

# #refugeeswelcome in parks: a resource book

- ideas for refugee integration and wellbeing
- how parks and urban public space can be more welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Clare Rishbeth,  
Dominika Blachnicka-Ciacek,  
Radhika Bynon  
and Tobias Stapf

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**Parks can play an important role in supporting wellbeing and connection for refugees and asylum seekers. This resource demonstrates how, and provides case studies and actions that can improve access to and enjoyment of parks. Our primary audience is people working or volunteering in refugee and asylum seeker support, and all involved in the design and management of urban parks and other outdoor public spaces. But we hope it may spark interest and ideas for anyone who likes spending time outdoors.**

**Do you work directly with refugees and asylum seekers?**

This resource book will share information on how the use of public space can help to facilitate wellbeing and inclusion, and offers ideas for supporting positive experiences.

**Are you involved in the planning, design or management of parks (or other outdoor public spaces)?**

This resource book gives an insight into the experiences of refugee and asylum seeker park users, highlights relevant barriers and expectations, and offers ideas for engagement and inclusion approaches.

**Are you new in your city and eager to find out about initiatives and activities that you could join?**

We hope that you can find some ideas for opportunities which are available in parks and other open spaces.

# Why refugees? And why parks?

Though the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers are complex and varied, circumstances of under-employment, poor living conditions, limited social opportunities and mental health pressures are commonly reported. In this project we look at how using outdoor places in cities and towns, in particular visiting parks, has the opportunity to improve the wellbeing of these new residents and support integration on the local scale.

## **Can the use of parks support social networks, improve local awareness and give a sense of belonging or a peaceful moment?**

Our project enthusiastically draws on the historic values of urban parks in the UK (and much of Europe): that parks are publicly owned, free to use, and for the common good of everyone. They are places for pleasure rather than profit, for activities, plays and sport, or for simply hanging out. Previous research conducted by members of our research team has found that even just sitting outside in public spaces can improve everyday quality of life, especially of people commonly marginalised by society<sup>1</sup>, and there is a wealth of research that addresses the mental health benefits of contact with urban nature<sup>2,3,4</sup>. The purpose of this project was to better understand how this relates to the personal histories and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, recognising both a shared humanity, regardless of citizenship status, and the impact of specific barriers to access.

It is not straightforward. The use of urban public space is culturally formed, responding to different national contexts and changing social needs, and for all migrants the outdoors can reflect both connections and disconnections with their home country. The public realm can be a place in which refugees and asylum seekers are uncertain about local norms, feel unwelcome or uncomfortable or are vulnerable to hate crimes. Diminished autonomy and ongoing uncertainty can reduce the confidence to venture outside, especially to unfamiliar places.

Parks often hold an emotional value to local people, representing memories and affections, and engendering a sense of ownership and care. Inevitably, cultures of park-use can also change; and these changes may be perceived both positively and negatively. New patterns of recreation, shifts between calm and noise, increases in litter, worries about antisocial behaviour, etc. can surface as local tension. Whether people interpret this as an outcome of migration will reflect demographic trends and broader political narratives.

Refugee support agencies are stretched and, therefore, often focused on points of immediate crises of status, income and housing rather than on medium-term ways of becoming local. Greenspace sector organisations (relating to parks, nature conservation, and the use of urban public space) aim to be inclusive, but may not understand or know how to address accessibility issues for refugee users. It is important not only to recognise these contexts and learn from them, but also to raise aspirations for the potential of parks not only as a 'wellbeing resource', but also as a location of mutual support and local integration.

An example of the mutual and interconnected nature of the benefits of 'refugeeswelcome in parks' is the introductory case study in Paris of 'learning French outside'.

- Asylum seekers have extremely easy access to drop-in French classes; these are not hidden away in a building.
- Sitting outdoors with the sensory qualities of trees and sky has additional restorative impacts, potentially reducing stress levels.
- Onlookers can see for themselves a willingness and commitment to learn the language. The visibility of the classes provides a counter-narrative to fearful perceptions of asylum seekers as a burden, and of this neighbourhood as a place for drug dealing and rough sleeping.
- Asylum seekers are themselves less vulnerable to abuse due to being in a group context.
- Within a 10-minute walk from this square there are two high-quality public parks, so there are opportunities to continue socialising in a more relaxed way.



# Outdoor French classes

## **Summary:**

Open-air language class given to asylum seekers

## **Where:**

Paris, France

## **Initiated by:**

BAMM

## **Website:**

<https://baamasso.org/en/learning-french/>

If you pass the Platz de la Bataille de Stalingrad at 6 p.m. each day you will see a free open-air French class given to dozens of asylum seekers (and anyone else interested). Learners can join one of two groups: one for beginners and another for more advanced French speakers. According to Bamm, an NGO that runs the classes in a number of locations throughout Paris, the objective of the classes is to “accompany people to linguistic autonomy alongside the learning of cultural norms needed for daily life”. By appropriating the flights of stairs edging the square, the classes recreate the structure of the seminar room, with the teachers sat at the bottom and the students gathering above them. These open-air public classes not only help asylum seekers to get on with the French language, but also serve as social occasions on which to meet up, make new friends and exchange information.

# Many ways to make #refugeeswelcome in parks

#refugeeswelcome in parks is not about any single idea. Our fieldwork has uncovered a wide range of initiatives which have supported access to and enjoyment of parks (see diagram right). Some of these are specifically focused on refugee and asylum seeker participants, other make steps to include them within a broader group. They can be initiated from the refugee sector or the greenspace sector, but most include some kind of collaboration between different organisations. Nine of these initiatives are highlighted in our case studies (pages 5, 12, 13, 18, 19, 24, 25, 30, 31).

# The importance of holistic approaches

#refugeeswelcome in parks promotes the benefits of initiatives that embed one or all of the following aims:

**1/ increase autonomy.** Refugees and asylum seekers often have very constrained life circumstances, in which the opportunity to make their own choices and pursue their own goals is very reduced. These initiatives can increase confidence in order to make well informed choices about where to go in a city or town.

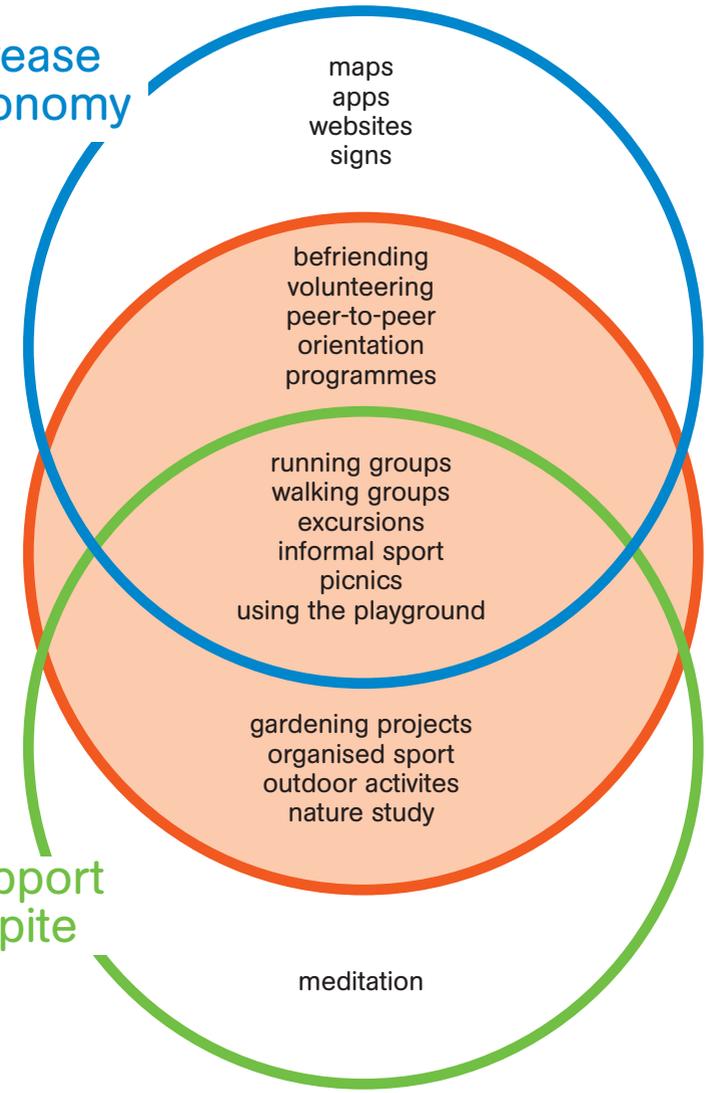
**2/ support respite.** Many refugees and asylum seekers live with poor mental health, and all are adjusting to 'finding their feet' and their own sense of being and belonging in a new cultural context. Respite (as potentially provided by outdoor places and activities) can be about peaceful relaxing, the enjoyment of taking part in familiar activities, or the pleasure of doing something you do well.

