

Island of Friendship: Creative Course for Migrant Women

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Project Report (a summary)

Funded by Quaker Meeting House

Dates: 20 November 2025 – January 2026

Location: Sheffield Flourish mental health charity

Format: 4 creative sessions creative workshops + 1 follow-up session

Participants and Rec

ruitment

Nine migrant women from Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Australia attended the group. Two medical students who were on placement at Sheffield Flourish also participated in the course. They were both women of colour and from migrant family backgrounds.

The female-only group was created following discussions with community organisations and individuals, including Sheffield City of Sanctuary, who highlighted the demand for a safe, women-only creative space where participants can express themselves freely.

The community organisations and groups across Sheffield helped us with recruitment. They included Zest Community Centre, Sheffield Conversation Club, One World Choir, Family Voice, International Women of Sheffield, as well as social media and WhatsApp groups. One participant was referred to us by her mental health nurse.

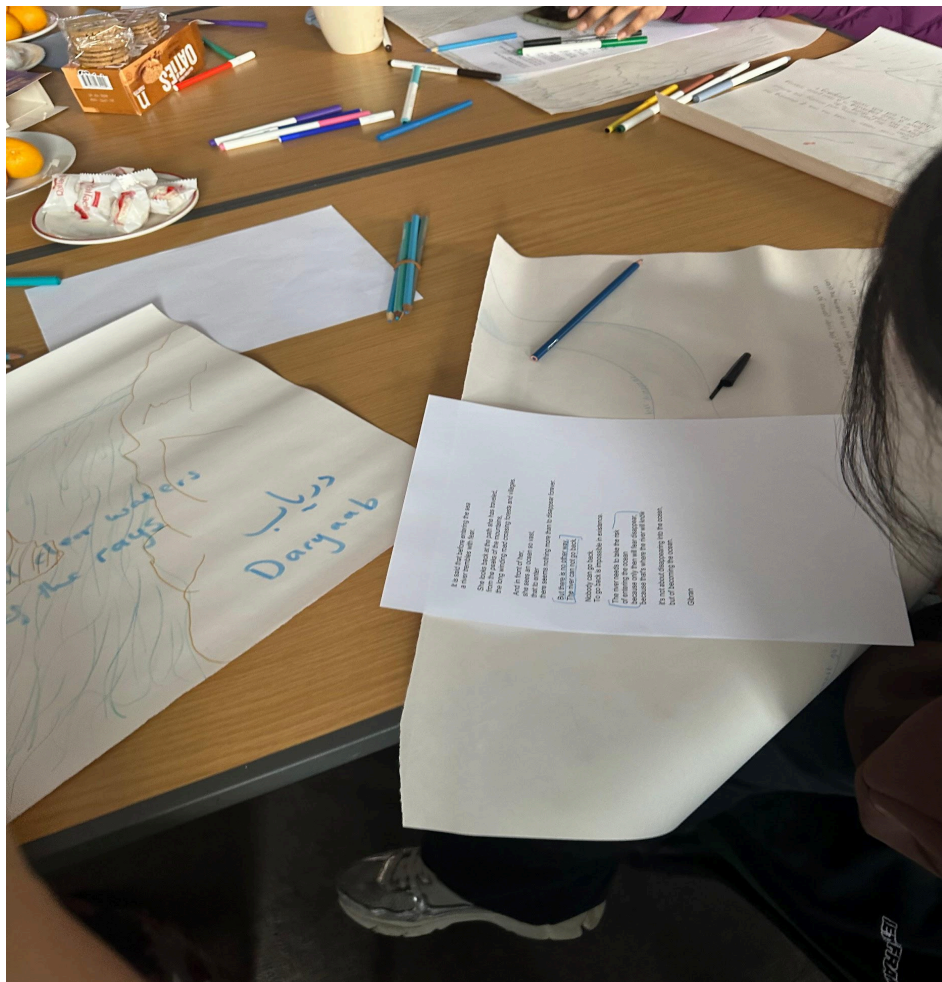
Aims and Activities

The Island of Friendship was a creative course to reimagine the UK not as an 'island of strangers', but a place of friendship where we can belong. The project was designed to provide a creative and safe space to foster community, support mental health, and celebrate migrant voices, cultures, and languages through cross-cultural storytelling, drawing, writing, and photography.

