Bringing Wolverhampton together through art

Tuesday 18 June, 2019

ACH Wolverhampton is proud to be playing a part in the city's Refugee Week celebrations through funding the production of a number of pieces of art, including a 4.5-metre wolf, via their #rethinkingrefugee campaign.

The organisation was established in 2008 as a social enterprise specialising in the integration of refugees through training and accommodation and has successfully resettled more than 2,000 individuals from refugee backgrounds.

Refugee Week (June 17th-23rd) is a nationwide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages a better understanding between communities.

Ash, a newly arrived Kurdish artist from Iran and a former product designer, has worked with local artists and sculptor, Keith Gilbert and Anna Smith to construct a 4.5-metre wolf out of cardboard. Other sanctuary seekers from all around the world have helped with the project, using 100m of cardboard to build the impressive sculpture in the gallery at Light House Media Centre.

Local artist Steve Graffoflarge Edwards spray painted the wolf and stenciled 'refuge, hope, faith, unity' onto the artwork. The wolf celebrates the diversity of the city and the valuable contribution of migrants and refugees. It is also a playful nod to the success of the city's football team, Wolverhampton Wanderers and the diversity of the football club itself.

The second piece of artwork involved West Park Primary School, which has run an arts workshop with a Syrian refugee, Hnan, with Jane Plowright inviting pupils from St Mary's and St Chad's Catholic Primary Schools in Brewood to West Park Primary School (Wolverhampton's first School of Sanctuary) to make new friends and to create a piece of artwork together by shaking hands.

Van Gogh famously signed off his gentle intelligent letters 'with a handshake' and there are few gestures quite so expressive of respect, equality and warmth – it is this that sums up the thinking behind making handshake sculptures for Refugee Week.

Schoolchildren have cast their handshakes in plaster together before hanging them on the wall of the Light House for the Refugee Week exhibition 'You, Me and Those Who Came Before', which is taking place until 28th June. From a distance the sculptures look like a beautiful artwork, symbolic of friendship and respect in general, but get closer and you can see individual details, that each hand is recognisably individual and different.

Hnan Osman, who is helping to create the work with the children, is from Syria. His education was disrupted by the conflict, so he was unable to finish high school, but he has spent the last year studying A-level art and putting together his portfolio as well as working on portrait commissions. He recently successfully obtained a place at South Bank University in London in September to study architecture.

The final piece of art being funded is a large photo shoot with 42 portrait photographs. Taken by photographer Nelson Douglas, these beautiful portraits of refugees and migrants reflect the diversity of the city and the individuals behind the labels of refugee and asylum seeker #rethinkingrefugee #outofdarknesscomethlight

The 'You, Me and Those Who Came Before' exhibition takes place at the Light House on Fryer Street in Wolverhampton until Friday 28th June. Entry is free, and all are welcome. The main event is June 22nd – a 'Meet and Mingle' event with international food, music, live art and children's entertainment.

To find out more about ACH Wolverhampton's Refugee Week events see www.ach.org.uk/events

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