

People & the DALES

Diversity Access Learning Environment Sustainability

4th – 6th March 2016

Skipton Refugee Hosting weekend

Over one weekend early in March 2016 a group of 27 refugees or asylum seekers currently living in Bradford spent the weekend living with host families in and around Skipton in rural North Yorkshire. There they found an extremely warm welcome.



The initiative was jointly organised through the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust's outreach project 'People and the DALES' and the newly formed Craven Refugee Support Group. In September 2015 a group of concerned individuals met to discuss what they could do here in Skipton to support refugees and asylum seekers. With all the media attention and discussions about the possibilities of Syrian refugees coming to Skipton for the first time people in Skipton were moved by the current refugee crisis and wanted to get involved and do something.

It was recognised that as yet there are no asylum seekers living in Skipton but there are many living in nearby Bradford less than 20 miles away. It was felt that those living in Bradford would appreciate time away from the city, an opportunity to meet new people and be welcomed into a community. Hence, the idea of a weekend where people in Skipton could host for a weekend was formulated.

There was a considerable amount of work involved in the planning of the weekend. Funds were applied for to cover costs of transport and meals during the weekend. A refugee support group was identified in Bradford and BIASAN was chosen to link with as the project worker for People and the DALES had already worked with them before and one of their English language teachers lived in the Skipton area and happened to play in a ceilidh band.



However, the weekend was action packed full of Fun, Friendship and Food. Mo Rahman from BIASAN made a fantastic effort to enthuse people and although originally over-subscribed on the day a few people dropped out and substitutes had to be included, but we almost had a full complement of visitors.

Only one host was without a visitor.

The group consisted of men and women and a few children who came from Sudan, Syria, Eritrea, the Gambia, Iran and Iraq. Mo decided to invite a mixed group of people and chose who came very carefully which was an excellent idea as not only was it an opportunity for refugees to come to Skipton it was for many the first time to host and it was important that the weekend was a success.

Upon arrival the group were welcomed by Mayor Gordon Bell into Skipton Town Hall Chambers where everyone felt extremely special and many were intrigued by the gold chain around his neck. He told them of Skipton's history and long tradition of welcome. They were then treated to a Moroccan style cuisine at the Friends Quaker Meeting House before heading home to spend the evening with their host family.

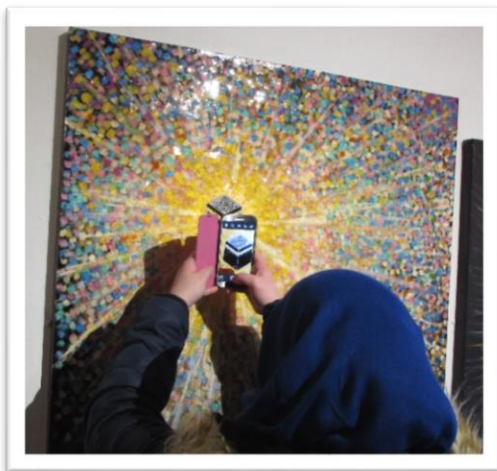


One of the hosts was Fiona Protheroe. "I was privileged to spend the weekend with a wonderful mother from Syria, and three of her children, as part of the hosting weekend. The refugee crisis feels so overwhelming, it felt good to do something positive as an individual, and as part of my local community."

On the Saturday morning the visitors were guests of Mr Fattorini at Skipton Castle and later delighted to find a 'Faith in Art' exhibition at Skipton Museum which portrayed Islamic art (some even thought this had been laid on specially for them!). In the afternoon people had options some took part in a heritage walk through Skipton woods, others did some arts and crafts and others enjoyed tea and cakes in Holy Trinity café.



Although a full programme of activities was provided at some points hosts wanted to do their own thing, one couple took their visitor to watch a local rugby match, another took their visitors to a fund raising coffee morning elsewhere and some children were taken off to play football. However, a full programme was useful as this gave both hosts and visitors confidence in knowing there was things happening but they could opt out in wanted.



The evening celebration to which all visitors and most hosts attended included a ceilidh with Wharfedale based Buttered Peas Ceilidh band at St Andrews church hall. For some it was the first time to dance and for others the first time to dance with men or women, but all without exception joined in and thoroughly enjoyed

the evening. The evening was rounded off with a scrumptious meal cooked by members at St Andrews United Reformed/Methodist church.

On the Sunday morning visitors were invited to join their hosts in morning worship or take a walk in the fantastic Yorkshire Dales countryside. At St Andrews the whole service was devoted to hearing stories from the visitors and one Syrian woman who is an architectural engineer brought the congregation close to tears as she talked about leaving her home in Syria and having to flee to Lebanon where she lived in a refugee camp before coming to the UK just 5 months ago. The church was delighted to welcome those of different faiths and articulated their desire to stand alongside those affected by war and violence. The church collection of over £500 was given direct to Will Sutcliffe who is the chair of Bradford's City of Sanctuary initiative.



"Please could you pass on our very sincere thanks to the congregation at St Andrews for the incredibly generous donation from Sunday morning's service. I was hugely encouraged by the service, the genuinely warm welcome and the interest shown by so many. It was clearly a very inspiring weekend and will leave very lasting impressions on all who took part." (Will Sutcliffe)



A final meal was provided at Trinity Methodist before the visitors reluctantly headed home to Bradford. Many hosts have invited their visitors, now friends, to return and invites to visit Bradford were made.

The weekend was a huge success thanks to the contributions of many people and organisations. The Rotary Club of Skipton provided transport to and from Bradford. The Wharfedale Foundation and Soroptimists contributed

towards the costs of food throughout the weekend, Skipton castle provided free entry to the castle and various churches offered their premises for use during the weekend and cooked fantastic meals. A huge thank you to all involved in the weekend. Skipton is a genuinely welcoming place.

Following the week hosts Peter and Bridget Edwards said: "It was so good to meet so many new people both hosts and visitors. Our house feels very quiet this morning without our two lovely lads but we have a date to meet again!"



To find out more contact:

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People and the DALES <https://www.facebook.com/PeopleandtheDALES>

www.peopleandthedales.org

Craven Refugee Support Network: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709780342489930>

BIASAN <https://www.facebook.com/BiasanYorkshire/?fref=ts>

<http://www.brc-net.org.uk/networks.htm>