**3/ use and build on social networks.** Most initiatives are supported by (and in turn support) social relationships. The human to human element is important: both between organisations and refugees and asylum seekers, and within the friendship networks of new arrivals.

Increase autonomy

Support respite

Use and build healthy social networks



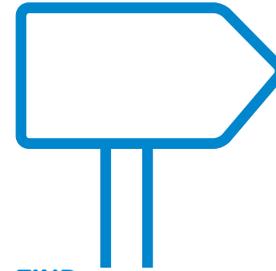
## Our team and methods

We are a team of academic and third sector researchers with experience in refugee integration, landscape architecture, and social innovation. We gained Arts and Humanities Research Council funding to conduct this project in the UK and Germany in 2017.

Our project methodology is founded on three principles: careful listening, learning from different contexts, and giving back so as to support change. We undertook a programme of interviews with refugees and asylum seekers (16 in depth interviews and many informal conversations), we also conducted interviews with a range of stakeholder groups (35 interviews) from both the refugee sector (support and orientation services, conversation clubs, and mental health services) and the greenspace sector (management, design, advocacy, community support). All types of interviews were conducted in three locations: London, Sheffield and Berlin, with additional stakeholder interviews addressing the UK national context. We also researched case studies of good practice in a range of UK and Northern European contexts, selecting nine to feature in this resource as inspiration for cross-sector working (for further details of the team and interviewees see p40).

## Structure of resource

The resource is organised under four key themes: **FIND, CHAT, JOIN IN, FEEL BETTER**. Each theme introduces contexts, what works, case studies, and questions for inspiration.



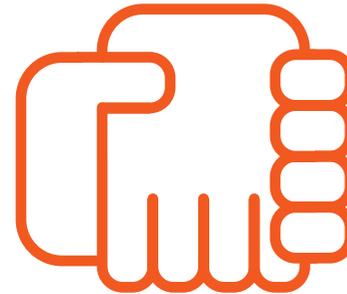
### **FIND:**

How refugees and asylum seekers understand the culture and diversity of parks, and research what information they need before visiting (p.10).



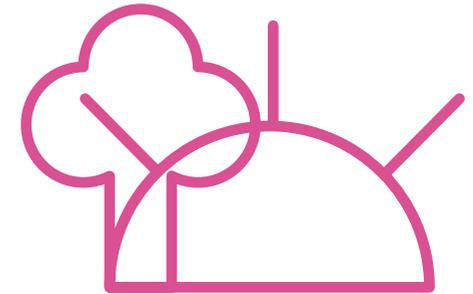
### **CHAT:**

How the confidence needed to visit parks is easier to find when you are with a friend, friends or a facilitated group (p.16).



### **JOIN IN:**

The potential of parks and public open spaces to offer a range of (mostly free) activities so as to help combat boredom and give a sense of purpose (p.22).



### **FEEL BETTER:**

The ways in which spending time in parks and other natural environments can improve mental health (p.28).

### **The final sections address:**

- Seven brilliant ideas for the refugee sector
- Seven brilliant ideas for the greenspace sector
- The importance of integration and connections
- What next
- The project team and contributors

# FIND:

## ask for ideas as to where to go

For any newcomer to a city or town, there is much to learn. When you are new to a country in a different part of the world, even more is unfamiliar. Refugees and asylum seekers might not easily understand places, and types of places, that seem normal to a long-term resident. Some will have grown up in countries in which there are public parks, and some not. Many will be unaware of the wide range of public outdoor spaces in countries such as Britain, where a short walk in a typical city may take you through heritage parks, sports pitches, cemeteries, city farms, nature reserves, river and canal banks.

Recalling their first weeks and months in new cities, many asylum seekers and refugees talk about feeling lost and confused and being nervous in stepping outside. Depending on their arrival route and legal status, some receive some basic orientation from service providers when they are located in a new accommodation<sup>5</sup>. The quality of this can vary greatly. Welcome packs can be text-heavy and written in English, with official introductions focusing on practical instructions such as how to operate the oven or find the post office. Information about the local neighbourhood is fragmented and delivered at the point of the greatest disorientation.

All refugees and asylum seekers spend time in public spaces in their locality to some extent. City centre locations are the most commonly used; they are near facilities and feel busy and safe. However, our interviews with asylum seekers and refugees suggest that often they don't know about places beyond the obvious, and that, glimpsing from the outside, parks often seem too quiet and uninviting.

## What helps?

Many refugees rely on their smartphone to get them from A to B, and to find facilities. However, Google Maps doesn't provide a sense of local culture, usual activities, and patterns of use which characterise the social life of public spaces. Some newcomers are lucky enough to know or be housed with people who have been in the city for a while, and who might serve as 'tour guides'. This is often an effective way of signposting newcomers to language support, free meals or activities. For well-networked asylum seekers and refugees, conversation classes can lead to learning about new cultures and leisure practices, walking groups can help with wider-scale orientation, and support groups provide regular local orientation. Face-to-face conversations and peer learning tend to be the best support in getting the hang of living in a new place, but printed and web-based resources can be useful, too, in providing information which can be returned to at different stages of settling into a new place.

“It felt very different from my country; there was no sunshine, no desert.”

Firuz  
(Iranian/Sheffield)



Nafsika Michael

# InfoCompass

## Summary:

Curated online and offline information hub for refugees and asylum seekers

## Where:

Berlin, Germany

## Collaborators:

place / making, Association for Socio-Cultural Work e. V. Bezirksamtes Reinickendorf, Albatros gGmbH

## Website:

[www.info-compass.net/](http://www.info-compass.net/)

In 2015, at a high point in Syrian refugee arrivals in Germany, the Integration Commissioner of Berlin-Reinickendorf outlined a key challenge: “The problem are not missing services for refugees but ways to better communicate the existing ones where the people are actually living.” InfoCompass is an integrated approach, supporting information flows between asylum seekers and refugees, professional supporters, organisations, and volunteers. It provides a service which collects, structures and locates support and activity offers and sources of general information. Online information mapping is supported by physically located and staffed Info Points throughout Berlin. InfoCompass provides a crowdsourced, collaborative gathering of information; crucially, however, this is supported as much as possible by an editorial team which check entries and provide good-quality translation.



place / making



place / making

# Orientation programme

## Summary:

A dedicated orientation programme for newly arrived Syrian refugees

## Where:

London, UK

## Collaborators:

Refugee Action and local partners

## Website:

[www.refugee-action.org.uk/our-services/refugee-resettlement/](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/our-services/refugee-resettlement/)

Orientation takes place during the arrivals week and is carried out after staff and volunteers at Refugee Action have provided refugees with the essentials (tenancy, housing benefits, job-seeking appointments, GP registration, Home Office, basic utilities). Firstly, local tours are given. These involve walking with newcomers around their immediate area and showing them local shops, markets, supermarkets, discount stores, local parks, mosques/churches, post offices, payment points (to collect benefits before a bank account has been set up), and transport links. James Peto from Refugee Action feels that parks are important but sometimes difficult to find; therefore, he makes a point of including these in the tours. On the first trip, there is usually an element of teaching newcomers to London about transport systems, currency, money saving, safeguarding, and road safety.

James explains: “We want this to be a friendly experience and try to take them to at least some places that speak Arabic and may seem more familiar to them so they are encouraged to explore by themselves as opposed to feeling daunted by the foreign environment.” The second orientation is for the wider area. In London, volunteers and staff at Refugee Action take clients to Shepherd’s Bush Market, where there are several Syrian shops and restaurants. Specific itineraries will reflect discussion between Refugee Action staff members and the refugees who participate in the projects.

