Soap Box Collective

Refugee Integration Forum member Firas Chihi from Stand and Be Counted Theatre shares an overview of the work they have been doing with young adult refugees, asylum seekers and new

migrants through their Soap Box Collective programme.

Case Study

Soap Box is a long-term creative empowerment programme for young adults seeking sanctuary (refugees, asylum seekers and new migrants) aged 18-35 years. The programme has seen various iterations in cities including Bradford, Leeds, and Coventry and was launched in Sheffield in partnership with the University of Sheffield in June 2022.

Weekly sessions are a safe social space to learn English, build confidence and creative skills, make new friends and build community. Participants work towards creating a range of live, digital and visual art productions to present to audiences across the country throughout the year. Participants work with a range of artists to create the work they are passionate about in ways that most excite them. Session and production plans remain flexible to who is in the room each week, we do not set any commitment expectations, ensuring participants can always fit sessions around their busy lives. We provide travel and a hot meal at every session as well as interpreters, all sessions are based in a city centre location such as The Montgomery Theatre or Sheffield Theatres as participants have expressed a desire to take part in an activity that is central so they can familiarise themselves with cultural centres they might not typically visit.

Throughout the past 18 months participants have co-created numerous projects and productions such as Across Time, a shadow theatre piece written, directed, performed and produced by the group. They presented Together for Change at Migration Matters Festival to an audience of 90 and at the City of Sanctuary's national conference. They have attended multiple trips to the theatre, the beach and enjoy social nights out together outside of their sessions with us. During this time they have developed their linguistic skills, built their confidence and most importantly formed a community with a true sense of belonging and ownership of the group and the creative work they make together. Each individual's unique talents are celebrated and platformed and many participants have spoken of the benefits this activity has had in helping them find and secure employment in a range of sectors.

Omid

Omid has been with us from the very first day of the programme, he is a participant whose journey epitomises resilience and growth. Prior to joining us, Omid faced challenges that hindered his confidence and integration into the community.

Through SBC's weekly workshops and support, Omid's engagement flourished, marking a significant shift in his confidence. He evolved into a more interactive, welcoming figure within the group, setting an exemplary standard for behaviour and camaraderie. His advocacy work, advocating for people

seeking sanctuary struggling in the UK, showcased his newfound confidence and commitment to societal change. He is passionate about using his voice and collaborates closely with charities such as City of Sanctuary on their various campaigns. A pivotal moment in Omid’s journey was when he got his Right to Remain in the UK, which further bolstered his self-assurance, paving the way for employment and a sense of stability.

Omid's transformation transcended personal growth, impacting the entire group with his infectious smile and open arms. His story is not just about overcoming individual challenges, but also about how structured support and joyful community engagement can ignite profound change in an individual, enabling them to become an integral and inspiring part of their community. Omid's case is a testament to the power of art and collective support in fostering personal development and societal integration. We are so lucky to have him as part of Soap Box and are excited to continue developing him as an artist and leader - he really does make the world a better place!

To learn more about this case study or the Yorkshire and Humber Refugee Integration Forum, please contact Liz Maddocks at admin@migrationyorkshire.org.uk.

Yorkshire & Humber Refugee Integration Forum

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