

# Stitch a Tree Project

## Further Information

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### Our Aims

1. To reflect the connectivity between concerned citizens in the UK, and to show solidarity with people who have been forced to flee their homes.
  2. To create a safe and supportive landscape together, using textiles.
  3. To celebrate the range of cultural and social histories which make up our community in the UK.
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### Background to the Project

The 'Stitch a Tree Project' is inspired by the Refugee Resilience Collective, who worked with children at a refugee camp to create a forest of tree drawings.

*"Some of the children made metaphorical links between the trees and their own lives, commenting, "Just as the water feeds the tree, our mothers have fed us". When we invited the children to think about forests, the conversation moved quickly to descriptions of forests that they travelled through... with memories of walking through deep snow and thorny trees, and of the shelter that trees gave from the rain. This swiftly led into tales of boat crossings to Italy, and we learned that some of the boys were on the same boats together. Frightening stories of overloaded vessels taking in water, and a man with a machete threatening people, then moved into remembering how people stayed safe, holding to steady one another, or sharing water and supplies when provisions were running low. At the end of the activity, we posted the drawings on the walls of the centre, creating a forest of the children's trees, for everyone to admire." (<https://www.facebook.com/CollectiveRC>)*

This led us to research the 'Tree of Life', a strength-based narrative therapy tool (Hughes 2014).

*"Tree of Life uses the tree as a creative metaphor on which people are invited to map out their lives. People begin by tracing their cultural and social histories in the roots, which may include writing or drawing such things as where they have come from, their family origins, those who have taught them most in life, their religious roots, or a treasured song. The ground contains features of their current lives, including where they live and what they are doing now. Strengths and abilities are mapped onto the main trunk of the tree, which may be identified by what others have observed of them, and stories are told about how these skills have been developed. Finally, hopes and dreams for the future are put in the branches of the trees, with the names of important people from the present and past on different leaves, and gifts that the person has been given in the fruits of the tree." (Hughes 2014:145)*

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### Our perspective

We plan to turn this tool into a nationwide project, using stitching to plant a forest of trees to show support for displaced people. We will be adapting the methodology to ensure involvement by as many people as possible. We hope that groups will organise their own collective stitching days, but trees can also be sewn alone.

Sewing is a powerful tool which acts as a common language across generations, cultures and diverse groups. By making a simple stitch, we create a strong shared message.

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### The Outcome - 'Forest'

The stitched trees will be arranged in a large embroidery called **Forest**, by Alice Kettle a contemporary textiles artist and Professor of Textile Arts at Manchester School of Art (<http://www.alicekettle.co.uk>). **Forest** will be displayed at the Whitworth, Manchester, in September 2018 and in progress at City Space Gallery, Winchester Discovery Centre, from 15 October to 26 November 2017. Each contribution to Forest will be acknowledged and documented on a map on the website.

**We thank you for contributing to this project and we look forward to seeing your stitched tree as part of Forest at the Whitworth in Autumn 2018!**

## Project Guidance

When designing your tree, try thinking about how the tree can represent you. You can explain this visually or you can write about the link between you and your tree on the label provided in the pack.

If you think about all of us, you can easily see how we are a bit like trees! We all need water to grow. We all lean different ways, grow tall or low, and we all have different features and fruits.

To break it down further, think about the following:

1. We all have social and cultural roots - our family, friends, our culture and our education.
2. The ground we sit on changes around us - our current circumstances change and shift.
3. Our trunk is our core - we all have different strengths and skills.
4. The branches represent our hopes and dreams for the future.
5. The leaves represent important people in our lives.

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## Working in a group?

Begin the session by exploring the project together. If comfortable, each person could talk about their response to one or more of the points in the Project Guidance section above. They may be able to give personal stories to the group or discuss observations and insights.

After the stitching activity, individuals could take it in turns to describe their tree. They could tell the group about the way they have interpreted the roots, ground, trunk, branches and leaves in their stitched tree.

To finish, the group could discuss what happens when a storm comes. How can a group of trees protect one another? How can a group of people help to keep one another strong? What do we all need to stay upright?

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## Working individually?

Listen along to this interesting podcast about refugees in Greece. It describes how people have fallen in love, had to do laundry in a baseball stadium locker room and shown resilience in making a home in surprising locations. We invite those of you stitching alone to listen along and learn more about this issue as you stitch your tree.

Listen here: <https://m.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/592/are-we-there-yet>

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## Drop-off Addresses:

Winchester: Stitch a Tree Project c/o Alice Kettle, City Space Gallery, Winchester Discovery Centre, Jewry St, Winchester SO23 8SB

Manchester: Stitch a Tree Project c/o Alice Kettle, Benzie Building, Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cavendish Street, Manchester, M15 6BR

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## Contact:

website: [www.threadbearingwitness.com](http://www.threadbearingwitness.com) / Email: [threadbearingwitness@gmail.com](mailto:threadbearingwitness@gmail.com)

Please email for an Arabic version of the Stitch a Tree Project booklet.

Additional packs are available via the website.

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