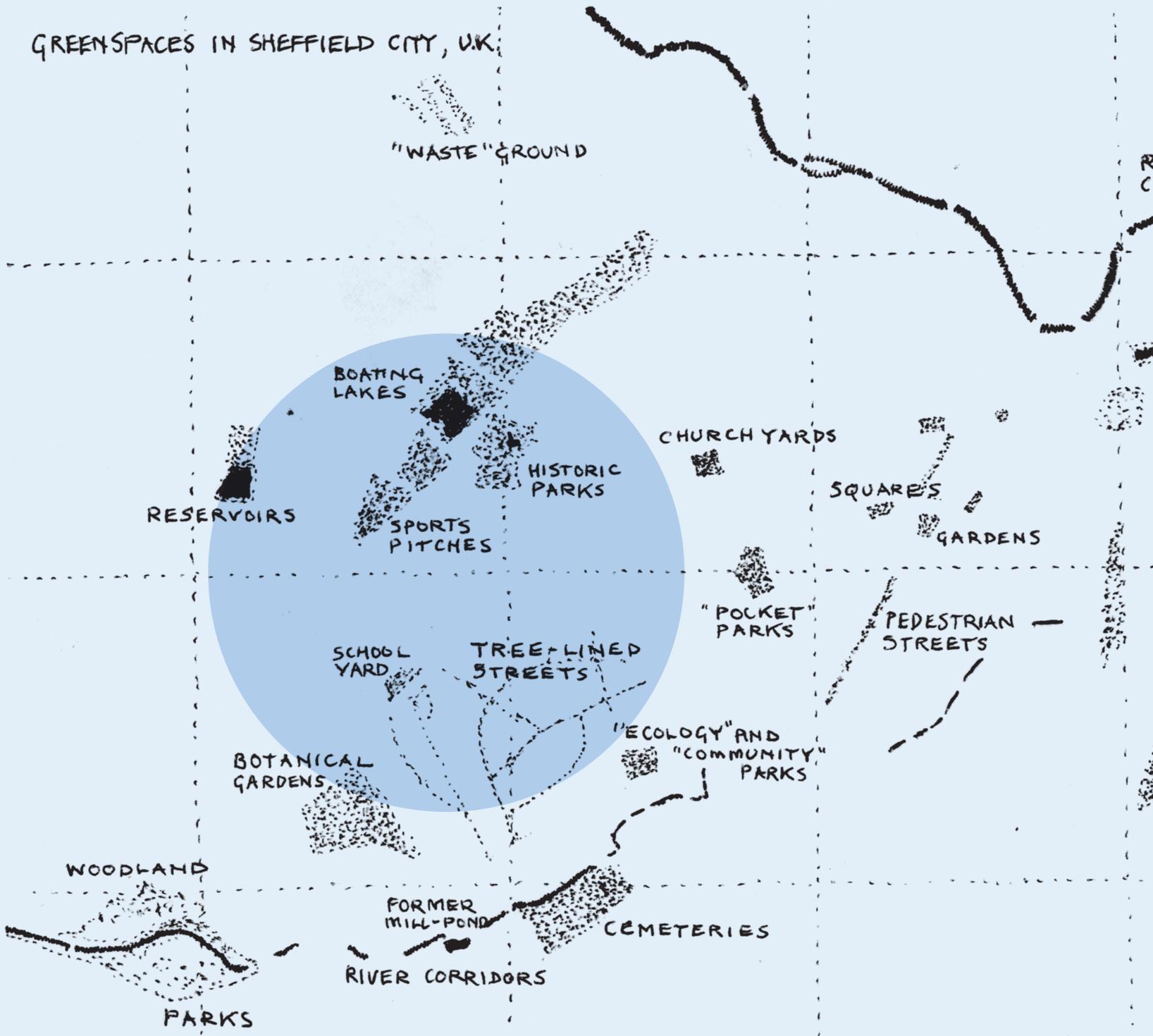


Clare Rishbeth



Clare Rishbeth

# GREENSPACES IN SHEFFIELD CITY, U.K.



## Questions:

How might the greenspace sector extend a welcome to refugees? Think about face-to-face means as well as the accessibility of printed and web-based information. Who could advise locally on this?

What could be provided in formal or informal orientation programmes to give a sense of what different parks offer, as well as the range of options regarding activities?

In which ways do refugees and asylum seekers already share info about local facilities and resources? What are the opportunities to extend the reach of this?

Talking about parks, can conversation classes provide a means of chatting about what happens in parks at different times of the day and year?

The maps and drawings included on the four 'questions' pages are from a landscape architecture textbook authored by Catherine Dee. They are included to evoke a visual sense of the variety of parks and the different ways people experience them, from a city-wide scale to close up.

# CHAT:

## come with a friend

When life is complicated and unsettling, gathering the confidence to venture beyond the front door can be difficult. Many refugees and asylum seekers feel lonely and isolated, relying on their phone to connect with friends and family who have ended up in different cities and countries. Not knowing places or people with whom to socialise, and often without permission to work, many have few reasons to leave the house. Refugee support provision is often located in crowded offices and halls, focusing on meeting urgent needs, so they are not ideal locations for making or sustaining friendships. Many asylum seekers visit only sporadically.

In our interviews, being alone was commonly cited as a key barrier to participation in outdoor activities. Spending time outside can be intimidating, partly because you are more visible. “Venturing out is stressful,” said Zenith (Zimbabwean/Sheffield). “You need to have a certain kind of boldness to settle in a new place,” said Mercy (Kenyan/London). A number of factors appear to shape this uncertainty and reasonable caution. Almost all of our respondents had heard about experiences of racist violence. Many have been subjected to verbal abuse in public spaces, and have developed their own ‘mental maps’ of safe and less safe locations. “I have been here for many years, but there are still places where I would not venture out on my own,” said Zenith. Parks that were avoided were often located in suburban, predominantly white areas (and perceived to be for only ‘indigenous’ people as a result), or ones that were too large, quiet and empty.

Ideas of ‘fitting in’ are also related to understanding local cultures of recreation and hanging out. Throughout a number of interviews, refugees felt that they needed to be seen as ‘being normal’. Some respondents talked about feeling different because of the colour of their skin, way of dressing, or limited ability to conduct a conversation in the local language, and felt concerned that others would judge them.



Nafsika Michael

## What helps?

Many of the above concerns and barriers were significantly reduced when our interviewees could go out with a friend or a group. The company of other people reduced a sense of anxiety and discomfort and a sense of racial, ethnic or religious ‘unfit’. Visiting with a friend is a different way of socialising from time spent in indoor locations, and can provide a shared confidence and a collective means of making sense of new environments. Some parks are more conducive to socially acceptable hanging-out; facilities such as BBQs, table tennis, outdoor gym equipment, and WiFi spots are all simple to understand, inclusive elements of outdoor places that make it easier for everyone to spend more time outside. For example, the Pankow park department in Berlin prioritised making parks near refugee housing fun to use, recognising the importance of free leisure provision for integration. It is useful if these kinds of facility-rich parks (often accredited as ‘Green Flag’ parks<sup>6</sup> in the UK) are easy to find for refugee users.

From interviews with refugee sector stakeholders, we learnt the importance and success of initiatives that ‘curated sociability’: visits out in groups in which there is some level of organisation that crucially provides social context. This often took the form of rural walks, but can also be focused on urban parks. Some groups working with refugee young people commented on the sense of release and freedom that spending time outdoors with a friendship group can bring, and one gave an example of how Afghani teenage boys felt able to exchange embraces in a park context in a way that they have learnt to inhibit in other locations. The mental health charity MIND works with vulnerable communities, and found that peer-to-

peer support was one of the most natural and effective ways of increasing people’s sense of belonging to the community and neighbourhood. Refugee support groups such as conversation clubs and volunteering programmes could support the creation of such ‘peer-to-peer’ networks, and consider taking indoor activities outside whenever feasible.

“I like to see people happy. When we sit in the park we say ‘hello’ to people. When we see someone with an Arabic face we talk to them, but we talk to anyone if they can understand our English.”