Over the course, participants explored themes that mattered to them, drawing on their lived experiences, identities, and personal journeys. They were actively

encouraged to write in their own languages as well as in English, valuing linguistic diversity and enabling deeper, more authentic self-expression.

We used accessible and gentle creative methods to ensure everyone could participate confidently, regardless of language level or prior writing experience. It also helped that I was able to support the newly arrived women from Afghanistan, as I could understand their language and communicate with them directly, creating a greater sense of trust and ease.



Themes and Creative Outcome

A supportive environment enabled participants to share sensitive experiences through creativity. The key themes that emerged centred around “uprooting and re-rooting.” The group spoke about leaving behind family, homelands, landscapes, and traditions, while building a life in Sheffield and navigating a new language and culture.

Up-rooting

Carrying this rock, I could not bring the river Satluj.

ਮੈਂ ਆਵਾਂਗੀ ਹਵਾ ਬਣਕੇ
Main aawāṅgī hawā banke
(I will come as air to you).

Ganesh Ji, introduced to me by my mother. To protect me from obstacles and bring me good luck. To always watch over me and to bring a piece of home wherever I go.

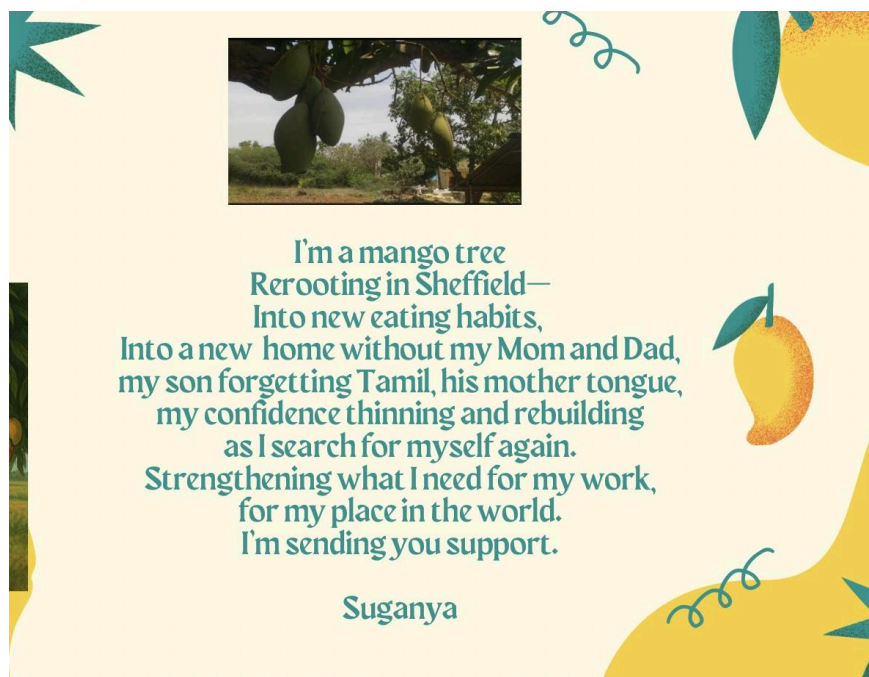
This soft toy passed down to me by my Grandmother. A reminder of why I am working hard and who I am making proud.

Always in search of place, of meaning, in the steel grey city that has denied me as my home.

This ring (Angoshtar انگشتر) belonged to my father. It has a spiritual meaning to me. Whenever I miss him, I hold it in my hand and this is the best feeling in the dunya دنیا (world).

This hammer is my tool, weapon, and a friend too. It gives me independence and I feel powerful with it. It can break down borders and all obstacles.

Dreams migrate too. They are stronger than loss. I walk towards them with my little lamp چراغ that brings light (نور nur) into my life. It's flame is small but refuses to dim.'



The group reflected that both departure and arrival are profoundly difficult experiences, and for some, arrival and seeking sanctuary has been even more challenging than that of leaving.

They spoke of experiencing resentment and racism, feeling small and invisible. The women from Afghanistan in particular spoke of isolation, language barriers, and difficult experiences of living in their neighbourhood (S14).

