

Portsmouth City of Sanctuary Partnership with Aspex – Case Study

Launched – April 2022

Ended– Dec 2022



Background

In partnership with Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, ran a pilot programme of weekly creative activities for the Refugee and Asylum seekers community April– Oct 2022. The programme was devised in consultation with commissioned artists, families and service users, due to the transitional nature of people accessing the service, activities varied depending on groups' needs. The project supported the personal, social & emotional development of children/young people, while enabling adults to take part in essential skills development programmes eg. English language lessons.

Project Approach

First Phase – April / June 2022

Refugee Week – [Healing & Now We are Here Exhibition](#) 22 June – 24 July 22

Each creative workshop was developed in collaboration with commissioned artists, who understood the needs and ever changing landscape of being a refugee in Portsmouth. In the first phase of the project (April – June) we worked with textile artist and educator Vanessa Rolf, who facilitated flexible workshops where the participants stitched in co-collaboration a quilt, leading up to refugee week (20–27 June) exploring the theme of *Healing*.

With Vanessa's workshop approach, and understanding of the group's changing circumstances, they were able to start a stitch and leave it for another person to continue. This enabled social interaction between people who are new to the city and an opportunity to engage in a creative non-committal activity with the aim of exploring mental health and wellbeing.

Through 8 weeks of workshops, we had over 50 families and children take part in creating a fabric and paper quilt. As a result of this, the paper and fabric quilts were exhibited in the gallery's Learning Space accompanied with family and self portraits photographed by Artist in Residence (2022) and Photographer Femi Olaiya. To bring attention to the work, we held an opening celebration of the exhibition, with the families, Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress in attendance.

To further support Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, we held a silent auction, selling the quilt to the highest bidder raising £152 from the auction. The proceedings from the quilt went toward producing welcoming boxes with food, toiletries and clothes for families and service users new to Portsmouth.

Testimonials:

"I have been inspired and humbled by those involved in this project, both service users and volunteers, who have given their time, their generosity and warmth, piecing together scraps to create something bigger. I have felt lucky to have sat together growing something colourful and joyful." Vanessa Rolf

"Being a migrant myself, I put my heart and soul into this project by having personal connections with each of my sitters to capture their stories in such a way that it reflects their strength, vulnerability, and aspirations. Making them look important and larger than life was a priority for me. I have drawn inspiration from Renaissance artists such as Thomas Gainsborough, Anthony Van Dyck, Hans Holbein the younger and 1960s African contemporary photographers like Seydou Keita and Samuel Fosso to create the perfect feel for this project." Olufemi Olaiya

[Exhibition & Celebration Images](#)

Second Phase - July/ August 2022

[Playful Exhibition](#) 7 Sept - 23 Dec 22

As a continuation of the project, we commissioned and collaborated with artist, sculpture and educator Flora Duley, to explore different cultural foods, and explore how it brings groups of people and families together.

With Flora's hands-on approach delivering the workshops, the children and families were able to creatively explore their relationship with food in a fun and playful way. The six sessions took place in the main eating area of a hotel, and brought their experiences and captured their conversations about food and cultural diversity - making ceramic tableware, large paper mache vessels with food newspapers, print-making, doilies, paint, and food recipe zines.

"I was interested in pattern making as a form of sharing, and wanted to explore patterns found on Ceramic tableware and vessels from different Cultures in Ancient History. I am interested in the sharing of stories around Food and social meal-times. Cooking and Sharing of Food as a universal connection. I was very struck by the joy of colours and patterns and warm social sharing between the community that came out during the sessions." Flora Duley

As a result, the artwork was exhibited in the gallery's Learning Space. Though we planned to celebrate the families and the work created, we had to change our plans due to the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Out of respect we decided to shut the gallery for the day, which led to the cancellation of the celebration. With this we wanted to show our appreciation to the families for their artwork and

commitment, and partnered with a small catering business 423-NO-MADS owned by refugees in the city to have cultural foods of the families choice delivered to the hotel to eat and celebrate together.