Khalid  
(Syrian/London)

# Start Walking

**What:**  
Start Walking

**Summary:**  
Urban and countryside walks for newly arrived students and refugees

**Where:**  
Plymouth, UK

**Initiated by:**  
START: Students and Refugees Together

**Website:**  
[www.studentsandrefugeestogether.com](http://www.studentsandrefugeestogether.com)

[STARTplymouth@StartPlymouth](mailto:STARTplymouth@StartPlymouth)

START based in Plymouth and Cornwall supports the orientation and settlement of refugees in the city and their transition 'from people in need, to self-reliant contributors to their local communities'. The START model of working brings together students on placements from professional programmes such as social work and occupational therapy with refugees and people seeking asylum, all of whom might be new to Plymouth. The ambition is to support an environment where people can use and develop skills, develop new connections and ultimately build more cohesive communities.



StartWalking project

'STARTWalking' is an initiative that involves a series of walks (roughly quarterly) undertaken by staff, students and refugees, giving all a chance to get to know both the city's green spaces and the nearby countryside. As well as its proximity to Cornwall and Dartmoor, Plymouth has a very dramatic coastal location. The programme introduces the walkers to this beautiful resource, getting to know the character and history of the landscape, building their confidence in getting around, and hopefully helps them develop a sense of attachment to their new home. It is also an opportunity to make new friends within the refugee community and outside, exchange experiences and sometimes share memories of home countries.

START Walking has produced a guidebook highlighting nine walks in and around the city. It provides practical information on transport, information on historical heritage and the local wildlife that can be enjoyed during the walk. This beautifully illustrated booklet can be used as a resource for individuals, friends and groups – newcomers and old-timers in the city!

# Open-air kitchen

**What:**  
Open-air kitchen

**Summary:**  
Riverside food bar and cultural venue run by refugees

**Where:**  
Warsaw, Poland

**Collaborators:**  
Local activists

**Website:**  
[www.facebook.com/kuchniakonfliktu/](http://www.facebook.com/kuchniakonfliktu/)

The 'Kitchen from a Conflict Zone' is not just a common truck food bar. Run by refugees, it is an open-sky restaurant and informal outdoor eating venue with a convenient sitting space located adjacent to the riverbanks and a busy pedestrian promenade, which is near to sandy beaches and volleyball courts. Jarmila Rybicka, one of the founders, says that the project aims to enable refugees not only to be productive, but also to gain confidence in going out and being present in the public spaces of the city. Jarmila helps each of the workers to obtain the right work permit, and supports them in dealing with local administrative processes.

Currently, Jarmila's team consists of 11 refugees, who either cook in the kitchen or contribute to the project in other ways, drawing on their own talents and skills. The team is mixed and represents different backgrounds, currently including women from Chechenia, Nepal, Balorus, Ukraine and Congo and men from Algeria and Egypt. Every day, the 'Kitchen from a Conflict Zone' enables spontaneous encounters between refugees and

Warsovians, offering delicious meals and snacks from the home countries of the kitchen's cooks. Thanks to the flexible table and plant arrangements, it offers a welcoming, open aspect as well as a sense of intimacy. For visitors to the Warsaw riverbanks, the kitchen serves as an invitation to explore the richness of the heritage that newcomers bring to Poland, taste the food, and enjoy a conversation. In the current Polish political environment, comprising hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers, this grassroots initiative offers a small-scale possibility of inclusion, integration and welcome.



Kuchnia Kunfliktu



Kuchnia Kunfliktu

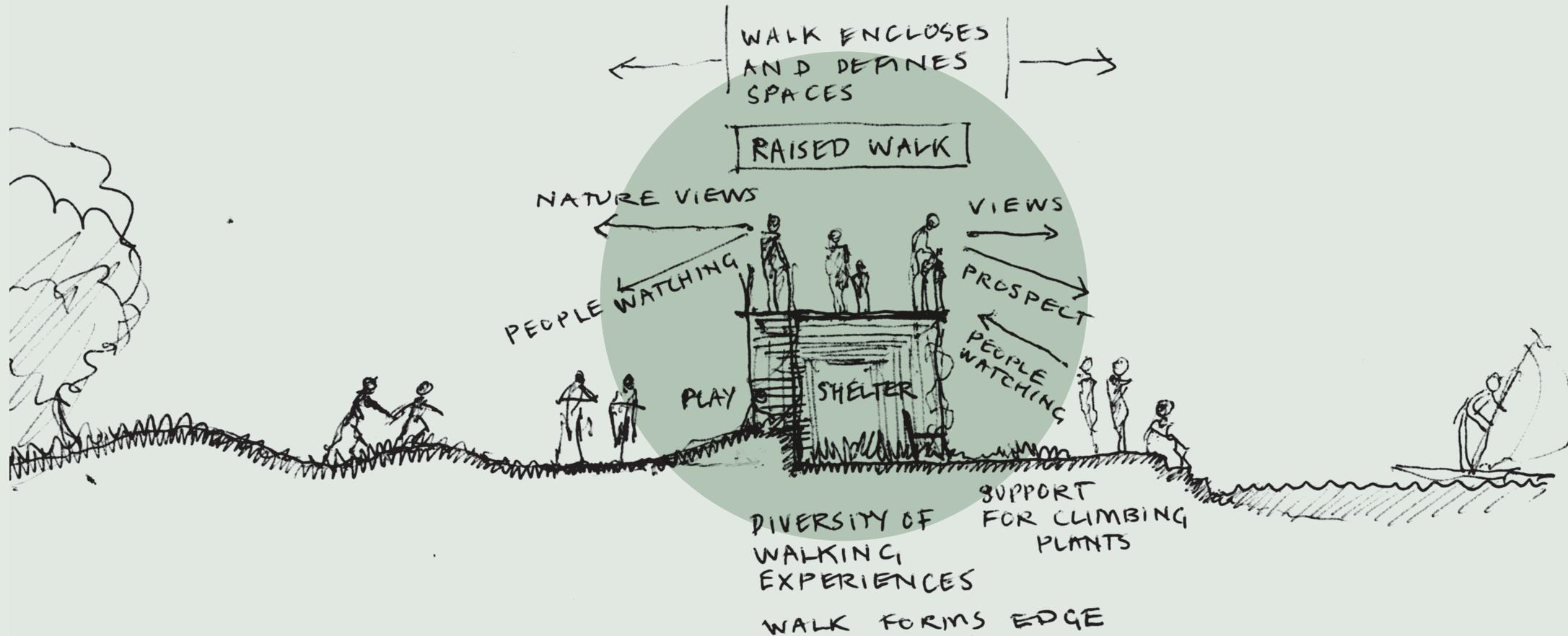
## Questions:

Which local parks and public spaces are most conducive for conversations between friends, considering safety, ease of access, facilities (including places to sit and nearby toilets), sunnier spots, and relatively sheltered areas?

Where does social contact in asylum seeker and refugee circles already take place indoors? How might it 'spill outdoors' when the sun is shining?

If there are already groups providing orientation tours or walking groups for refugees, do they visit attractive and facility-rich local parks as well as more distant beauty spots?

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How might refugee groups be engaged so as to take part in designing and improving activities that make a park more social: playgrounds, food, informal sport, etc.?



# JOIN IN:

## look out for free festivals, sports, children's play, volunteering

“Asylum seekers cannot fall in love,” Firuz told us (Iranian/Sheffield). This simple statement reflects the state of limbo in which asylum seekers live for months and years pending a decision on their asylum application. This process of waiting means that all other aspects of their lives are put on hold. Many ‘refugees-in-waiting’ lose control of their lives: they cannot work, cannot travel, cannot make plans, and days are experienced as monotonous. Love and friendship, exhilaration and accomplishment take a back seat. It is easy to lose the energy to initiate simple, enjoyable activities. Funds are constantly pressed, with no money for the bus, no facilities for a post-sport shower, a winter coat shared between friends<sup>7, 8</sup>.



Nafsika Michael

Many urban residents see local parks as places in which to take part in (or initiate) a range of leisure and social activities. However, a number of our refugee and asylum seeker interviewees did not see the purpose in hanging out in green spaces; these places may be beautiful but they can also seem strangely quiet, boring and un-engaging. Contemplation is not always welcome, and memories of the past can sometimes heighten current despondency. “I would see no purpose in going [to parks] on my own, but from a moment where my friend introduced me to running, I take part in park running classes regularly,” Firuz told us.

