

Building your local Refugee Week

Workshop notes (by Salma Ibrahim)

Refugee Week is a national partnership of national NGOs who work with refugees or on issues of migration (as well as the National Education Union), and is coordinated by Counterpoints. It has grown since it was founded in 1998 and now happens internationally, and encompasses people with lived experiences of being refugees, those who work with refugees, those in the arts, education, technology etc.

- Counterpoints Arts runs a national network called **Platforma** that focuses on building links and networks between the arts and the refugee sectors.
- Local people are forming strong cross-sector networks.
- This workshop is for those who are interested in building such networks for Refugee Week and also vice versa: how Refugee Week networks can help small organisations build new networks over time.
- Three themes that are relevant to building a Refugee Week event: infrastructure, funding, and communication.

What is already out there?

Start by looking to see who is running Refugee Week events already. And which organisations & people might have capacity & interest to get involved.

Planning an event: an introduction

- The first question is to ask how much time is available
- Sustainability is key (financial and environmental)
- Normally it takes a small core of people who are able to meet regularly and share ideas for the event(s).
- A core team is very important because it helps coordinate all the different parts of Refugee Week as it cuts across different orgs and subjects.
- Ask yourself, can you have a local planning meeting? Can you invite everyone to come and learn and share on whatever scale - local or bigger/smaller?
- Attend open-access events to develop a network, such as the conference today. It helps to showcase what's going on already.

Infrastructure:

- think about what is possible where you are (in terms of the organisations that are already there, schools, public spaces etc).
- Identify your goal. For example 'we are not reaching the mainstream audience' or 'we are not connecting with refugees enough'.

Funding:

- CA discusses the possibility for arts funding for Refugee Week. A lot of Refugee Week events are not funded, but there are funders who are

interested in funding these projects. It is important to understand that there is potential for funding.

- Think about Arts Council funding: they will fund one-off events and you don't have to be a charity or an organisation. Evaluation and forms are a big part of it.
- It is possible to apply for funding to pay for things like childcare and transport.

Communications:

- The best way to grow your network is by people hearing about you.
- However simple your social media strategy is, it will help get your message out there.
- Local media is often much more influential than it is given credit for. Local media has more authority and credibility than national media.
- Social media helps makes connections overtime.

Group discussion notes: (the members of this small group all work with children)

- Difficulty making contacts with schools - GDPR and complex organisation structures can make it hard to reach the right person.
- Spreading the word by word of mouth is very effective and most connections are made that way.
- It helps to make connections with the local authorities (infrastructural awareness).
- Small world - people seem to know each other so it makes building networks a little bit easier.
- Age: when working with younger children, it is very important to understand that they are open to these conversations. They are heavily influenced by the adults around them and may be having conversations about refugees at home with their parents already.
- Collaborate better with teachers as they know their pupils best when it comes to discussing difficult issues.
- Timing: mailout out gets circulated, schools respond, dates agree, safeguarding policies discussed, materials and final meeting. Luckily, this is often very quick for schools but can depend on the time of the academic year.
- Creating new work: Kazzum arts make postcards to share with new arrivals.

CA has partnered with the NEU – National Education Union. Speak to Emily (emily@counterpointsarts.org.uk) about connecting with them.

Feedback from other group discussions

- Start small : in terms of budget and audiences.
- Deciding who wants to get involved and how they can help draw new audiences is important.
- Difficulty planning meetings w other organisations. Solutions: just do it. Keep it broad and inclusive.
- Audiences: think who is it for? How to get the cross-over of audiences in terms of diversity and age. How to make refugees more actively involved.

- Discuss labels and how to overcome labelling and its limitations.
- Brands have different 'languages' for representation and feelings towards different labels. Find a middle-ground to make communication easier.
- Refugees don't always want to be in the spotlight. How do we accommodate for this?
- Growing culture of solidarity, for example through food, sharing spaces and resources.