

Report for Nineveh Trust by Just Bring Yourself CIC - September 2023

Thank you for the funding awarded of £2050 to provide : 5 x guides, 5 x backstops for 5 x guided nature hikes with a farm visit in Surrey County Council's Norbury Park, near Box Hill in Surrey.

We are delighted to inform you that the hiking events which you funded were a great success. As we received the offer of funding from you too late to find dates in school calendars before the end of October 2023 on which to book groups of school children, I emailed Nineveh Trust to see whether we could instead offer the programme of hikes over the summer to refugee or asylum seeker families. We were so pleased to hear from John MacGregor on 9 May 2023 that our funding could be used instead to provide these individuals and their families with the opportunity to hike with us.

These are individuals who are either trying to start a new life in the UK or who are awaiting asylum and who would benefit enormously from an introduction to our countryside and feel safe in the process. We asked to conduct these events for them because we understand that many of these families have difficulty adjusting to life here and stay in their current place of residence for the majority of time as they do not know 'how' to visit the countryside and where to safely go. As well as providing for their well-being through a connection with nature, our intention was for them to see their role in looking after the landscape in this country.

- A total of 64 individuals from aged 6 to late 40s booked to come with us over July and August 2023. Twenty four children were booked on.
- These individuals signed up through our partners at the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Hub and the Guildford Refugee Hub. Francesca Simpson also attended an evening community event for the refugee and asylum seekers in West Horsley to introduce herself, explain what Just Bring Yourself CIC does and invite them to take part.

The positive impact on these individuals to spend time in nature became quickly apparent. We contacted several media outlets to let them know about our activities and mentioned the Nineveh Trust funding to all of them. BBC Radio Surrey picked the story up and Nicky Patrick interviewed Francesca on Saturday, 5 August. You can hear it at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0g0ds7y>

Below is part of the press release we circulated:

After months of prep, the team at Just Bring Yourself took were delighted to take five groups of refugee families out for a hike into the fields, farm and woodland of Norbury Park. These were days of smiles we will simply not forget.

Funding to cover our core costs and get the project moving was provided by the Nineveh Trust. The all-important transport was provided by Epsom College and Surrey Community Action. Surrey County Council's Norbury Park provided a beautiful backdrop of meadows, mixed woodland (which our guests referred to as jungle during the day) and a meandering river course. Our volunteer guides, Don and Anton, shared snippets of knowledge about nature as we walked on together. The highlight of the tours, as is always the case, was Swanworth farm. Swanworth is a place where children and animals connect, and this summer Larry the Lamb was the star that made children smile from ear to ear. It is always heartwarming to see the delight on someone's face when they interact positively with animals. The families had lots of questions to ask farmer Nick Bullen, as the comparison of farming cultures was a hot topic, including why we don't just buy a cow for home use from the local farm (well there's a thought!).

On one day, our rather worse for wear gazebo was having none of the weather, so we looked around for a place of cover from the rain where we could sit for our picnic.

There are two mighty oaks standing in the Swanworth fields and these looked like an ideal canopy, so we opened the tarpaulin and placed various blankets for the families to sit on. It was a cultural choice to take shoes off and sit either on or around the blankets. One mother produced a huge pot that her family had been carrying around in a bag the whole day. All the children placed themselves around the blanket as she served up a fragrant biryani. The children excitedly invited us to join them and soon enough the mother was serving everyone on the tour with the most delicious home cooked food she had prepared the night before, including dessert.

Occasionally the food and blankets were visited by a bee or wasp and the automatic reaction of the children was to squash it but after explaining how valuable these pollinators are and how we must look after them the children were more akin to using a leaf to usher the insects to another direction. They had not heard why bees are so important for our food systems but the nearby blackberry bushes with bumble bees at work provided us with a chance to show them.

We then offered everyone the chance of writing or drawing something about their day and Francesca and Kirsten spent some time sitting with the children who asked how to spell various words to express what they had seen or enjoyed at Norbury. Some expressions were made in their own language which we hope to share soon as the calligraphy is quite beautiful.

We followed this with nature-related games in the Swanworth fields which allowed the children to run through buttercups and grasses. We then asked everyone to help clear up which enforced the Countryside Code that we teach during each tour and they were all brilliant and totally willing.

The long walk home through paths laden with incoming blackberries, wild flowers, birds and farm animals was filled with conversation and questions from our guests. The lovely minibus drivers were there to meet us for the journey home.

A lot of work and co-operation goes into days like these, but our team came away each time feeling moved and enriched by the happiness and enthusiasm of the children; the days were made especially so thinking about the unimaginable experiences that forced them from their homes.

A further great additional result of these hikes is that we are developing a programme to enable refugees/asylum seekers to do volunteer work (something they are desperate to do since they cannot work). The programme is being developed with Surrey Community Action and entails 10 x hiking events in which we will train participants so that they can become guides for other groups of refugees/asylum seekers. There may even be potential for some of the very enthusiastic children we met to act as nature guides for other children. We are also offering within each hike the opportunity for participants to cook a meal in a village hall and share it together – an activity that has great beneficial effects, particularly on mothers who are used to cooking from scratch for their children and no longer can as they are not permitted in their current accommodation.

We hope we might approach you at a later date should we develop more activities connecting children and nature. Thank you again for your support this year.

Francesca Simpson and Kirsten Johnson
Co-founders
Just Bring Yourself CIC

September 2023