Using metaphor and imagery, K wrote this poem about holding onto her culture and identity while adapting to a new hostile environment:

'I'm a Rose in a pot,
I need oxygen, water and light,
I carried my roots from Afghanistan to Gleadless valley,
the neighbourhood's soil doesn't like me,
A rose in winter brought inside,
Re-rooting because of my children's safety and future,
Re-rooting my threads with my sewing machine.'

Re-rooting in a different culture and language is a complex and ongoing process. Through this project, participants identified what supports that journey: their faith, inherited strength, involvement in community groups and centres, and safe spaces where multiple languages and identities are welcomed.

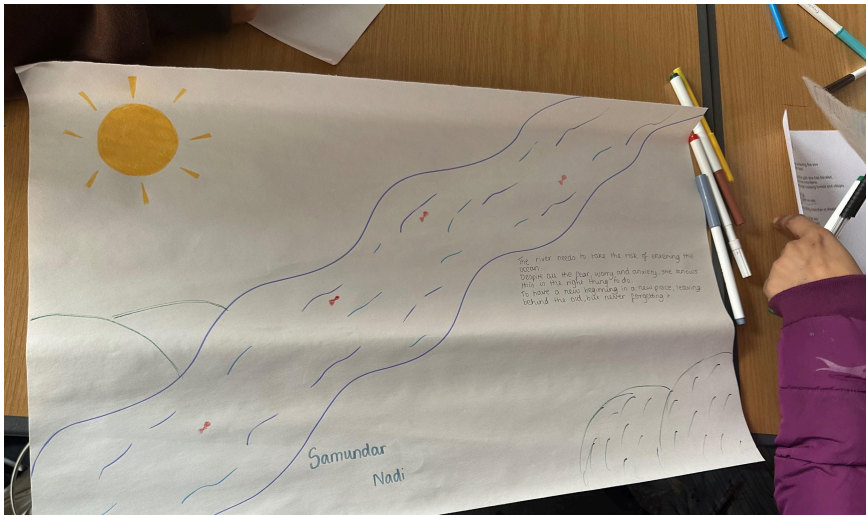
They also emphasised that sharing stories and creative expression help them greatly.



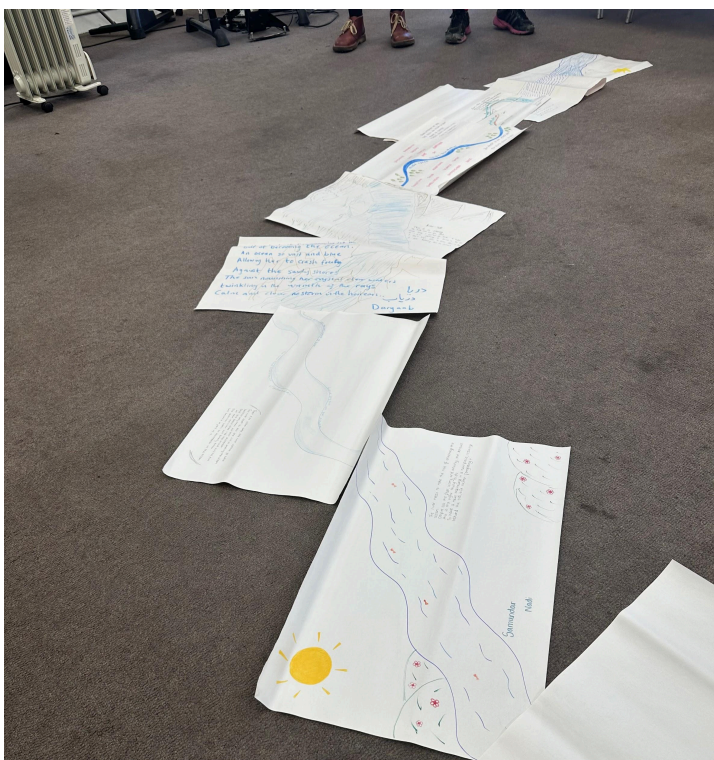
I'm a magnolia tree, my flowers are a sign
of spring,
I am called a force of life,
My colours enrich the city.
Rerooted in being an artist in Sheffield—
moving from studio to studio,
carrying canvases, materials, workshop
tools,
in and out, here and there,
Each space holding a different part of
me,
Borders don't define me.
I'm sending you energy for survival.

Annie

The creative work produced during the course, including individual and collective poems, drawings, and photos, became bridges linking individuals across differences, nurturing mutual understanding and affirming that no one had to navigate their journey alone.



