made contact with a group of unaccompanied male refugees, aged 15-18, from Kurdistan Iran and Iraq. This project has involved the boys meeting and eating together once a week and devising a traditional Kurdish dance performance, which they will perform over a two-day expedition in the Yorkshire countryside to the people and landscapes they encounter.

The project has linked up with the Duke of Edinburgh Award team to enable the young people to learn skills to undertake an expedition and gain an award. As part of their award they will make a documentary film about themselves and their experiences in Britain by filming the expedition and documenting their daily life through photography. Meeting the Harthill Morris dancers in the Peak District and sharing traditions with them bolstered their wish to share their culture with English people.

For the second year YSP is running a summer holiday club for local families and refugee families. YSP started a series of projects in 2004 under the banner *Meeting Point* that offered different events including a holiday club for families and children from the local school and families and children of people seeking asylum. "For the families seeking asylum this may well be their summer holiday," Bowman points out.

YSP has also been working with women from Africa seeking asylum, developing informal small scale women's projects in partnership with Wakefield Asylum Team and other asylum/refugee support groups, to offer outings where women have lunch together, meet new people in a safe environment, see exhibitions, walk in the landscape and make art and crafts which we hope helps to overcome their sense of isolation and fear.

One of the intentions of the initiative is the development of a volunteer programme, which has so far enabled asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, Burundi and Congo to get involved in the work of the park. One Zimbabwean volunteer was presented with a Volunteer of The Year Award 2005.

A Zimbabwean artist and refugee, who has embarked on a Fine Art degree course began by volunteering, was elected to get involved in extended mentor training by shadowing and working alongside YSP Education staff, and now assists at workshops and public events.

“We are developing and integrating the Meeting Point initiatives into what we think of as core activity. YSP is a unique cultural resource where people can come to enjoy art and nature”, says Education Curator Anna Bowman.

“Government dispersal brought an estimated 1,800 refugees and asylum seekers to the Wakefield District. We wanted to find ways of introducing, engaging and involving these new communities in this wonderful place”, Bowman explains.

Bowman reports that these projects have made a difference to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers by giving them a sense of belonging, helping them to better understand their new country, make contact with others in a similar situation, thereby improving their English and generally supporting integration into society by acquiring new skills and improving self-confidence.

The initiative has made a significant impact on the organisation by raising awareness of the issues around asylum, promoting the idea of a more diverse workforce and developing the skills of staff and artists to work with diverse audiences including refugees and asylum seekers.

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