

Collaborations Continue !

Mitrajectoires Association and AFS France Vivre Sans Frontières

Amy Stapleton

✚ Urgent situation before Christmas

As part of an event organized by the Council of Europe and EFIL, 29 participants from 12 different countries gathered in Budapest in August 2016 for a Study session about “Active citizenship in the refugee crisis.” Mitrajectoires, an organisation focusing on interculturality and migration with projects in the North of France, AFS Nord Flandres and the AFS France refugee reflection group were represented by Amy Stapleton (Mitrajectoires) and Aude Labetoulle (AFS Nord Flandres and AFS France refugee reflection group). Since then, we have been continuing our collaborations. As these things can tend to be, it has been a little slow getting contact sorted but things have improved, particularly since Christmas. Before Christmas with evacuations of several camps in the North of France and the resulting pressures and uncertainties on the people we are working with, it was hard for Mitrajectoires to get moving on much as everything was very much up in the air. We were very much focused on the emergency issues, such as finding shelter.

✚ Bringing together youth

However, since January, Mitrajectoires have taken on by Aurélie Demol, our intern who is working on a project bringing together AFS France and Mitrajectoires (she is an active member of both organisations). This creative project aims to create a spectacle focused on the theme of dreams with teenagers coming to France with AFS and another group of unaccompanied minors. These two groups will work together on the project and finally will come together to share this in a public event.

“From the beginning of this experience, teenagers from all over the world participating in this project could connect really quickly, whether they were refugees or exchange students.



This was made possible not only by their openness and their willingness to meet each other, but also thanks to the mediation of art (theatre, movement, drawings, poetry, photography, etc.) as a language, a perpetual creation and a re-creation. Art as an intercultural language, sometimes without words, can help one express oneself in their own particular way while making oneself understood, not by concepts, but by emotions and humanity. Art as a method of intercultural research can create a space where inter-human laws can be found and re-thought, and where they can occur, according to time, space and the

people involved. Last, but not least, art can be a cry for an identity in perpetual transformation where everyone can find his place and his voice”. Aurélie.

This project was presented at the AFS Forum on the 4th of March 2016. Mitrajectoires were represented during the introduction video and we collaborated on a workshop on 'intercultural mediation and art'. Our presentation specifically focused on intercultural mediation using artistic approaches when working with refugees, migrants, youth and in prisons. You can find out more information on the event at www.forum.afs.fr.

At the event, the project won first prize in their national AFS competition! This was great news both for the promotion and recognition of work with refugees within AFS and regarding collaboration with Mitrajectoires.

Next steps

Welcome families:

Working with AFS France in the region of Lille, we are currently looking at the potential for a project with families welcoming unaccompanied minors. The idea is for AFS to use their experience and expertise to assist in the intercultural issues that may arise within the home. The issues we are facing is lack of time and already overworked volunteers. However, hopefully it will take off and once we have things laid out we will propose the project to the French National AFS board.

Participation in each other's events:

We will also continue to participate in an AFS activity here in Lille. Young refugees, asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors will be invited to participate in the orientation weekends for the AFS groups in the region.

One of the AFS members of the refugee action group also is working on educational projects with refugees in Paris and aims to attend the Mitrajectoires 'Teach the Teacher' trainings in May which focuses on training volunteer teachers to effectively develop and implement courses with young refugees and migrants. He will also visit our projects to get ideas for what is possible in Paris. I will also be visiting the projects he is working on in the coming months. This may lead to new ideas for collaboration in the future.

Personal collaborations

Finally, on a personal level, a few collaborations have come out of the EFIL seminar in Budapest! As well as meeting up with friends I made in Budapest and giving each other moral support on projects, I have started to get involved with Voices of Young Refugees in Europe (VYRE) who were involved in the training in Budapest. I was working with Cihan Kilic at a YEN JEV Easter seminar this month promoting collaborations between young refugees and other minority groups. Additionally, here in Lille, Aude Labetoulle (AFS Nord Flandres) has begun to get involved with Mitrajectoires projects, volunteering in a French oral class with unaccompanied minors in Lille. We have an intern working on an artistic language project with these youths and Aude is a huge help.

Contact us!

If you want more information on any of these projects, visit our websites:

Mitrajectoires Association at www.mitrajectoires.org

AFS France Vivre Sans Frontière at www.afs.fr.