

Schools of sanctuary: giving a warm welcome

Oxfam Youth Ambassadors Action Guide



Credit: Dana Tegon, student at St Bede's and St Joseph's College in Bradford.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, 23,507 people came to the UK to seek sanctuary on the basis that they no longer felt safe in their own countries. Many of these people were children. Schools therefore play a central role in creating a good start for asylum seeking families arriving in the UK. Young asylum seekers and refugees need to settle into a new school where they don't know anybody, lack familiarity with the routines and cultures of the school, and may not speak the language.

Oxfam has formed a partnership with the organisation City of Sanctuary to develop this resource. We want as many schools as possible to learn about sanctuary and to consider joining the scheme to become a *School of Sanctuary*. This Action Guide will assist you to:

- **Learn** about what it means to be seeking sanctuary in the context of refugees and asylum seekers
- **Take positive action** to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within your school and the wider community
- **Share** your vision and achievements – and be proud!

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Action 1: Educate your school about sanctuary and promote positive attitudes. You will learn more about refugees and asylum seekers and then pass on your learning to other students and staff: **See page 2.**

Action 2: Encourage your school to gather information and think more deeply about how welcoming it is. See the research questions on **page 3.**

Action 3: Use your influence to enable your school to become a School of Sanctuary. For guidance on holding a persuasive meeting with your headteacher or other senior leader see **page 4.**

Please note. Any school can become a School of Sanctuary. If your school does not currently serve refugees or asylum seekers you could create links with local refugee groups and communities, and you could explore ways of making your school generally more welcoming for all people.



Credit: Leeds City of Sanctuary/2014

For support with taking action or setting up a Youth Ambassadors Group, get in touch with Oxfam's Education & Youth Team:

education@oxfam.org.uk



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Photo credit: Selma Kesedzic / 2015

Action 1: Learn about refugees and asylum seekers

Begin by learning about the issues and then strengthen your learning by teaching others. The issues are complex, so you should do some thinking to work out your own opinions first.

Download the accompanying Oxfam *Schools of Sanctuary* PowerPoint presentation and workshop plan for everything you will need.

Why do you need to learn first?

One of the best ways to learn about a topic is to teach it to others. The final action in this guide invites you to set up a meeting with senior leaders in your school to persuade them to join the *Schools of Sanctuary* programme. The *Schools of Sanctuary* programme is partly about creating a more welcoming environment for asylum seekers and refugees, but it is also about being generally more open and welcoming to all. Learning more about the realities that asylum seekers and refugees face will enable you to talk with passion and authority.

What to do

STEP ONE

Download the PowerPoint presentation and workshop plan from this resource.

Within your group, present the PowerPoint to each other.

If you need help ask a teacher to help you to learn and adapt the script to make it your own.

STEP THREE

Reflect on how well your group has presented and taught the presentation and the workshop.

Are there any areas you need to improve?

Is there any further research you need to do?

STEP TWO

Do the workshop as a group. This should take one or two group meetings. There are six activities. Try to do as many as possible but if you have limited time aim to do two.

Discuss and agree upon the most important new things you've learnt.

STEP FOUR

The next step is to use the presentation and workshop to educate other young people in your school or college. Plan which groups or classes you will teach. Will you do a large assembly or make the presentation to smaller groups? How will you fit the workshop into your plans?

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Image courtesy of Paul Doddy at FreeDigitalPhotos.net

Action 2: Research task—How welcoming is your school?

This action helps you to prepare for Action 3 on the next page. Action 3 involves meeting with senior staff members at your school to convince them to join the [Schools of Sanctuary](http://schools.cityofsanctuary.org) initiative: schools.cityofsanctuary.org.

A School of Sanctuary is a school that extends a welcome to everyone as equal, valued members of the school community. But to what extent is your school already a School of Sanctuary? The answer to that depends upon what it is already doing to make everyone welcome.

So take some time as a group to discuss and research the following questions. Make sure that you take notes to record your responses. You could even conduct a survey of students and staff regarding the first question and use a suggestions box for ideas on how to make the school more welcoming to new students.

HOW WELCOMING IS YOUR SCHOOL?

1. In general, on a scale of one to ten, how welcoming is your school? *Each group member can decide on a rating and share their thoughts. Then try and reach a group decision for one agreed score.*
2. On a scale of one to ten how welcoming is your school to students from different cultures and to students who are new to the UK? *As before decide individually and then as a group.*
3. What was the score for questions 1 and 2? Unless it was ten how do you think the school could be even more welcoming?

HOW DIVERSE IS YOUR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY?

4. How diverse is the area / county / city in which you live? Find out the precise numbers from the 2011 census on [this interactive map](http://bit.ly/1zjP3bS): bit.ly/1zjP3bS.
5. How does the data on diversity in your area compare to the national figures? *(Nationally in England and Wales 83.35% of people are White British, 1.8% mixed, 5.87% Asian or Asian British, 2.81% Black or Black British and 0.82% Chinese).*
6. How ethnically diverse is your school? Do you think that the school is **less/more/equally as** diverse as the wider community?
7. How many languages are spoken at your school?

ARE STUDENTS GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ABOUT SANCTUARY?

8. Have you learnt about asylum seekers, refugees and the concept of sanctuary either in or outside of class time? Do you think this is also the case for other students?
9. Have you been given the opportunity to meet refugees or asylum seekers in or outside of class and hear their personal stories? Do you think this is also the case for other students?
10. Are there any initiatives in the school (such as homework clubs/ buddy systems/school linking/ conversation clubs) that link students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) with other students?

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Credit: John McLaverty / Oxfam

Action 3: Influence senior staff at your school

So you've decided you would like your school to become a *School of Sanctuary*. For this to actually happen you will also need to persuade senior staff at your school. To do this, we suggest you arrange a meeting with a senior staff member such as your headteacher or deputy head. To plan for your meeting you will need to prepare and research the relevant information. If you have already carried out Action 2 in this guide you are halfway there!

Things to explain in your meeting:

1. What does it mean to become a *School of Sanctuary*?

Have a good read of the website schools.cityofsanctuary.org to find out. The resource pack is also very useful: bit.ly/1J6aaDZ. This video from Lawnswood School provides a good case study too: youtu.be/GZA84qYxQ44

2. Is your school already a welcoming and inclusive place?

Link back to your discussions and highlight how diverse your school and your local community is, what your school is already doing to ensure it is an inclusive and welcoming place and let the teacher know how you rated the school out of ten for its welcome, and why.

3. What do you think your school could really achieve as a *School of Sanctuary*?

All schools can learn more about refugees and asylum seekers and be ready to extend a warm welcome. But how your school takes action depends on their situation. For more ideas see pages 9-12 of the *Schools of Sanctuary Resource Pack*: bit.ly/1J6aaDZ.

WHAT TO DO

STEP ONE

Decide who it is best to speak to. Would you like to meet directly with the headteacher or deputy head, or are there any other senior staff who could take action to help your school become a *School of Sanctuary*?

You will need to contact your chosen target to arrange a time either in person or in writing explaining why you would like to meet them.

STEP THREE

Hold your meeting. If your passion, knowledge and enthusiasm comes across, the staff member you are talking to should get excited too!

STEP TWO

Once your meeting is arranged decide as a group how you would like to run the meeting. Would you like to do a formal presentation or would you like to discuss your ideas informally?

Either way, plan what you'd like to say carefully and who will say what. Prepare an agenda and share it in advance with the staff member you are meeting.

STEP FOUR

Follow up. If you don't hear back from the teacher about what they have done then there is no harm in asking them. Most teachers are very busy and some gentle reminders could move things along!

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