



City of Sanctuary UK

Guidance for Welcoming a Person with Lived Experience to Speak

Why did we produce this guidance document?

This guidance has been developed in consultation with the Sanctuary Ambassador network to ensure that invitations for people with lived experience to speak are positive and constructive experiences for all those involved. Whilst we recognise the importance of hearing from people with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, invitations for them to speak at your place of work, organisation, school or event should be mindful of their experiences and challenges they may face, in line with our values (Inclusiveness, Openness, Participation, Inspiring and Integrity) and principles (see the [City of Sanctuary Charter](#)) across all City of Sanctuary content.

Guidance for Inviting Organisations/Organisers

Before the visit

- You should approach a speaker through a refugee-organisation or community group, such a local City of Sanctuary group. This is because people who have sought sanctuary may feel obligated to say yes and it is easier to say no to an indirect request. Remember that a speaker who has previously spoken at your organisation/institution may no longer want to. The organisation/group the speaker is affiliated with can also support the speaker to consider the ways in which they would feel most comfortable speaking and what they would/would not prefer to discuss.
- Ask the speaker and their supporting organisation/group how they would like to speak and engage with people in your institution/organisation. Are there topics they do not want to discuss?
- Ask the speaker if there are ways they can be supported to attend the visit – offer to pay for a bus/train/taxi fare on their behalf (N.B. People who are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim are scrutinised for receiving monetary support, so consider paying in advance and giving the speaker the tickets or a voucher) to get to your organisation/institution.
- Before the visit, clarify with the speaker who they will be speaking to (number of people, ages, roles, etc.).



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Before the visit (continued...)

- Consider learning about sanctuary issues in advance: make sure all attendees understand the meaning of terms such as refugees and asylum-seekers and have learnt about some of the challenges facing them. You should not expect the speaker to educate you on topics that you can learn about yourselves.
- Reflect on if any people in your organisation/ institution may be particularly sensitive to the topics agreed to be covered during the speakers visit. Discuss the visit with them (and parent/carers if a child) and prepare them for the potential topics to be discussed during the visit. Agree how they would like to participate (or not) and ways they can leave during the visit if they no longer feel comfortable.

During the visit

- Familiarise the speaker with the organisation/institution setting and make them feel comfortable. Encourage the speaker to bring a friend with them to support them.
- Seek to make the visit a positive and constructive experience for all involved: do not solely focus on their challenging or negative experiences but try to capture the complexity of their human experiences: there is more to their lives and identities than experiences of vulnerability. Consider discussing their passions, interests, professional experiences and hopes and dreams for the future to enable attendees to connect with the speaker through shared commonalities.
- Do not take photos or video recordings without consent. Remember that speakers may prefer to speak confidentially and not be able to be identified after their visit depending on where they are in their journey through the UK migration system and risks to the safety of family and friends in their country of origin.

After the visit

- Follow-up by sending thanks to the speaker for visiting your organisation/institution. Encouraging all the people in your organisation/institution to contribute a note of thanks is always a lovely way to show how their visit impacted on attendees.
- Reach out directly to the speaker and their support organisation/group after the visit to see if there are ways in which you can offer ongoing support and get feedback from them on how they through the visit went.



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Guidance for the Speaker with Lived Experience

Before the visit

- Carefully consider whether you wish to speak from your experience of seeking sanctuary. Could this negatively impact your wellbeing? Is this the right time in your journey through the UK's immigration system to share your story? Remember you do not have to speak about your experience of seeking sanctuary and you can and should say no if you do not want to.
- Reflect on what you would like to talk about and what you would prefer not to discuss. What would you like the people in the organisation/institution to learn from your visit? How many people do you feel comfortable talking with?
- Discuss your visit with a trusted friend/colleague/ person in an organisation or group that you are affiliated with. Work together to develop a plan of how you would like your visit to be structured and what it could include. What approach would you like to take in speaking about your life and experiences? Discuss strategies for not answering questions you feel uncomfortable about or if you want to leave the room/organisation/institution. Present this to the inviting organisation/institution and discuss what this will look like in practice.

During the visit

- Bring a friend, colleague or mentor who can support you during the visit.
- Remember that you have agreed how the visit should happen and what topics you will or will not discuss. If this changes on the day of the visit, immediately raise this issue with the organiser of the visit with the support of your friend/colleague/ mentor.
- Remember you have agreed strategies to not answer questions you do not feel comfortable with or to leave the room if you need a break. Your friend, colleague or mentor should support you to implement these strategies if necessary.

After the visit

- Take the time to reflect on the visit with your friend/colleague/mentor. Share what you thought went well and what could be improved with the inviting organisation/institution.
- Carefully reflect on whether you enjoyed this experience – if you did not, we would recommend you not agreeing to speak at an event like this again.



Example Case Studies

Interviewing Experts by Experience in Schools

Prior to the visit, students learnt about what it means to seek sanctuary and the different ways people come to the UK. They then prepared to interview the speaker by writing down questions they would like to ask. These questions were sent to the speaker in advance with details of the students' ages and backgrounds who then had the opportunity to only answer the questions with which they felt comfortable. The teacher discussed with the class why someone might not want to answer certain questions and which questions students could ask. During the visit, students 'interviewed' the expert by experience, who directed the discussion to focus on how happy they had been in their country until they had been forced to leave, sharing some positive memories and experiences in their home country before then sharing some details of their life in the UK now.

Connecting through Food

During this visit, the speaker preferred not to stand in front of attendees but work alongside them in a collaborative activity. Instead, the organisation arranged for her to lead a cooking class sharing a recipe from her home country. She explained how her grandmother taught her to make the dish using ingredients from her garden. She talked about the difficulty finding some ingredients to make it in the UK and what she used instead. Students thought about what the dish reminded them of in their own cuisines and the meals they eat with their own families.

Focusing on the Future

At a public event, speakers shared their hopes and dreams for the future now they were living in the UK. For many this included their professional aspirations and wishes for their family. They discussed some of the challenges they face in achieving these goals, highlighting the barriers they experience from their position of someone who has sought sanctuary. One story included that of a young person who wished to join the British Army, something that was much respected by some of the more resistant members of the audience.

Carry My Story

In the Carry My Story programme, speakers prepare for their visit to school by filling a decorated box with items related to their lives and a short description of their lives. They then share these boxes with schools, where children begin to learn about their experiences. Children spend weeks researching the country and culture of the speaker, learning about why they have sought sanctuary and their experiences in the UK and carefully preparing questions to ask them that are shared in advance. Finally, the speaker attends school where the children are thrilled to finally meet someone they feel so connected to. During these visits students are excited to learn about the diversity of speakers' backgrounds, including those who are a biochemist, teacher, international footballer and beekeeper. The students follow up their visit with a creative project to educate the wider school community and their parent/carers about what they have learnt.

