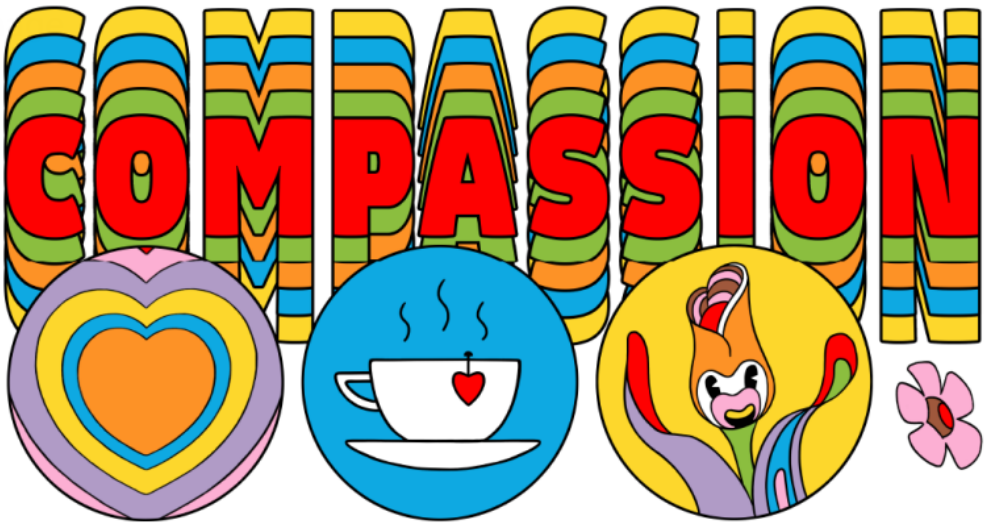
Guest blog post by local Refugee Week ambassadors



‘Compassion is a very simple act, but it can change people’s lives

positively'

The perspectives of 2023 Refugee Week Ambassadors from Hull

In this guest blog post Refugee Week Ambassadors Gaida Dirar and Mayas Dirar both share their experience of being involved in various initiatives to represent lived experience of forced migration and being a refugee.

Being part of advisory groups

Gaida: The Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) is the conference held every year, which began in 1995 to strengthen the cooperation between governments, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and UNHCR (the UN refugee agency: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The ATCR has contributed to increasing the numbers of refugees being resettled in safer countries.

My involvement started in 2019 when the conference was chaired by the UK government, I joined the conference to represent the UK's resettled refugees through Yorkshire's Refugee Advisory Group (RAG). We delivered the first ever 'Refugee Statement'; this statement is developed by and includes voices of refugee delegates to the ATCR from around the world, and since 2019 it has become a tradition to include the statement every year at the conference.

'***It's an opportunity for us to reach our voices to people who make decisions.***'

The UNHCR recently reported the number of displaced and stateless people has reached above 117 million people across the world, and around 20% of those people have been granted refugee status. Obviously, some of those people are displaced in their own country, the majority are in countries close to their home country, and there are people who flee from those unsafe areas to claim asylum in safer countries.

When it comes to ATCR meetings we have representation of 20% of people with lived experience taking part in discussions about refugee resettlement.

In the Yorkshire and Humber region we have the Refugee Advisory Group. We were formed when we were invited to attend the ATCR conference in 2019. The theme of the conference was Nothing About Us, Without Us. And we get consulted on resettlement projects which are delivered by organisations in the region here. It's an opportunity for us to reach our voices to people who make decisions.

Mayas: I'm a Sudanese refugee artist from Hull, part of a collaborative artists group Arafa and The Dirars. Also, I'm an active member of various refugee advisory groups. In 2020 I joined the RAG and I found it a platform to amplify the voices of refugee artists. Through RAG I was introduced to IMIX, which

helped me gain confidence in representing myself as a refugee in the media and on the social media. With IMIX I was able to be a refugee ambassador in the Refugee Week 2023 and share my experiences with wider audiences.

I remember the first time I joined online where I was introduced to the group. I joined because I wanted to use the opportunity to meet other members to represent the areas that we are resettled in. One of the positive opportunities for me was getting to know IMIX through the group.

On top of having lived experience we have knowledge and experience in refugee lives because we are active members in communities and some of our members are working within different refugee groups and organisations. The group consists of people living in different parts of the region.

'***Refugees are not always about being miserable, in crises and sad stories. We live our lives in happiness.***'

Refugee Week

Gaida: I heard of the Refugee Week Ambassador and City of Sanctuary Ambassador roles through RAG. Being active in City of Sanctuary means I take part in campaigns and learned how to be active within the community to raise our voice, speak to the

media and organise campaigns. These activities made it possible to become an ambassador for Refugee Week; IMIX accepted our applications, and we went to London to meet with other Refugee Week ambassadors and to help kick off the theme of #Compassion this year. We had training and interviews; we are now feeling ready and more confident in this role.

We know compassion is a very simple act, but it can change people's lives positively. We will be attending various events to promote the simple acts. I am so optimistic about it, it is about the positivity of refugee communities, because refugees are not always about being miserable, in crises and sad stories. We live our lives in happiness, and we are happy to be settled, we live in peace and safety. So, I think it is important to show this side as well because being a refugee is not just about being in crisis.

The thing about the media is that they show refugees as far away from humans (not like other human beings), I remember seeing refugees and I didn't know I will become a refugee. So, it is not far away from anybody. I have delivered speeches about the narrative of othering, the subject is always so obvious, refugees are us and are our communities, so it is obvious, but we keep using othering in language.

Mayas: In my experience, something they do in the media is that they try as much as possible for everything to be your own words but also, they try to move things into a different way (when a journalist will find their own 'angle' on a story, that isn't quite the point that the person being interviewed intended). So,

in the end it will not be you. But through platforms like refugee advisory groups, you can be with your full truth.

We have a lot of passion, and we are committed to speak out on behalf of our communities and when we engage with organisations our feedback gets received positively.

As told to Rawand Ahmed at Migration Yorkshire.

Rawand is our Refugee and Migrant Participation Officer and the co-chair of the Regional Refugee Integration Forum

One way of including people with lived experience at Migration Yorkshire is by creating platforms for people with lived experience to come together in advisory panels. Those panels are the Hong Kong Advisory Panel (HKAP), and the Refugee Advisory Group (RAG). We are currently recruiting members to join our new Ukraine Advisory Panel (UAP).

Gaida and Mayas are both members of RAG. Gaida is also a member of our Regional Refugee Integration Forum, representing lived experience. She is contributing and committed to the objectives of the Integration Forum.

Header image - Compassion by @_Murugiah, Insta handle: @_Murugiah, Twitter: @Murugiah_

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