

Creating and Growing Partnerships with Organisations

College:	Leeds College of Building, Leeds Conservatoire, Leeds City College
Written by:	Florence Drayson



Florence, Youth Social Action Apprentice, established a connection with the organisation Mafwa Theatre, which provides creative and community opportunities for female refugees, asylum seekers or migrants in Leeds. This was a lasting partnership; Florence got students from Leeds Conservatoire, Leeds College of Building and Leeds City College involved, and it allowed students to engage with the local community and contribute to its improvement and raise the positive profile of the colleges and students.

The connection started when Florence asked Neha Eapen, Minoritised Communities Representative at Leeds Conservatoire, to find a charity to work with. Neha was studying acting, so chose Mafwa as they work with their community members to do drama, film and spoken word. They had a meeting with the directors Keziah and Tamsin in order to identify where Leeds Conservatoire could support the organisation.

The first project we got involved with was recruiting volunteers for telephone befriending. Neha and Florence advertised the opportunity and had five sign-up to the befriending.

In March, Neha organised a 'Latin American Culture Night', with the aim of celebrating and raising the profile of music from around the world. Neha used the event to fundraise for Mafwa and invited them to be involved. Keziah and two of the community members attended and had the opportunity to showcase their work; one of the members performed her spoken word poetry and Keziah prepared films that the community members created. Neha said "I'm so happy I had the opportunity to meet and work with MAFWA. It is so clear what a positive impact they have on women and immigrants in our community. Having such a focus on creativity really shines through its members and it's evident how much joy and confidence they bring. It took a lot of organisation liaising and planning with an external company but I have learnt and gained so much from this experience and I hope that through our collaboration, more people have been inspired by the incredible members of MAFWA just as I have."

Through having discussions with the directors, Florence found out about their plan to create a community garden space/garden of sanctuary in an area of Leeds with a large migrant and asylum seeker population. Florence mentioned that she worked with Leeds College of Building and offered to organise for those students to help out. Over May and

June, thirty-nine students from Leeds College of Building, including plumbing and painting decorating students, attended the Lincoln Green 'Dig Days' and helped with tasks like digging out old roots and plants, weeding areas, litter picking, clearing areas, cleaning graffiti, planting, and painting handrails. The work they did had a huge impact on the garden and Florence received plenty of comments on how vital their contribution was. It was evident that students were able to learn a lot about teamwork, working on a project, and more about the local community.

The students were also able to make impact in other ways; they made connections with locals, one of the main aims of community gardens. Tamsin emailed Florence and said "We've been on site all week but I also wanted to get in touch to say a HUGE thank you to all of the students this week for the incredible hard work they put in to making Roxby Close look absolutely amazing! We really couldn't have done it all without them and we are so excited for local residents to get to enjoy it this summer and in those to come. One amazing outcome was that a sanctuary seeker of around the same age had joined us to plant and when the students went to lunch they actively welcomed him and asked him to go with them on their lunch break, which is just what this project is all about and which warmed our hearts!"

Community work helps to raise the positive profile of students and demonstrate the excellent things young people can achieve. Florence said "Hearing about how the students interacted with members of the community, I was so proud. It felt like one of the best achievements of my career. This is what we do it for - to create positive change."

Through social action funding, Florence purchased tools including spades, forks, a wheelbarrow and buckets, for the students to use and the organisation to continue their work.

During a series of summer volunteering sessions, Florence took Leeds City College students over to the garden and advertised their regular gardening sessions. Staff and students worked on a vegetable bed to remove weeds and together they were able to restore the patch. One student was happy to have tried something new and learn a new skill. Mafwa were pleased with the contribution from a local organisation and the encouragement to get more local residents involved.

Overall, creating and growing this connection has been beneficial for all parties; students had great opportunities, which became very valuable for them to gain numerous skills, Florence was able to ensure community needs were being met by working with an organisation that was addressing community needs and Mafwa could utilise many students' skills and hands to do their jobs.



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MAFWA THEATRE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

FOR TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

We need volunteers to help people feeling lonely this winter.

Volunteers will attend 2 online training sessions and need to commit 1 - 2 hours a week making befriending calls in February and March. Volunteers will be matched with service users and we will provide training, supervision and a prepaid SIM card.

Training will take place on zoom:
31st January 4:00 - 5:30 and 3rd February 4:00-5:30

Everyone is welcome, we are particularly interested in volunteers who can speak multiple languages.

Sign up: <https://www.mafwatheatre.co.uk/vol-sign-up>

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Jcsu_ Our Minoritised Communities Rep, Neha, is partnering with the excellent charity @mafwatheatre

They are seeking volunteers to help those feeling lonely this winter, including migrants and refugees.







