

Ardersier Seashore Day - Working with Refugee Families

It's a beautiful summer's day at Ardersier Common, East of Inverness and a group of around 30 people from refugee families from various parts of the Highlands arrive by bus and make their way to the picnic site.

There to greet them are John Orr the local HLH Countryside Ranger and Anna Holda the Adult Learning Coordinator for Refugees at HLH along with tutors and helpers from the High Life Highland ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) team. The children are running about and excited about the day ahead and the parents are smiling and dressed in bright colours. They are carrying picnic baskets and blankets which they layout on the grass.



The day gets underway with some introductions and then John gives out binoculars and leads a guided walk along the shore and through the common. There are oystercatchers and curlews wading in the shallow water and calling across the bay.

In the distance you can see the lighthouse at Chanonry Point and the peninsula with Fort George sticking out into the Firth. As we turn inland into the Common, we see goldfinches feeding on the seed heads of teasel plants and hear linnets and yellowhammers calling from the densely packed willow trees and gorse bushes with their sweetly scented aroma. When we get back to the picnic site a red admiral butterfly flies above our heads.

After a cup of tea or juice, the children go with John for a minibeast hunt in the meadow while the adults join Adult Learning ESOL tutor Mairi Lamont for some mindfulness and language learning activities on the shoreline. The children find lots of bugs and beasties and carefully catch a small tortoiseshell butterfly in the net to examine it's intricate and brightly coloured wings.

Meanwhile the adults learn about the tide and mime the sea motions as a mindfulness and gentle physical exercise which produces a lot of laughter! Afterwards they carefully balance stones to make stone towers where the shingle ridges provide the perfect flattened stones for this meditative activity using concentration skills.

After a picnic John leads a pebble painting session with the whole group and lots of brightly coloured minibeast are reproduced on the smooth pebbles along with some depictions of the view from the shore.



The day ends with more tea and a chance for the children to play and the parents to relax in the sun and chat with the staff. Then it was back on the bus and home to various communities around the Highlands.

Judging from the reactions and the conversations we had with all the families as well as the smiling faces, the day was a great success and a very rewarding experience for everyone involved.

These sessions are just part of a whole range of learning opportunities and experiences provided by

HLH staff and others. They play an important part in helping these families to integrate; building skills and feeling part of the community.

John Orr – Highlife Highland Countryside Ranger, Inverness Area