An Afternoon at Yorkshire Sculpture Park with Learn for Life Enterprise

Refugee Integration Forum member Emma Spencer, Informal Learning Manager at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, shares the experience of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers for a visit.

Case Study

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) holds a special place in the hearts of many visitors, offering a sanctuary where art and nature intertwine across 500 acres of open landscape. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to merge our vibrant artistic program with the tranquil beauty of our surroundings, recognising the profound impact it can have on well-being for individuals and communities.

Our commitment to inclusivity drives our community program, which focuses on extending a warm welcome to groups who may face barriers to accessing such spaces. Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers to the park is a cornerstone of our mission, understanding the unique value that open spaces, nature, and creativity hold for these communities.

In March 2024, we had the privilege of hosting a group of refugees and asylum seekers from the Learn for Life Enterprise network, an organisation dedicated to supporting vulnerable communities in Sheffield. Through language lessons, skill-building activities, and inclusive sports and creative activities, Learn for Life empowers communities fostering confidence and resilience.

For many in the group, their visit to YSP marked a poignant first experience. It was truly a joy to accompany them as they explored our outdoor sculptures, intriguing indoor exhibitions, and had time to connect to nature while in the landscape. Together, we shared time together over a cuppa, had lots of conversations, and moments of quiet reflection. Recognising the vastness of our park, we carefully crafted our time to allow ample time for the group to spend time following their own curiosity, immerse themselves in nature, connect with one another, and engage with our artworks.

What are the key things that have been learned?

Engaging more with communities has been crucial in shaping our approach and improving our ability to offer a thoughtful, inspiring, and person-cantered approach.

We make time for communication, between YSP and our community partners as well as between our internal YSP teams. In the preliminary planning of their visit, we had conversations with Learn for Life, changed plans, and revisited the afternoon once we knew who was attending. Our goal was to ensure mutual understanding and to address any individual needs within the group. Recognising that YSP can be overwhelming for first-time visitors, we planned a gentle schedule for the afternoon that prioritised comfort and accessibility for everyone involved allowing us to respond to the weather and how people were feeling.

Throughout the afternoon, we intentionally carved out time for conversations and reflections. These moments are crucial, as they often delve into complex and sensitive topics. Through our experiences with community groups and our broader audience, we've discovered the transformative power of art and nature in facilitating these discussions. The artworks at YSP serve as catalysts, prompting us to contemplate issues ranging from our local communities to global challenges. Art provides a platform for expressing what matters most to us and shaping our identities.

Operating from a trauma-informed perspective, we harness the power of sculpture to ignite meaningful conversations. The expansive physical space of the park not only allows for freedom of movement but also creates a conducive environment for introspection and contemplation. We feel incredibly fortunate to offer a safe and nurturing space at YSP, where creativity, conversation, and self-reflection flourish, making every visitor's experience richer.

We also make sure to follow up with feedback and reflections to understand why certain approaches may have worked well or where improvements can be made.

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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