

Contemporary dance for children and young people arriving as refugees - some recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations to professionals working with children and young people who have arrived as refugees.

There are some general recommendations, followed by specific recommendations for artists working in accommodation centres for refugees.

The recommendations represent an ideal; we recognise that not all recommendations can be met at all times.

General recommendations

When designing project structures (project conception phase), we recommend:

- multi-professional teams in the conception of the project (for example, working with a specialist educator with experience supporting individuals who have experienced trauma).
- that artists always work in a team (at least 2 people, better is 3).
- the team should be representative of the diversity of the participants.
- that artists who have themselves arrived as refugees are actively recruited and integrated into the teaching team.
- project formats with repeating structures, which allow familiarity to grow and demonstrate reliability (both for participants and partners).
- that artists/teaching teams are given the opportunity to complete diversity training and to learn from professionals experienced in working with people who have had traumatic experiences.
- process support as a core element of projects: reflection among the teaching team each week, regular exchange with a wider circle of colleagues (we suggest once every 10 weeks, more often if necessary) and supervision from experienced professionals. Furthermore we recommend multi-professional supervision, for example from dance teachers/artists and from colleagues from the social work sector.
- supporting artists in developing an awareness of the need to take care of oneself in the work (through training and supervision, for example).
- developing a professional network to organisations who have competencies you do not have (legal advice, medical advice).
- building a receptive offer into projects (watching dance together).

creating posters and flyers in the main languages that the participants speak.

On the ground (project delivery phase), we recommend:

- that you consider the whole person and not just the “refugee”.
- if you want to work with the stories of flight, you ask yourself why you want to do this - whose interests does it serve?
- that you frame your work as an offer, not a requirement. Try to avoid creating pressure to “be a good participant” - “be a good refugee”. No one has to do anything here....
- that your work focuses upon activating resources in the participants.
- that you create opportunities for participants to experience their own agency and develop trust in themselves.
- that sometimes the way to make a space safe (for a group of girls, for example), is to close it to other people.
- that you be flexible: be prepared to totally change your offer if it does not work. If your offer is not working, don't ask what the participants need to change - ask what you need to change.
- keeping it simple - basics work in this context.
- working with reliable, repeating structures in your workshops.
- developing clear structures for the start and end of sessions.
- that you work with the circle as an anchor: a reliable, social form which gives a feeling of belonging to the group.
- that you reduce your reliance on language: practise using the minimum number of simple words to explain. Develop other strategies for communicating.
- working with images and objects.
- using a wide range of music to help communicate atmosphere, quality, speed etc.
- developing a diverse repertoire of music from many different countries.
- that you use contrast as a tool to communicate (big/small, slow/fast, hard/soft...).
- working with dynamic travelling movements (jump, roll etc) in a clear spacial pattern (on the diagonal, for example) to let out tension and energy.

- working with simple contact exercises to support participants developing trust in themselves and others and encourage them to take responsibility. Leading and following exercises and blind leads have a similar function.
- using pairwork (mirroring, for example) to explore the boundary of oneself and others and practise forming relationships with others.
- working with rhythm to encourage a sense of community in the group.
- using with body percussion to playfully create awareness of one's boundaries.
- that you leave time for yourself to cool down after the session - you may have experienced something that you need time to process.
- that you do not underestimate the impact upon yourself of working in this context. Look after yourself. Talk to your team about what you have experienced and heard. Ask for support if you need it.
- that you try to be realistic about what you can do and what your responsibility is. Who has the knowledge or network to deal with needs you cannot meet? Whose responsibility is it?

Recommendations when working in an accommodation centre

When designing project structures (project conception phase), we recommend:

- work with an open group - whoever is there can dance.
- consider separating the groups according to age or gender if necessary.
- establishing long-term relationships with accommodation centres: establishing a clear, supportive framework takes time.
- to aim to create a continuous offer with regular, weekly sessions: come to stay. This allows relationships (individual and organisational) to grow and trust to develop. Regularity must not be delivered through people (for example, the same artist coming each week all the time) but can also be delivered by structures which repeat (always at the same time in the same place with a trusted format).
- developing links between the local community (schools and theatres, for example) to connect the dance projects with the residents to the wider community.
- building social moments into project structures - when people inside the accommodation centre can come together - and also moments when neighbours can come into the centre if possible.

- that you build a receptive offer into projects - sometimes in the centre to make it easy to attend, sometimes outside to facilitate participants leaving the centre.
- that you try to create an offer based upon the needs of the participants and organisation: develop your project with the staff and residents of the centre.
- tailoring your project format to its goals. For example, if you restrict your group to those living in the accommodation centre, you will have a more homogeneous group and probably have more capacity to address the individual needs of the newcomers. If you are wanting to place your focus upon integration, then you may want to structure your project to work with residents of an accommodation centre with residents of the neighbourhood.
- that you be aware that finding and keeping an appropriate dance space may be a challenge.

On the ground (project delivery phase), we recommend:

- that you arrive early to set up the room (often agreed spaces are not actually available).
- that you keep the dance space closed until you have collected the children.
- that you make an agreement with the centre that you can collect the children (knocking on doors). If possible, collect mobile phone numbers so you can text participants to let them know you are coming again. Try to recruit participants to take the role of the “collector”.
- that you work with an open space - if someone wants to leave allowing them to do so, but invite them back: “Come back when you are ready!” “Hope I see you next week!”. Be aware that children may need to be accompanied back to their rooms.
- that you build a relationship with the security staff who will help you get access to rooms and the participants.
- that the inclusion of the team at the centre (for example, the security staff or social workers) can offer opportunities for a different kind of relationship to emerge and activate support mechanisms.
- building in regular meetings with your contact in the centre, find your allies in the centre and nurture them.
- working with touch and massage can be an effective way to support young people to calm down, arrive with themselves in the present and manage stress.

- you leave time at the end of your session to manage the children out of the space and back to their families.
- that you are aware that if you work outside the centre, you will need to travel with the group and may need to organise transport.