[Playful Images](#)

Successful Outcomes:

- Developed creative and sustainable approaches to mental health and wellbeing
- Supported small catering businesses led by refugees in the city
- Gave away art bags that included 250 art materials packs
- Co-created two exhibitions, [Now We Are Here/Healing](#) and [Playful](#), and with each held celebratory events to celebrate the artists and families involved.
- Sold the exhibited quilt in a silent auction raising £152, which has gone towards creating Welcome Boxes for families in need, in the city.
- Supported small catering businesses founded by refugees in Portsmouth, 423-NO-MADS'S and Arisa's Little Kitchen.
- Award further funding to continue offering arts sessions and support
- Expansion of partnerships i.e. Victorious Events

What worked well

- Commissioning artists who understood the RAS community and how they worked.
- Offering open and flexible creative sessions that spoke to their needs
- Meeting the families and service users where they were located, as this gave way to build intentional and meaningful relationships with the families.
- Having one main contact (Shamila) and working with us to make sure all safeguarding protocols were in place
- Supporting small catering businesses founded by entrepreneurs in the RAS community.
- Being open to unexpected changes and working through that as partners

Lessons observed

- Be intentional in building relationships with the community
- Vulnerability needs to be considered at all times
- Listening makes a big difference as some just want someone to talk to
- Come in open to learn from the community as they have so much to offer and tell
- The service users and families want to be creative, so work within a flexible and open structure that will allow them to do that.
- Consistency is key, they love familiarity, i.e. the artist that works with them, as they are always going through life changes. So be stable in how you work with Portsmouth City of Sanctuary and the families. This as a result builds trust and knowing they can rely on you to have their best interest at heart.
- Support external work/projects done by the organisation i.e. events, signposting.

Testimonial:

The art workshops were great for all audiences and were enjoyed by children and adults. The project highlighted the charity and the work we do. The project was engaging and therapeutic for the clients we work with. The children were very happy and they hope to have continuous art sessions. They did not want them to stop. Then adults in the refugee hub and women in the group were also happy with the activities. – Shamila Dhana

Future of partnership

This pilot project has enabled us to develop our relationship with participants and Portsmouth City of Sanctuary. It's given us an opportunity to get started quickly, test out new ways of delivering activities suited to the needs and situation of the RAS community, informing the development of work for a larger 3-year programme under our creative families initiative. This larger, long-term programme will enable us to grow and develop this project further.

Due to the success of the project, we have been awarded funding by Portsmouth City Council to deliver more creative workshops commissioning artists to work

with us in doing so. This includes our *Let's Paint Together* project delivered by artist, facilitator and painter Isis Selmileaitis. This work has been exhibited in our main gallery space to accompany the [Group Show](#) which explores togetherness, communities and friendship.

We've also been awarded funding by Victorious Events, to deliver art sessions leading up to the Victorious Festival with Flora Duley. Inspired by artist Rae Yen Song's themes of families, colour, 2d/3d shapes, body shapes and creatures and her performative nature. Flora has been exploring these themes with families and the community through a creative process to bring their ideas of connection to the forefront during Victorious. Further to this, to show support Victorious will sponsor Portsmouth City of Sanctuary with tickets to attend the 3-day festival in partnership with the gallery.

Our aim is to continue exploring different ways to partner and collaborate with PCoS, and have ongoing discussions on how we can continue to use art and creative solutions to aid the needs of the community.

This project was supported by The Partnership Foundation.

Aspex www.aspex.org.uk

Aspex has a 41-year track record of supporting emerging artists and engaging audiences, through the delivery of a programme of exhibitions, off-site projects and participatory opportunities. Artists such as Mona Hatoum, Richard Wilson and Cornelia Parker, all internationally acclaimed, received support from Aspex at an early point in their careers.

Portsmouth City of Sanctuary <https://portsmouth.cityofsanctuary.org>

Portsmouth City of Sanctuary is a grassroots humanitarian charity (CIO), primarily assisting Portsmouth's migrant community with direct action. The PCoS volunteer team aims to compassionately uphold the dignity and independence of all individuals it supports, regardless of status, and strives to do so with respect and welcoming warmth for everyone.



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