



Ayad's Appetite Story

Jubilee Project

World in One City

Introduction

Ayad is an Asylum Seeker from Iraq who is currently awaiting a decision to be made by the Home Office about his asylum case. He became involved with Appetite through the Jubilee Project, a project in Stoke on Trent Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Stoke-on-Trent. The Jubilee project commissioned British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) with the support of Appetite to work with the group to explore themes of food and culture through working in clay.

Project information

The Jubilee Project was established in 2012 by volunteers from a local church to support the growing number of asylum seekers and refugees in Stoke-on-Trent. The majority of the asylum seekers who attend have been subjected to enforced separation from their loved ones, have been subjected to physical and sexual torture, victims of political issues and genocide which have left them psychologically traumatised.

Ayad's story

Ayad has been attending the Jubilee Project since July 2014. His country of origin is Iraq, from which he fled in September 2013 after being targeted and attacked by a local militia in a sectarian cleansing campaign. He spent some time in London before being moved to Stoke-on-Trent in the Summer of 2014, and was finding it difficult to adjust to his new, unfamiliar life. He found the isolation and boredom difficult, "the weeks were endless". Attending the Jubilee project helped to give structure to his week, and he looked forward to the weekly sessions.



BCB were commissioned by the Jubilee project, with the support of Appetite, to carry out the World in One City project with 20 members of the Jubilee project. BCB had identified food and culture as a theme for the project and worked with the group to create art pieces out of clay, bringing together the culture, food, traditions and heritage of the countries of origin with that of pottery heritage of Stoke-on-Trent.

The project was delivered at Spode, a disused pottery factory. Transport was organised by the project leader for each session, and Ayad acted as translator between the artists and the group members and also helped the project leaders to contact all of the other members of the group, reminding them about the meetings and gently encouraging them to attend.

Over the course of 10 weeks the group explored press moulding, designing back stamps, glazing, appropriating existing Spode decals to illustrate new stories, illustrating favourite traditional and western foods onto plates, making porcelain kitchen utensils and building terracotta bread cloches. They used the bread cloches to bake their own bread loaves. Ayad describes how he was able to design a plate which illustrated how the group wanted to feel different and unique, without feeling "alien or abnormal".

One of the challenges for the project was the transient and uncertain nature of the group. It was not unusual for member of the group to have to leave the group suddenly once a decision has been made about their asylum status. Ayad recounts how vulnerable the group members feel and how the atmosphere of the art sessions could change based on one phone call.

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“They were very vulnerable. In the middle of the project somebody received a letter from the Home Office of rejection, somebody receives a call that his case has to go to the court... you have no idea of the fluctuations in the mood in the group. One day you could have ten people interested in the project, the next day three.”

But he is clear that the approach of the artists helped people to engage. Everyone was called by name and no-one discussed their asylum stories. “We did not feel like asylum seekers, we demonstrated our stories in our work” Ayad says. Ayad’s story also illustrates the important ongoing role of the main project leaders at the Jubilee club. It was their encouragement and support that ensured that ensured the group members were able to engage with the BCB project. They not only took care of the logistics of the project such as transport and refreshments, but also considered the ongoing psychological factors that each individual was facing.



Outcomes and impact

The impact of the World in One City project on Ayad has been significant. He was able to step up from being a participant to a volunteer for the project and welcomed the challenge this brought. He likened the experience to being chairman of a great organisation in terms of the sense of achievement it gave him. The artists involved from BCB greatly welcomed his input, in particular as an interpreter for the group.

He says that being involved in the project has helped him to access his old skills. Before he arrived in the UK Ayad was a quality manager and worked also as a trainer and a translator. He is qualified to Masters level in management and Leadership. However, he believes that his journey through the BCB project has helped him to understand a different side to himself, helping him to adjust to his current life in Stoke-on-Trent.

“It showed [the] different profiles we can have and we should not really get stuck in the mindset that there is only one version of Ayad, [that] the version of Ayad is

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the version he used to be in the past. There is a new version of Ayad, yes a new version of me and of lots of others [in the group].”

It has also opened up social experiences for Ayad and opening up new areas to use the new skills he has developed.



When asked about future aspirations for art, Ayad is uncertain about the future of the group members role with Appetite. “This phase in our lives is a station, and you don’t know which train you will get. There have already been people who have gone, and they have a different story to write”. This, of course, makes planning the sustainability of the work with

this specific group difficult. However, there are lessons that we can take from the work that Ayad and the Jubilee Project did with BCB and Appetite.

Ayad’s role as a translator has been invaluable to project. However, Ayad makes clear that being able to engage with a group of asylum seekers needs to include far more than translation services. Ayad is clear that managers of art projects such as World in One City must understand and consider cultural language. As Ayad states, “Language is an essential requirement for projects like this. Not only the language in terms of linguistics, but also the cultural language. What is accepted here could be offending in other cultures, and vice versa of course”. Ayad played an important role in bridging the cultures and gives the example of timekeeping. “Some of our members of the group ...came from some humble areas, they do not have educational backgrounds, they do not have a sense of time. ‘I will come after one or two hours...’ and they do not show after that!” Therefore, understanding the culture of a group can be vital in building trust and relationships, not only for the duration of the project, but also for the long term skills and confidence levels of the group.

For Ayad, his involvement was initially a diversion from the effects of being “uprooted from their rich lives”. However, he is clear about the benefits of the project for both him and his group, from building confidence, developing skills and helping to further develop their social network. If he was to do this project again he would like to make sure that the idea came from the group first. “If we start with what people like to do then they will be creative”. Ayad believes that the group themselves could contribute more of their own culture, and the art

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associated with their home countries, through their ideas. “They will show different meanings and features of art that we do not have [here]”.

What themes would you use to categorise this case study?

Skills development; diversity; Asylum Seekers and refugees.

Photos by BCB

