

A day out in the countryside



People and the DALES is an award-winning outreach project delivered by local charity Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT) which enables people from disadvantaged backgrounds to visit the Yorkshire Dales for health and well-being. One group leader working with refugees and asylum seekers in Blackburn and Darwen said:

‘Doctors should prescribe a dose of the countryside instead of anti-depressants, as being in the great outdoors is so good for people.’

Working with Black and Minority Ethnic groups, people with a physical or mental health issue, and those from inner cities that rarely get out into the countryside, the project brings people together for a break from everyday life. Activities range from a simple guided walk to kite-flying, art workshops, quarry visits, or even a day spent shadowing a hill sheep farmer.

Judy Rogers, Community Development Worker at YDMT, said, ‘I feel that I have the best job in the world, planning and running fantastic days out in the Dales and meeting such amazing people.’

The project’s focus has changed over the last 12 years, from working mainly with Muslim groups from Bradford, Leeds and Keighley, to working more and more with asylum seeker and refugee groups as their needs are so great. One participant, recalling her asylum hearing, spoke of how terrified she was. She imagined herself back in the Yorkshire Dales and memories of the day she spent with YDMT helped her through the experience.

Welcome to Skipton

Following the refugee crisis of 2015, members of the local community in Skipton got together to see if they could turn their feelings of helplessness into positive action to support their neighbours overseas, and the Craven Refugee Support Network (CRSN) was formed.

As well as asking North Yorkshire County Council if Skipton could receive Syrian refugees through the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, it was suggested that a ‘hosting weekend’ could be organised to welcome a different refugee group to Skipton.

In March 2016, working with the Bradford Immigration & Asylum Support & Advice Network (BIASAN), 29 asylum seekers and refugees stayed in homes across Skipton. The weekend was organised through People and the DALES in partnership with CRSN and churches in Skipton, and the visitors enjoyed the warm welcome and hospitality of their hosts.

As eating is a big part of any holiday, meals were prepared in different churches across Skipton, avoiding any worries by the hosts about what their visitors may or may not eat. The weekend included a ceilidh attended by 80 people, and visits to Skipton Castle and the museum, where quite by chance a mainly Islamic Faith In Art exhibition was taking place, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed.

One elderly lady in Skipton hosted a young Syrian woman. Later they met again in Bradford and the Syrian woman surprised her 'host' by inviting her to stay the night, saying, 'I have no family here in England, so now you are my family'. The visitor had become the host.

Future hosting weekends involving different churches in Skipton are being planned. Judy said, 'It does take a lot of work to organise, but seeing people deep in conversation, keeping in touch and visiting each other independently after the weekend, and hopefully changing attitudes is such an important task. It is something that we in the rural areas really can do and it may change lives'.

The outreach work of YDMT is funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund, Morrisons Foundation, Sir George Martin Trust and players of People's Postcode Lottery.

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