

# Malhamdale City of Sanctuary Hosting Weekend

On the weekend of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019 the community of Malhamdale, in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales, hosted a weekend away for the Maternity Stream of Leeds City of Sanctuary. Families in Malhamdale opened their homes to families of refugee and asylum seeking women and children for a great weekend.

In its fifth year, the Malhamdale Weekend has become the annual highlight of a relationship that has evolved and developed between the Malhamdale and Leeds Maternity Stream. Spent walking, crafting, and catching up on long-distance friendships, the Hosting Weekend 2019 was a huge success in celebrating people and the Dales.

#### **Project Background**

The idea of a hosting weekend grew out of previous day visits to the Dales made by women and children from the City of Sanctuary's Maternity Stream from Leeds organised as part of the

outreach project 'People and the DALES' run by Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust. Participants enjoyed these visits so much that they wanted to return and stay longer. The first hosting weekend took place in July 2015 when four families were hosted in private homes whilst others staved at Malham Tarn Field Centre. It was such a huge success that the initiative was repeated in 2016, 2017, and again in 2018 when eight families opened their homes to welcome visitors, enabling a larger group to experience fantastic Dale's hospitality.



## People and the DALES (PaD)



People and the DALES is a community outreach project, which enables diverse and disadvantaged groups from urban areas around the Yorkshire Dales to take part in a wide range of fun, active and thought provoking activities in the countryside. The aim is to of provide people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to return independently and improve health and well-being.

Since 2005, over 10,000 people have had life changing opportunities to get out and about in the Dales and one of the groups benefiting has been the Maternity Stream of the City of Sanctuary from Leeds.

### Maternity Stream of the City of Sanctuary

In 2011, the Maternity Stream of the City of Sanctuary was started by a group of asylum seeking and refugee (AS&R) women who volunteered as Health Befrienders for the Refugee Council in Leeds.

Asylum-seeking and refugee women living in the UK often have complex health and social care needs, with poor underlying mental and physical health and are at increased risk of negative pregnancy outcomes. Despite this, AS&R women are less likely to attend for timely maternity care and when they do, care may be poor, with staff not understanding their specific needs and displaying poor attitudes.

These women "didn't want other mums to suffer as we had," and teamed up to form the Maternity Stream of the City of Sanctuary. They are now a national and rapidly expanding network of people

and groups including AS&R service users, representatives from refugee organisations and other charities, midwives and midwifery students, commissioners, educators and researchers.

### **Hosting Weekend 2019**

As well as being at risk themselves, volunteer AS&R women are central to running the activities of the Maternity Stream and this is why the weekend away, with its focus on community, friendship, support, and relaxation, is so vital.

Nearly forty AS&R seeking women and children participated in



Malhamdale's fifth hosting weekend. Amongst the group were families from Eritrea, India, Iran, Mauritius, Pakistan, South Africa, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.



The weekend began on Friday evening with a lovely meal at Malham Tarn Field Studies Centre before people were collected, and taken home by their hosts. A small group stayed in the accommodation at Malham Tarn. Saturday saw most of the group depart from Malham Tarn on a fantastic, fourmile walk through Trougate down into Malham. This was a huge accomplishment for our youngest walker who, at just three years old, managed the whole thing! It was a chance to chat and to relax in the glory of nature.

Wesene: "When I come to Malham, I

forgot all the bad things. I see the fresh air and I think, 'oh my god'... The people I stayed with, I have never met people like them – they were big, big nice! They looked after my baby as if she was their granddaughter. This is my first holiday since I have lived in the UK and I have been here five years."

Those who didn't go on the walk stayed at the Centre and had great fun. There did chalk drawing, bubble blowing, playing with play-dough, and sang songs! It was great to relax, play, and get to know each other more. Tayeba said, "It was fabulous, everything was extraordinary...It made me

feel very special. Me and my girls have never been to stay overnight somewhere for many years. It was an opportunity to get out of the house and have some entertainment."

After the day's adventures, participants returned to their hosts to prepare for the evening's entertainment, which included a ceilidh, singing, dancing, and frivolity by hosts and visitors alike. Everyone came to the evening dressed in traditional clothes from their home country and people looked absolutely stunning! Batty Moss Ceilidh Band started the dancing but then music from all over the world was played through the big speakers and we all learnt different traditional dances. It was a chance to get to know each other better in a relaxed and happy environment. Fatoumata said, "Sharing the past and knowing other peoples' cultures made me feel happy."

Wesene said that the party was her favourite part of the whole weekend: "I felt confident to dance and I haven't danced in a long time."



On the Sunday morning, all were invited to join the church service at St Michaels where women talked about their experiences as asylum seekers. It was a really moving experience. As the group

has grown together and got to know each other over the years, the church service offered the opportunity to express how these trips had transformed people's lives – visitors and hosts alike.

The weekend concluded with a delicious meal at Airton Quaker Meeting House and lots of goodbyes.

### Thanks

This hosting weekend could not have taken place without the hard work and support of lots of people. A huge thank you to Maureen Dore and members of St Michaels in Kirkby Malham for all the hard work in organising accommodation and food. Thanks also to Simon Watkins and Airton Quakers for providing the Sunday lunch; to Jim Wright from Malham Tarn Field Centre for providing accommodation, meals and a space for activities; to Sarah Hodgson and Bev Hudson for organising all the children's activities; to Batty Moss for playing at the ceilidh, and to all the hosts for taking our visitors into their homes and hearts. A big thanks also to the People's Postcode Lottery for putting funding towards this and other such initiatives.

Ijeoma, who is 14, said that, "Taking part in this weekend made me feel a lot more confident with myself and to stay strong because out there is a lot more people going through a lot more."

Rose, who coordinates the group in Leeds, said: "It is the highlight of my year and makes me feel like we are doing something right."

*"I always feel at home and loved. We are one and we are a big family." (Diako)* 

"It made me feel like I was back home with my family." (Sara)



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