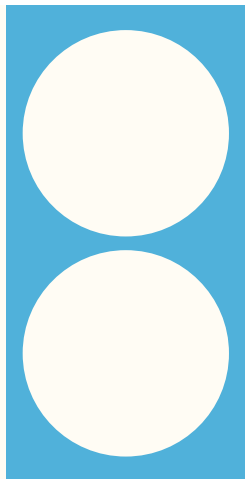


DIVERSE VOICES: A HUB FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND MULTICULTURAL EXPRESSION



“Why can’t the whole world be like Language Cafe?”

How It Started

Diverse Voices provided creative input at the regular “Language Café” facilitated by Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) at Aberdeen Arts Centre. The café attracts a wide range of adults from diverse ethnic communities in Aberdeen City, with many common interests and needs.

This project encouraged participants to use a variety of creative platforms to share their stories, both past and present, and develop a stronger understanding of each other’s lives, challenges, and ambitions.

The creative practitioners Anna Fancett, a storyteller and dancer Laura Booth used a range of written, spoken & digital mediums to explore homeland and culture. Throughout the sessions, which incorporated stories, movement and dance, there were also opportunities for participants to share and explore their personal cultural traditions. Each week would explore a different theme, often with guest speakers and the creative practitioners would design engaging workshops with a large group activity as well as with the focused and smaller group activities.

The inclusion of Diverse Voices to Language Cafe has seen an increase in attendance, so much so that the weekly session is regularly at the full capacity of 60. Not only has attendance increased but the sessions have seen a more inclusive reach, with more women attending and participating as well as a diverse mix of cultures being welcomed to the Cafe experience.

What are the project values?

Community & Unity

In a successful collaborative environment, taking the time to hear everyone's voice is crucial. Even if someone seems hesitant, creating space for their contribution is important. Diverse Voices provides the foundation, and the Creative Practitioners adapt based on how participants respond and often take the conversation in new directions. They think of it as supplying ingredients and letting everyone “start cooking!”.

Growth & Knowledge

Repetition and familiar structures help build security, fostering trust in both the group and practitioners. Ultimately, the goal is to create knowledge that empowers each individual. As such, the practitioners understand that respect for each individual is paramount – the Language Cafe is not an institution participants need to conform to, but a space where knowledge translates to growth and confidence. The space is facilitated to ensure no one voice dominates by fostering social interactions that strengthen these connections.

Why Does it Matter?

Language cafes have the potential to be incredible hubs of cultural exchange, something often missing in communities where residents might complain about newcomers without truly getting to know them. Diverse Voices has created a sense of inclusion and equality, a safe space to be intentional and open to everyone. Unfortunately, many language cafes unintentionally become isolated clusters of similar cultures, hindering real integration. The strength of the Language Cafe in Aberdeen is the use of a city-centre venue as well as offering opportunities for participants to attend events there through free tickets. The success of this particular cafe lies in the growing volunteer base, as learners who attended the cafe become confident and skilled in language so they volunteer to support more learners. By using Diverse Voices as an approach to embrace diversity and creativity, the Language Cafe can raise awareness of cultural differences and foster compassion and empathy, equipping participants with the tools and knowledge to engage as active citizens.

Future Plans

GREC have recognised the importance of art and creativity in boosting self-confidence and language skills. Simple strategies implemented by leaders like Anna and Laura have proven effective in promoting self-expression and engagement. As a result, they are keen to embed this way of working and will continue to seek funding to employ creative practitioners in the future. The growing popularity and number of participants highlight the Language Cafe's role in celebrating Aberdeen's multicultural wealth and fostering community engagement.

Want to Know More?

- [GREC website](#)
- [Diverse Voices Podcast](#)

A Volunteers Story:

“The language cafe is the only place I know where you can meet people from different cultures. It helps with building confidence. People who might be shy to speak up at first find their voice here, supported by others who are also learning. We practice the language but also help each other with grammar and understanding.

We want to be accepted, we are living in Scotland and UK members, we want to learn about the culture of U.K, to know the rules, maybe then we can be accepted. How do we find out about Scottish Culture? I have no bus card, so Language Cafe has improved my language and knowledge about Scottish culture.

The cafe has made me feel confident to volunteer. There is no guidance at the hotel where I stay, it is basic, but the cafe connects me to the city. I look forward to Thursdays, and just enjoy conversations. We use the cafe to plan and find solutions to life challenges. It's a supportive environment where we can share stories and feelings.”

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