“There is a big park nearby my house with a basketball court and I go with my friends there. Every Friday we play football together.”

Khalid  
(Syrian/London)

## What helps?

Many stories emerged during the course of our research into refugees and asylum seekers finding their ‘niche’ – a purpose that helps them to feel more like themselves and gives some kind of structure to their days. At best, activities in public or semi-public places provide times and places of contact between newcomers and longstanding residents, where companionship can be found by ‘doing alongside’ rather than extended conversations (although many of our interviewees would avoid contexts in which they were the only asylum seeker or refugee).

Everyone is different; therefore, having a variety of ways in which to ‘join in’ is important. Points of contact can be organised sessions: playing football, gardening (and sharing cooking), walking groups, conservation volunteering, etc. Structure and regularity can be very useful, especially with capable and experienced facilitation. In the Green City Action community allotment in Sheffield, specific sessions attract refugee participants in which “growing happens, a cup of tea happens, a lot of conversation happens”. Regular visitors find a space in which to grow vegetables from their own seeds, cook dishes from their home country, and swap multi-lingual words for different plants using pictures on the wall. Doing something, especially something that connects to past interests, can help to restore a sense of autonomy and purpose.

Participation can also be about informal, easy-to-understand ways to join in as one person among many: pushing a swing in a playground, sitting on a bench in a sunny courtyard, watching a performance at a summer fete or throwing a frisbee in a park. Asylum seekers and refugees with children often find park visits an essential coping strategy. “When the weather is super-nice I put off all other responsibilities and take the kids outside!” said Najwa (Palestinian/Berlin).

Some parks offer a wider range of ways in which to participate than do others, and in the Sheffield context, city centre locations in particular were seen as convenient, inclusive and safe. Every newcomer to Sheffield knew, and spoke warmly about, the Peace Gardens, a central urban garden with attractive planting and run-through fountains where children play. Here, respondents feel comfortable about visiting with friends, or on their own, and enjoy watching others. Everyday acts of participation not only alleviate boredom, but also are intrinsic to public integration and may increase a sense of belonging in new surroundings.



# Football

## Summary:

Weekly football sessions for asylum seekers, refugees and local youth

## Where:

Sheffield, UK

## Collaborators:

FURD, U-Mix Centre, Sheffield

## Website:

[www.furd.org](http://www.furd.org)

Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD) hosts weekly football sessions at the U-Mix Centre in Sheffield for asylum seekers and refugees, and local youth more broadly, to promote social inclusion and understanding between different communities. FURD believes that “football, as the world’s most popular sport, can help break down barriers created by ignorance or prejudice, and bring together people from different backgrounds to play, watch and enjoy the game”.

Wednesday U-Mix sessions gather a diverse mixture of users: younger and older experienced players and beginners (though, sadly, efforts to attract women haven’t worked out yet). Around 15 people usually turn up and join in. According to one of the regular members of the group, Wednesday sessions are a great way for newcomers to establish a network of friends in Sheffield and learn about other events and activities going on in the city. Football exercises allow refugees and asylum seekers to undertake a structured physical activity outdoors irrespective of the weather. Playing football provides a helpful escape from everyday worries. After a game,

all participants are welcome to lunch – a friendly way to continue informal discussions, about football and beyond, and develop new friendships and connections.



Nafsika Michael



Nafsika Michael

# Growing together

## Summary:

Inspiration, training and support in establishing own gardening projects

## Where:

Berlin, Germany

## Collaborators:

Die GRÜNE LIGA Berlin and Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Umwelt

## Website:

[www.grueneliga-berlin.de/themen-projekte2/stadtbegruenung/integration-und-inklusion/](http://www.grueneliga-berlin.de/themen-projekte2/stadtbegruenung/integration-und-inklusion/)

The project entitled ‘Growing together - gardening as a contribution to integration’ is an initiative run by the Green Liga and supported by the Berlin Senate. It aims to include all Berliners who are interested in community growing and developing gardening skills. Local associations, neighbourhood groups, cooperatives, businesses, schools, shelters, refugee homes, disability support, and all interested citizens are welcome to develop their own gardening initiatives. Green Liga inspires, motivates and supports new gardening projects in local communities by organising seminars and workshops on community gardening as well as providing individual and community consultations. In 2016, over 20 community gardening initiatives were undertaken throughout Berlin as part of the project: flowerbeds in courtyards, community gardens in local neighbourhoods and in emergency shelters, and school projects. Green Liga also runs a competition for the best gardening initiative that champions inclusion, integration and wellbeing.



Nafsika Michael



Nafsika Michael



Nafsika Michael



## Questions:

Who can connect local outdoor sports and recreational groups with asylum seekers? What is the scope for both informal links and formal referrals?

How can organisations offering free activities, from outdoor films to conservation work, gain help in addressing access barriers for refugees and asylum seekers?

If there are outdoor volunteering opportunities, can training and accreditation be integrated so as to support future employability? Is anyone local already doing this from whom you could learn?

Who could collaborate on a good playground guide?

# FEEL BETTER:



research shows that spending time outside can improve mental health

Our stakeholder interviews with staff from both MIND and City of Sanctuary outlined the high incidence of mental health problems for refugees and asylum seekers. Though much of this distress can be related to the circumstances of leaving their home country, it can be exacerbated by the experience of ‘the limbo’ that individuals find within the asylum system, and by precarious and poor-quality housing, fragmented support, and social isolation<sup>9, 10</sup>. “I am depressed and take anti-depression drugs [...] My mood here is different. In Iran I was very happy. Maybe my mood will change if I can work, go to university and can contribute to society,” said Hozan (Kurdish/Bradford).

Some of our interviewees talked about days when they felt too low or too exhausted to venture outdoors, where you are visible and potentially judged. For example, Hayyan (Syrian/Berlin) explained that he does not want anyone to see him on days when he is particularly stressed or feeling angry. A destitution centre manager in London underlined that for more vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, spending time outside requires the effort of ‘fitting in’, and that indoor spaces can feel less demanding and, indeed, feel more ‘normal’.

“The difference between indoors and outdoors is that I prefer the outdoors because I am able to let the negative energy out when I am outside. Indoors I am stressed and feel more pressure.”

Tamara  
(Syrian/Berlin)



Nafsika Michael

## What works?

However, most of our respondents were keen to talk about experiences of feeling better, less anxious and more relaxed in parks. This was especially mentioned in the Berlin context, in which men and women talked about finding times of calm in both parks and urban squares. Rima (Syrian/Berlin) enjoyed being part of a lively buzz, spending afternoons sitting on a bench with her husband in Alexanderplatz, but also highly valued her local park. “When she is upset or confused, she likes to go there to think by herself and find peace in her soul and mind” (researcher notes). Sami (Syrian/Berlin) expressed a preference for open spaces, and described spending time in parks as a respite from the crowdedness of city streets. Sensory qualities of being outdoors were often noted as important, such as walking barefoot on the grass, being able to eat outside, or simply having a smoke on a bench. Some refugees and asylum seekers preferred being among activity, others spoke of the value of finding a calm, quiet spot.

Respite can be purposeful and expertly supported, with some thoughtful and responsive initiatives providing therapeutic support for those recovering from significant trauma (one excellent example is The Grange in Norfolk, as well as the currently developing ‘Gardens of Sanctuary’ programme<sup>11</sup>). Organised trips to the nearby countryside or to the seaside can offer points of genuine joy and relief. “Once we see the sea, we cheer up immediately. We don’t think about any of our troubles...,” said Lotanna (Nigerian/London), but the temporary nature of these trips brings about limitations. “But as soon as we come back, our troubles return.” Regular visits to local places may have more long-term benefits. Sarah, a

Red Cross worker running a ‘Welcome Group’ for refugees in South Yorkshire, took the approach of spending as much time as possible outdoors. She advocated using trips and volunteering as a means of helping refugees to “escape the everyday, to cleanse their minds”.

