

Mosaic Project Visit To Peak District National Park

Introducing refugees and asylum seekers to countryside access and outdoor activities for pleasure

Working with asylum seekers and refugees on projects presents particular issues and opportunities. Due to their status and the current programmes of dispersal, they tend to be a transient group with the potential for the group members to change completely at a moments notice. The experiences of leaving their homes, travelling to and entering Britain can be disturbing and isolating, and is further exacerbated by being placed in a new environment with limited opportunity for making contact with the wider community.

Developing projects around access to the countryside can provide a number of more positive opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to engage with aspects of living in a new country. Involvement in activities may lead to further opportunities once refugee status is confirmed. An additional context is that the natural environment and activities provide a stimulating setting for learning a wider vocabulary and building language skills within a more supportive situation in which friendships are nurtured.



Making it happen

The Mosaic Project was a partnership between the Black Environment Network and the Council for National Parks. It aimed to stimulate ethnic communities' interest in visiting National Parks. Between 2001-2004, eight different groups, selected to include a range of ethnicities, ages and genders, visited 8 of the 12 National Parks in England and Wales.

In July 2003, Ardic, a Birmingham based group of Yugoslavian and Kosovan Muslim refugees, hired a minibus and booked accommodation for 6 boys aged 14 to 19 years, plus two youth leaders, for a weekend in Hathersage Youth Hostel in the Peak District National Park as part of the Mosaic Project.



Going off into endless space

En route, the leaders explained the country code to the boys and taught them about rural life in Britain, so enabling the group to get enjoyment out of the visit while showing their respect for the countryside.

Upon their arrival, rangers welcomed the group and led them on a hill-walking expedition to see waterfalls. Initially the boys found the unaccustomed exercise tiring, but it was such fun that they were still





keen for more. After lunch they went mountain biking, and over the weekend, further activities included caving, kayaking and sailing. All of these activities introduced the group to the range of opportunities available within the National Parks. The boys were in high spirits throughout the weekend and seemed to enjoy playing practical jokes on one another.

The group had never visited a National Park before and was fascinated by the scenery and the surroundings. They had never stayed in a youth hostel either, so were unfamiliar with the rules. They did not realise that they needed to clean up after themselves, although they learnt very quickly!



The Future

The initial visit sparked so much interest amongst the group that Ardic decided to identify some way in which the boys could mark their appreciation and enjoyment. Therefore Ardic in conjunction with the park staff arranged for the group to undertake a series of return visits to work with the park staff on conservation projects in the Peak District. This included scrub clearance and woodland management with, after one visit, the group bringing back surplus saplings to plant in their own gardens.

Feedback from all the groups involved in the Mosaic Project, including Ardic, is included in a useful booklet 'Visits to National Parks: a guide for ethnic communities'.

FACTFILE

- **Funders:**

Heritage Lottery Fund; Council for National Parks; Black Environment Network.

- **Partners:**

Ardic; Peak District National Park.

- **Target:**

Muslim boys (Refugees and asylum seekers) from Birmingham.

- **Numbers:**

6 boys and 2 youth leaders.

- **Resources:**

- 'Visit to National Parks: A guide for ethnic communities' can be viewed and downloaded from www.ben-network.org.uk or www.cnp.org.uk Hard copies by request.
- BEN can provide training for organisations wishing to work with ethnic groups effectively.
- BEN can provide training for ethnic groups to enable them to run safe trips to the countryside.

- **Key points:**

- National Parks offer a range of activities to suit the needs of various groups, depending on age, and according to the available budget.



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