

## Purposeful Activities For Asylum Seekers And Refugees

### Enabling asylum seeker and refugee support organisations to join in outdoor adventure and environmental education

Asylum seekers who have been dispersed to South Wales are socially and geographically isolated, especially the women and children. Organisations working with new arrivals asked *Black Environment Network (BEN)* to help them with providing opportunities for their clients to learn about, experience and familiarise themselves with local environments in a fun way.

#### Working together to build skills and confidence

BEN works to enable community groups to develop the skills and confidence to organise their own environmental projects. The Purposeful Activities project aimed to enable two groups to use their time constructively by forging new friendships and building links within the environment sector as the basis for future activities.

#### Making it happen

*Displaced People in Action (DPIA)* is a Cardiff based organisation supporting refugees and asylum seekers throughout Wales. BEN has worked with DPIA on a number of projects in recent years, including garden visits, outdoor adventure and nature conservation activities. DPIA staff had worked very hard alongside BEN Development Workers on all aspects of events management from Spring 2001 through to late Summer 2002. Then in Autumn 2002 BEN helped raise funds for DPIA to run their own programme of Outdoor Adventure Activities in 2003.

BEN coordinated a funding bid to the Home Office for a programme of Purposeful Activities for Asylum Seekers. Using established contacts, BEN was able to arrange for various environment sector partners to facilitate activities in a culturally sensitive way.

During the spring and early summer of 2003, DPIA organised six activity days for their members. Each day involved a different group of people taking part in an adventure with a local outdoor activity provider. Activities included:

- a trip to *Dan yr Ogof Caves* for families, to celebrate the Iranian new year – also including Yemeni and other families
- two trips for single men to go canoeing, climbing, coastal traversing, surfing and camping in the Swansea area with *Absolute Adventure*





## Women and children learn from nature

The Minority Ethnic Women's Network Cymru (MEWN Cymru) works predominantly with women in Cardiff from various backgrounds including those seeking asylum. BEN has worked with MEWN Cymru for over five years, on a range of countryside access and outdoor activity projects.

MEWN Cymru also asked BEN for support with organising two outings for women and children from Cardiff to take part in environmental education:

- a discovery day on a Gower beach with the National Trust
- a family fun day at Crymlyn Bog Nature reserve with the *Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)*, *Swansea Environment Centre* and *Swansea Environmental Education Forum (SEEF)*.



## The Future

MEWN Cymru ran an evaluation of both days with the 46 adult participants and found that they really enjoyed exploring the countryside, particularly The Gower. A focus group run by BEN in Autumn 2002 with MEWN Cymru revealed that the women wanted a variety of environmental events and activities, with The Gower being the most desirable destination. This led to MEWN Cymru applying to Awards for All for funding to employ a part time worker to run similar events for 2003.

## FACTFILE

- **Funders:**  
Home Office – Purposeful Activities for Asylum Seekers – via Welsh Local Authorities Consortium
- **Partners:**  
Black Environment Network; Displaced People in Action; Minority Ethnic Women's Network Cymru.  
The National Trust; Countryside Council for Wales; Swansea Environmental Education Forum; Swansea Environment Centre.
- **Activity Providers**  
Dan yr Ogor Caves; Folly Farm; Bristol Zoo; Absolute Adventure.
- **Target:**  
People seeking asylum in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea via DPIA  
Women and children seeking asylum in Cardiff via MEWN Cymru
- **Numbers:**  
110 children and 97 adults via DPIA  
46 women and their children via MEWN Cymru
- **Resources:**  
BEN case studies detailing earlier work with DPIA and MEWN Cymru.
- **Key points:**
  - Working with ethnic community groups helps them to gain the necessary contacts, skills and confidence to organise their own environmental activities.
  - Fun activities helped these isolated men, women and children who are refugees or asylum seekers with vital confidence building and development of local knowledge, language skills and social contacts.



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