Ultimately, autonomy is important as well as respite. Asylum seekers who have managed to find and take part in outdoor activities, walking or running groups, gardening projects, etc. clearly felt the wellbeing benefits of these small-scale achievements. “Do not stay along at home! Force yourself to activity!” This is Firuz’s enthusiastic advice to his fellow asylum seekers (Iranian/Sheffield).

# Horticultural therapy

**Summary:**  
Post trauma mental health support through gardening

**Where:**  
London, UK

**Collaborators:**  
South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (Slam), Maudsley Charity, and horticultural project Roots and Shoots.

**Website:**  
[www.slam.nhs.uk/media/our-blog/horticultural-therapy-garden-for-maudsley-hospital](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/media/our-blog/horticultural-therapy-garden-for-maudsley-hospital)

[www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2017/jun/28/nhs-therapeutic-gardening-help-refugees-trauma](http://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2017/jun/28/nhs-therapeutic-gardening-help-refugees-trauma)

For 10 years the project has provided therapeutic gardening and psychotherapy to refugees and asylum seekers suffering from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many who use the service have been affected by trafficking, torture, violence and rape, and have been referred by mental health services at the Southwark PTSD trauma unit. Prior experience that clients have in gardening varies: some are very experienced, whereas others are complete novices. Gemma Eke, a clinical psychologist from Slam, explains how many of their service users with PTSD are in need of routine in their lives, and that involvement in a facilitated gardening project can help to provide this. Initially, clients attend a 10-week course in a group, wherein they are taught skills to manage their mental health, after which they are invited to

return for a weekly gardening session. According to Gemma Eke, gardening as a tool for psychotherapy not only helps clients to 'concentrate better' and 'to be present', but also develops social relationships and trust. Asylum seekers who take part in the project often refer to powerful metaphors in relation to gardening and recovery. As one participant said: "When I see the corn growing I think, although my life has been demolished, I can still grow again."



Beth Steddon



Beth Steddon

# Wheels for Wellbeing Cycling club

**Summary:**  
Cycle training and group rides.

**Where:**  
Manchester, UK

**Collaborators:**  
Refugee Action, Groundwork, and local operators

**Website:**  
[www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/targetwellbeing/pages/refugee-well-being-project-tw](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/targetwellbeing/pages/refugee-well-being-project-tw)

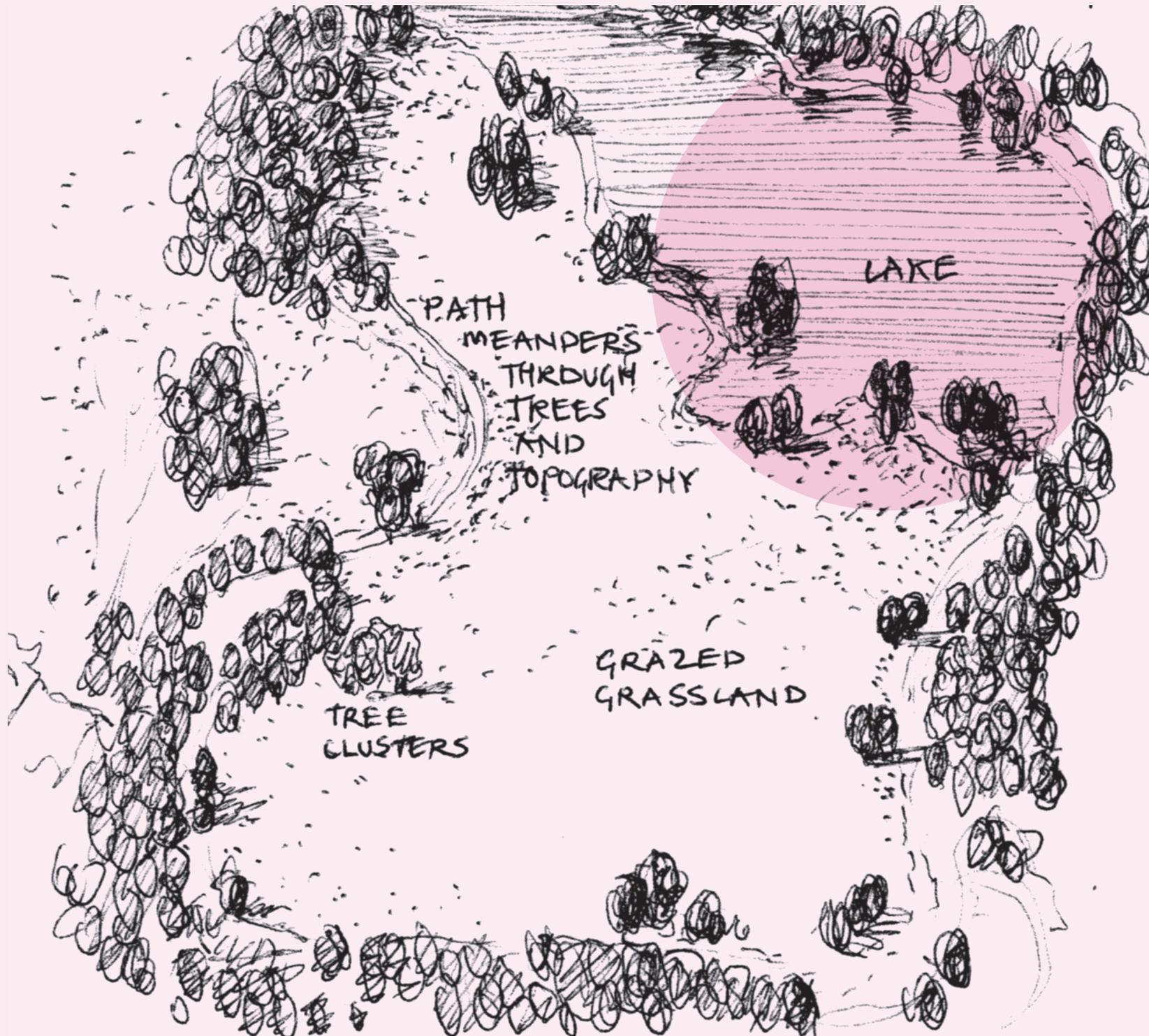
Refugee Action's Wellbeing Cycling Club was set up in 2008 in partnership with the Cycling Touring Club (CTC) and funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Target Wellbeing. Between 2013 and 2015, the Wellbeing Cycling Club provided cycling training to over 400 asylum seekers and refugees throughout Greater Manchester. For a few hours a week, keen learner and experienced cyclists took part in park-based and on-road cycling activities, including training on safety, control, and the Highway Code.

Cycling classes were targeted at different age and gender groups, and advertised through word-of-mouth, posters, and staff working at centres such as the Boaz Trust, Revive, and the British Red Cross.

The formal cycling training sessions were supplemented by ongoing individual advice from social work students on placement from Manchester and Salford Universities. Though it focused on cycling, this additional encouragement aimed at addressing wider issues in relation to stress and wellbeing in a broader life context. Evaluation of the project was built into all stages, partly through the keeping of 'cycling diaries' by 47 participants. Two thirds of respondents reported an improvement in their stress management, 83% reported feeling happier after having taken part, and all appreciated learning new skills. Some groups built a sense of community among participants, and an increase in confidence allowed them to explore their neighbourhood more freely. For some, cycling became their favourite means of getting around. Sadly, the specific funding stream ran out in 2015, bringing an end to the project, and the bikes were donated to a local community project who could continue its good work.



Refugee Action



## Questions:

Where are places of respite in your local area or nearby?

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Where and when is health information and support given to refugees and asylum seekers? Could information about parks and outdoor activities be part of this?

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What training or information do health providers need in order to better understand contexts and constraints of refugees' and asylum seekers' daily lives?

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Which sports or recreational organisations in your area could host events or training for refugees, and what creative ways are there to address some common barriers (kit, travel, snacks, etc.)?

