

## Beach of Sanctuary

*Beach of Sanctuary  
Sands shifting slowly,  
Grains of repair  
Reshaping  
The deep despair,  
Reframing them into  
Fully human scapes,  
Even escapes,  
Refuturing  
Our damaged world.  
A cocreation  
That gives hope,  
A collaboration  
Of kindnesses  
In peaces*

*Not pieces - "The sea breeze" by Dave Traxson*



Wolverhampton Quaker Meeting has been involved this year arranging summer outings and holidays for our local sanctuary seekers. We are fortunate in having access to a residential facility at Porthmadog, North Wales where we were able to accommodate three groups for a short holiday during August. The guests were drawn from our Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary Drop-in Centre and included people from 11 different countries; in all 8 different languages were spoken.

Dave Traxson, one of the volunteers, writes:

On the three holiday trips to the wonderful Gelliwig residential centre at Porthmadog in August of four nights each there were 68 participants supported by 12 Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary and Quaker volunteers to support the three groups. Of those going on the holidays, 47 were asylum seekers, 21 had obtained leave to remain and the parties consisted of 37 children and 31 adults.

I think it is safe to say that all involved in the holidays had spiritually uplifting experiences and had warm feelings of human connectedness and fun as a result of enhancing new or existing relationships.

Some of the vividly experienced and expressed joys that occurred, of which there were many, included:

- a first night orientating group stroll to the marina and steam railway station where the groups that arrived at Gelliwig turned into eager paparazzi taking many photos of friends and family with the lovely backdrops that the setting afforded. It was a heartwarming way to start the trips and helped cement the relationships in the groups. It also provided a short walk for them to do on other evenings that had rewarding views and an instant chill out factor which some benefitted from repeating.
- the shared meals created caringly by the cooking team and supportive volunteers to reflect cultural requirements where the empty plates and pans spoke for themselves in terms of appreciation and enjoyment.
- the brightly lit up eyes and smiles of children and adults alike as they took their first steps on the beach and first paddles in the sea, which some were experiencing for the first time, at Black Rock Sands. Paddling holding hands, digging holes, making sandcastles, playing beach games and laughing at the frolics and fun were the big joy of this 'Beach of Sanctuary' as we started to call it.
- the 'collaboration of kindnesses' featured every day and in every setting whether it was people spontaneously tidying up after a meal and giving the dining room a refresh; people sharing the care duties for the children so individuals could have a bit of a break or down time; making packed lunches for others; going on chatty strolls together and being considerate and mindful of others.
- the sharing of food, music and song from different cultures was special and, on some evenings, created a bit of an inclusive party vibe. On other nights some board or paper-based games were played much to the enjoyment of all involved.



In addition to the holidays at the Gelliwig centre, together with Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary, Wolverhampton Quakers helped to arrange some day trips during the school summer holidays. We have formed a special link with Clun Valley Quakers who generously host an annual day out on a farm by a river on the border between Shropshire and Wales, welcoming about 50 sanctuary seekers and volunteers.

This year they laid on a fun and relaxing day out with boating, fishing, singing and dancing. It was one of those very hot days and the river was almost dry: undeterred, the children set off with fishing nets and eagerly sought out the few remaining puddles on the dry riverbed. In rescue mode, they carefully transferred some minnows from the small puddles to the slightly bigger puddles. Special memories in the making of a wonderful day in beautiful countryside. Over the years we have been visiting, friendships have been formed between some of our sanctuary seekers and our Clun Valley Quakers, which are mutually valued.



A new venue for us this year was Carding Mill Valley in the Long Mynd, Shropshire. There we were welcomed by members of St Laurence's Church who laid on a splendid tea in their church hall. A picnic lunch earlier by a stream and some walks into the hills were enjoyed by some as was the opportunity to do some bargain hunting in the charity shops in Church Stretton by others. Children had fun catching small fish in the stream, carefully returning them to the water after a short period of observation.

Finally, we took a group of youngsters and their parents to the Kingswood Trust Activity Centre on the outskirts of Wolverhampton. Activities there included archery, feeding sheep, den building and picking fruit.

Our sanctuary seekers expressed their appreciation in many ways, including offering to volunteer their services. Here are some of the comments we received:

*“I would like to thank the whole Quakers and CofS team for arranging this wonderful holiday for us. It brought much needed smiles to our kids’ faces.” (Ravi- India).*

*“Thank you to everyone for a memorable and great day with very good hospitality and kind people, everything was good food, music, and a short walk, most importantly finding new friends.” (Ziba – Iran).*

*“Thanks for inviting us to this wonderful trip to the beautiful countryside valley, thanks for giving our children the opportunity to see and enjoy being in the countryside, wonderful experience. Thanks for the hospitality, food was amazing. Very grateful.” Salma (Sudan).*

In all these experiences a safe space is created for the time we spend together, a time of welcome and friendship where sanctuary seekers can for once relax, have fun and feel valued and respected. We are all truly blessed and enriched by these opportunities for shared encounters.

Dave Traxson and Rosemary Fox from Wolverhampton Quaker Meeting.