In our final session, we used the metaphor of rivers, connecting each river drawing to create an act of solidarity. Participants drew rivers that flowed into one another, symbolising shared journeys, resilience, and collective strength.



Feedback and Follow UP :

Participants reported that the workshops increased their confidence in self-expression and provided opportunities for multilingual and intercultural

understanding. They felt support across different migrant experiences and a stronger sense of belonging.

They shared that they felt heard, validated, and less isolated. The creative structure allowed sensitive experiences such as loss, domestic violence, racism, displacement, and mental illness to be explored gently without placing anyone under pressure to disclose more than they wished. They felt that the project planted seeds of connection and creativity that they would continue beyond the workshops.

daily lives at ... course to be in ...
... workshop that I attended.
T. SUGANYA.

I found the class from Best. The Island of
Friendship is very useful to open my thoughts
and ideas.

They recognizing me my mother tongue. I am
improving my confidence. When I speak with Shixin
I feel relaxed and my heart feel very life
I wrote something on my words Now days.
thankyou. I attended 4 session. but we need
more session. thank you.

I really enjoyed the workshop that I attended.
It was very eyeopening ^{to meet} ~~that~~ people ~~could share~~
going through different experiences and using
creativity to express that. I would really like
to attend more workshops like this in the
future as I love writing and would like to do
more.

Maria Ismail

It was very insightful to hear everyone's stories,
and to understand everyone's journeys are very
different but we can still connect through them.

It felt like a very welcoming space and seeing
the same faces every week felt like a community.

Everyone could voice their opinions judgement free.

The course felt like it went very fast but
everyone bonded.

I found this course to be very insightful about the daily lives of women who have migrated to England. I thought it was a very supportive space for everyone to share their feelings and opinions. I especially loved the session where we were asked to bring an item that was very significant to us. This allowed me to express my true feelings about the item and dive deep into my emotions relating to the item. Thank you Shirin

Kashvi ♥

The connected Worlds Workshop ~~was~~ has been absolutely wonderful. The gentle pace & calm environment with a group of like-minded, courageous & beautiful women in a similar position as myself has helped me find my creative voice & begin shaping my experiences with others. I am so grateful to Shipin for giving me ~~a~~ a safe place to explore the power of written word. I am sad that it has come to an end but will continue to find my voice.

-Megan G.

this class is very helpful
The teacher

this class is very helpfull for me.

The teacher is very kind and good.

من در این صف که اشکرات کردم بسیار به صف خوب است آمد
مکنید تا چیزهای زیاد بیاموزم در آینده هم میخواهم اشکرات کنم
تا بتوانم آنلیسی را زیاد تر یاد بگیرم با مردم های دیگر آشنا شوم
و همه دوستانه رفتار میکنند و یک فرصت خوب است برای یاد
گرفتن و آموختن و من خوش هستم در این صف هستم باعث
افتخار من است

Shirin is very calm, good listener
Excellent tutor/teacher/facilitator
I really enjoy the sessions here
And would certainly get more involved
with other projects and workshops.
This place is flourish with Artworks
And has a relax and welcoming
atmosphere.
The group of women are nice and friendly
And we get on well with each other.
We learn from each other
And share our experiences of
Being Migrant Women in UK.

Annie Anthony Mays (Facebook)

We held a friendly follow-up session to check in with everyone. New participants, having heard about the course from other women, attended and showed great interest, asking about weekly sessions.

A significant body of creative material was produced during the course, including many individual poems alongside collective pieces. I plan to curate and develop this work into a published article, ensuring that participants' voices and creative contributions are thoughtfully represented and shared more widely (with their consent).

I continue to support one participant, S, whose mother is a poet in Afghanistan where she is not allowed to work or write. S is determined to translate and publish her mother's excellent poetry into English here in the UK. We have contacted poetry translation centres to explore ways to help publish her mother's work.

Finally, I would like to thank Chrissie Hinde and Quaker Meeting House for supporting and funding this course. The feedback from the participants shows that creativity can act as a bridge between cultures, languages, and lived experiences. In a time when division and hostility can feel loud, this project quietly cultivated solidarity, dignity, and belonging. We hope this is the beginning of further creative and community-building work.

Shirin Teifouri

Course facilitator

[Connected Worlds](#) Enterprise lead