# The importance of integration and connections

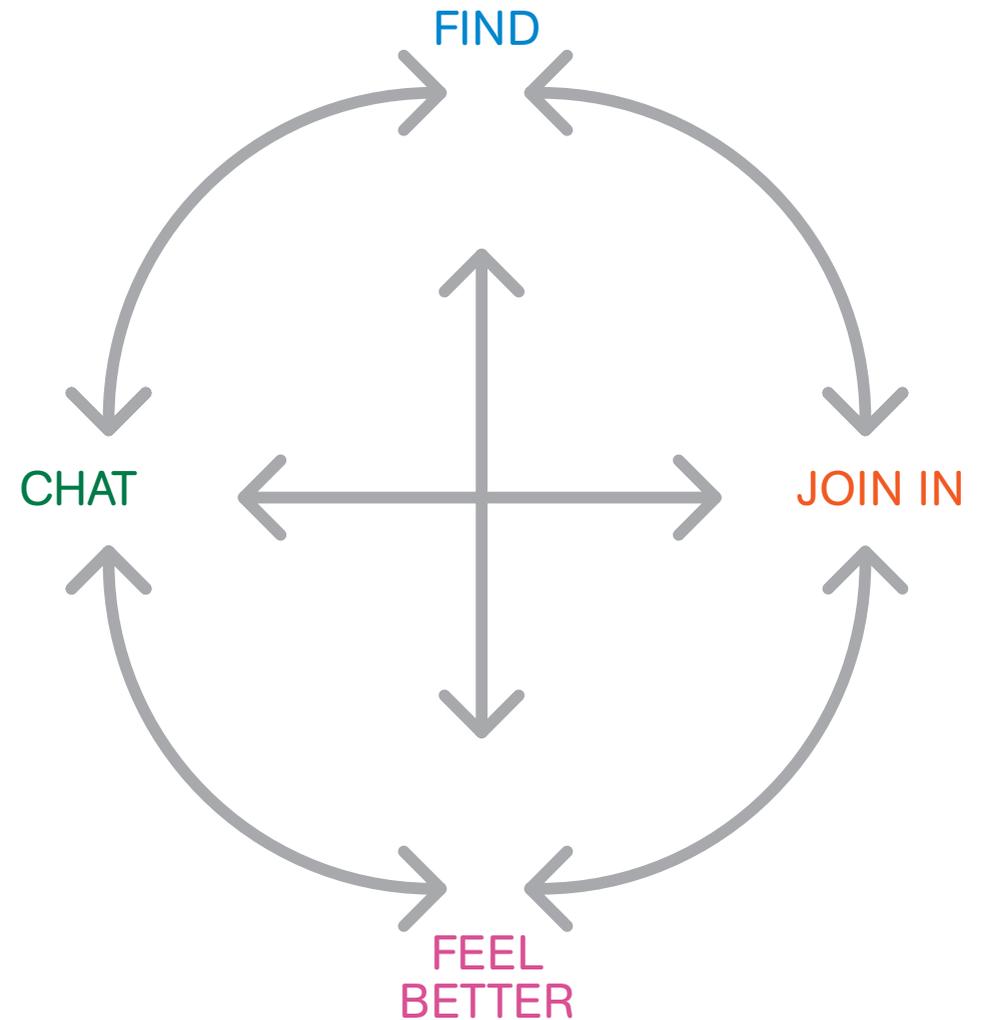
#refugeeswelcome in parks is often about continuing what you may already be doing, but increasing the range of participants involved or the potential for wellbeing. Our **Find, Chat, Join In,** and **Feel Better** framework helps you to consider and address barriers to open space use that may be particularly relevant to refugee and asylum seekers. On this diagram (right) think about your starting point. If you have an initiative that has a key objective to support wellbeing (**FEEL BETTER**), then follow the arrows, and check whether you are addressing the challenges of finding, of supporting confidence by coming with a friend, and of understanding the activity as something fun to join in.

In order to want to **FIND** out about local parks, there needs to be a broad understanding of how these can be **places in which to socialise**, to easily **take part** in free activities, and that this time spent outside can **improve mental and physical health**.

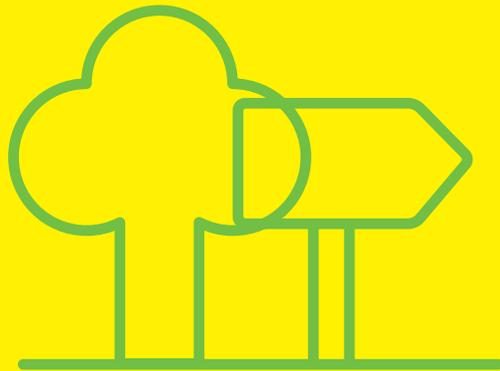
People feel safer to **CHAT** outside when they can **find** a park that suits their mood, and have a **choice of activities**. This can help them to become **less isolated**.

It's easier to **JOIN IN** things when activities are easy to **find**, provide a **non-demanding social context**, and give a **sense of purpose**.

People **FEEL BETTER** when they can **discover** and spend time in places that feel **relaxing and safe**, and where they can spend time **doing things that they enjoy**.



# Seven brilliant ideas about parks for people working to increase wellbeing and integration for refugees and asylum seekers



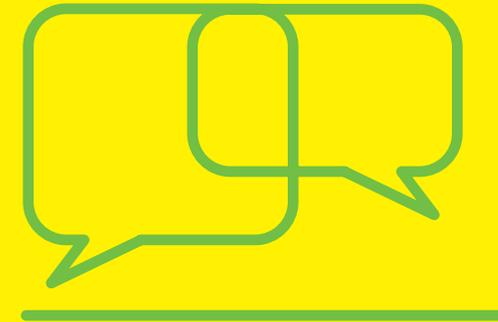
1. Include local parks and greenspaces in **orientation** programmes, especially thinking about the range of activities and times of the day/week/year.



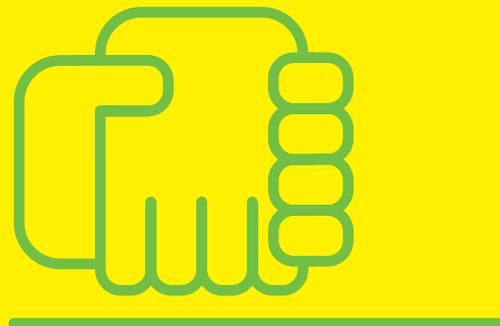
2. With refugees and asylum seekers, **co-create information** on local facilities, events, outdoor volunteering, and activities. Find methods with which to update and share these.



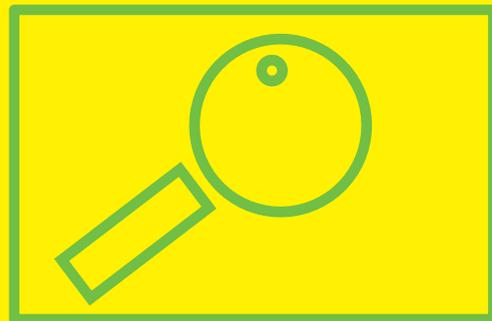
3. Connect the indoors and outdoors. When the sun is shining, **take activities outside** or suggest nearby places to continue conversations afterwards.



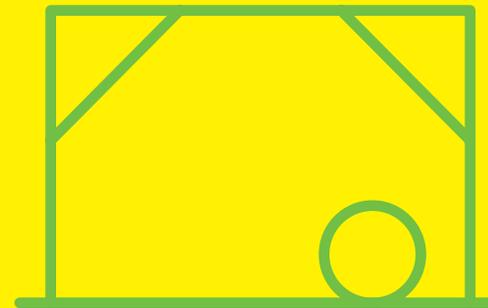
4. Encourage **'conversation clubs'** to talk about parks: different types and kinds of open space, facilities, what is okay to do there (and what is not), and being honest about problems.



5. Help refugees and asylum seekers to feel more confident about exploring the outdoors by **'going with a friend'**, especially if trying out a new activity or finding a new place. Encourage the more settled to act as tour guides for new arrivals.

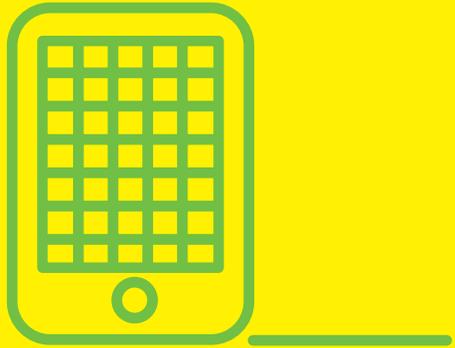


6. Think about how you and your organisation **'can be found'** by sports and greenspace organisations looking to promote events and improve inclusion.

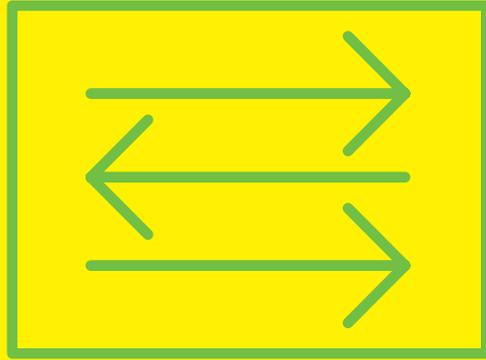


7. Set up a **'health & parks'** kit. Lend frisbees, badminton sets, footballs, BBQ sets, picnic rugs, trainers, skateboards.

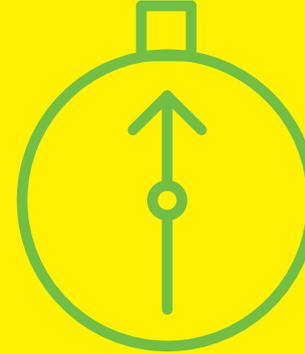
# Seven brilliant ideas to welcome refugees for people working in the parks and greenspace sector



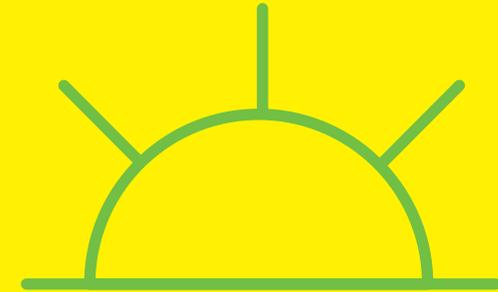
1. Make sure that information about parks, including facilities and activities, is visual and welcoming. Connect this directly to **Google Maps**.



2. Find out if any of your current staff or volunteers have **connections** with refugee support organisations and listen to their ideas for developing access.



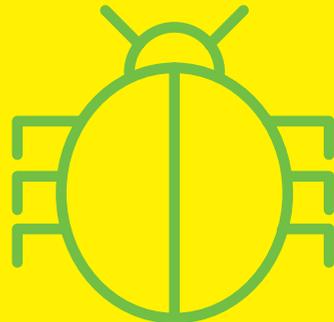
3. Investigate who locally provides refugee and asylum seeker **orientation**. Offer them resources about different types of parks and outdoor activities, as well as contacts within 'Friends of groups'.



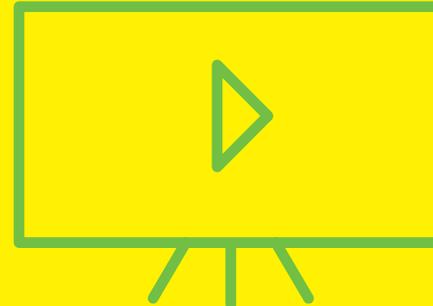
4. Review how **welcoming** a park is through the eyes of someone concerned about their own safety, and think about what would make a difference in the short and long term.



5. Increase free, easy-access **activities** in public spaces: music, sport, gyms, BBQs, play equipment.



6. From boot camps to bug hunts, include refugees and asylum seekers in outdoor **wellbeing and nature** initiatives.



7. Within your own organisation, include refugee and asylum seeker issues within **training** in relation to engagement and diversity.

## What next?

Whether you have read through this resource booklet cover to cover or dipped into random pages, we hope that it may have sparked some ideas, be they big ones or small ones. Many of you will be busy people, so maybe it's not a brand-new thing, but rather a tweak to something existing. Most of these ideas and approaches are nationally and internationally relevant, but are best acted upon locally. Therefore, drop someone an email, phone them, or find a mutual friend for an introduction – get something started so as to support #refugeeswelcome in parks.

We are keen to work with partnerships on all scales over a long period of time, sharing the ideas that worked better than expected and learning from those that didn't. So please do get back to us and let us know what you did and how it went.

Clare and the team

## The #refugeeswelcome in parks team

Clare Rishbeth, University of Sheffield, UK  
Radhika Bynon, The Young Foundation, UK  
Jonathan Darling, University of Manchester, UK  
Tobias Stapf, Minor, Berlin, Germany  
Dominika Blachnicka-Ciacek, University of Sheffield, UK

### With fieldwork and additional contributions by:

Safa'a AbuJarour and Wassili Siegert (Minor)  
Suzanne Solley and Nabeela Ahmed (Young Foundation)

## A thank you to our refugee and asylum seeker interviewees

We appreciate your time and sharing with us your experiences of new beginnings and spending time outside.

### With the Sheffield team

Reda (f, Uzbekistan), Hozan (m, Kurdish, Iran), Zenith (m, Zimbabwe), Firuz (m, Iran)

### With the London team

Khalid (m, Syria), Maher (m, Syria)  
Rana (f, Syria)

### Shorter informal conversations with

Lotanna (f, Nigeria), Yamha, Mawusi and Wafaa' (all f, Ghana), Dehab (f, Eritrea), Mercy (f, Kenya), Fikru (m, Eritrea), and Beysos (m, Iraq). Beysos (m, Iraq)

### With the Berlin team

Rima (f, Syria), Sami (m, Syria)  
Rifat (m, Syria), Hayyan (m, Syria)  
Najwa (f, Palestine), Rasha (f, Syria)  
Tamara (f, Syria), Lana (f, Iraq)  
Ali (m, Iraq)

Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

## A thank you to stakeholder interviewees

We appreciate your time and reflections on your own experiences and expertise relating to refugee and asylum seeker integration and wellbeing, and/or the ethos and practice of inclusion in green spaces.

### Sheffield local

City of Sanctuary  
Assist (destitute asylum seeker support)  
British Red Cross  
Chilly Pep (young people support)  
Sheffield City Council Parks Department  
Green City Action  
Friends of Firth Park  
Cohesion Advisory Group

### London local

DOST (drop-in sessions with refugee young people)  
Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park  
Stepney City Farm  
Refugee Action  
Austin Forum  
Hackney Destitution Centre  
Haringey Migrant Support Centre,  
Streatham Drop In  
SLAM

### Berlin local

Hilfe für Jungs e. V. (Aid for Youth)  
Diakoniegemeinschaft Bethania  
(Diakonia Society Bethania)  
Straßen- und Grünflächenamt  
Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf (Office for Streets and Greenspaces)  
Gangway e. V.  
Grün Berlin GmbH (Green Berlin)  
Tempelhofer Berg e. V.  
Anwohnerinitiative Görlitzer Park  
(Residents Initiative)  
Die Gärtnerei/Schlesische 27  
Interkular  
Place / making

Grünflächenamt Tempelhof Schöneberg  
(Office for Greenspaces Tempelhof Schöneberg)  
Grünflächenamt Pankow (Office for Greenspaces Pankow)  
GrenzGänger  
Polizei Berlin (Berlin Police)

### UK national

Mind  
Refugee Tales  
City of Sanctuary  
Wildlife Trust  
The Grange  
LDA Design

## A thank you to our case study contacts

Melora Koepke (Paris)  
Place / making (Berlin)  
Refugee Action (London)  
START Students and Refugees Together (Plymouth)  
Kuchnia Konfliktu (Warsaw)  
Football Unites, Racism Divides - FURD (Sheffield)  
Die GRÜNE LIGA (Berlin)  
South London and Maudsley NHS foundation trust - SLAM (London)  
Refugee Action (Manchester)

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11. [www.thegrangenorfolk.org.uk](http://www.thegrangenorfolk.org.uk).

12. Gardens of Sanctuary is a partnership initiative between City of Sanctuary, the Permaculture Association UK, and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

## Image and graphics credits

Catherine Dee (p9, 14&15, 20&21, 26&27, 32&33) Images first published in Dee, C. (2001) Form and fabric in landscape architecture: a visual introduction. London, Spon Press.

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[www.refugeeswelcomeinparks.com](http://www.refugeeswelcomeinparks.com)

Correspondence contact:  
Clare Rishbeth,  
Department of Landscape,  
University of Sheffield,  
Sheffield,  
S10 2TN.  
[c.rishbeth@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.rishbeth@sheffield.ac.uk)

