

BALTIC awarded *Gallery of Sanctuary* status recognising support and welcome for people seeking sanctuary



BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead has been awarded the title *Gallery of Sanctuary*, recognising its efforts in supporting sanctuary seekers, raising awareness of forced migration and celebrating cultures.

The title, the first Gallery of Sanctuary in England, was awarded by **City of Sanctuary UK**, a nationally coordinated network of organisations and services, including cities, universities, theatres and libraries that welcome and support refugees and people seeking asylum. City of Sanctuary's Awards recognise and celebrate organisations that go above and beyond to welcome people seeking sanctuary. Appraised by a panel including someone with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and an expert in the field, the awards rewards good practice and progress within a sector.

Since 2019, BALTIC has programmed an ongoing series of activities, event and initiatives under the banner *Neighbourly*, that have focused on building relationships with refugees and people seeking asylum in Gateshead and across the North East of England. This activity includes **SkillsMatch Volunteering Programme**, in partnership with the West End Refugee Service, **ESOL Language Cafés** and the after-school art club **International Art Club**.

Informed by a regular meeting Working Group, comprised of people with lived experience of forced displacement, and with generous guidance from a network of refugee support organisations in Gateshead and Newcastle, *Neighbourly* considers how BALTIC can be a 'good neighbour' and support people who have been forced to leave their homes to feel happy, settled and at home in the North East.



Art Gallery of
SANCTUARY AWARD
Welcoming People Seeking Sanctuary

Neighbourly considers what practical provisions and opportunities might help someone to rebuild their lives, such as language learning, making friends and feeling part of a community. The strands of work focus on bringing people together; exploring creativity, social connections and shared hospitality.

In achieving its sanctuary award, BALTIC was praised for its organisation-wide and long-term approach, making the sanctuary work span multiple years and one that involves staff from all parts of the organisation. Feedback highlighted BALTIC's regular events that celebrate diverse cultures; strong partnerships

with local organisations such as the West End Refugee Service; efforts made to identify job opportunities at BALTIC for people with lived experience; and International Arts Club, noted for being a great way to bring students together and reflect how migration is shaping their school communities.

Sian Summer Rees, City of Sanctuary Chief Officer said:

We all have a part to play in building a more welcoming, inclusive and compassionate society. BALTIC are going above and beyond - their work breaks down barriers and brings communities together. We are over the moon that this phenomenal gallery has joined the City of Sanctuary network. This is a movement of welcome: thousands of ordinary people, standing in solidarity with people seeking sanctuary.

Sarah Munro, BALTIC Director commented:

Being awarded the Gallery of Sanctuary status is meaningful. It brings to the forefront our ongoing commitment to welcoming and supporting sanctuary seekers. Our 'Neighbourly' activities are crucial in making this happen. These real-life connections and exchanges mean we can be useful and supportive to our local communities and those seeking sanctuary. Colleagues across the organisation are engaged in this and we continue to think about the ways we can provide equitable access to BALTIC's resources.

Annie Bedford, Producer (Communities) said:

We are so pleased to have our work and commitment in this area recognised. We hope the added visibility the Gallery of Sanctuary title brings will signal to even more people that BALTIC is a place where they are welcome. We look forward to connecting with more institutions with Sanctuary status in the region and beyond, to help build the movement of welcome that City of Sanctuary UK champions.

There is a movement of hospitality in the North East region with Gateshead and Newcastle Upon Tyne both holding City of Sanctuary status, committed to providing a safe and welcoming culture for people seeking asylum. BALTIC joins Newcastle University, Newcastle Libraries and Curious Monkey in their Sanctuary status, contributing to local efforts to achieve a more inclusive and compassionate society.

BALTIC strives to be a better neighbour to local communities and those seeking sanctuary through focussed activity:

- BALTIC co-ordinates a **SkillsMatch Volunteering Programme**, in partnership with the West End Refugee Service. Current roles, ringfenced for sanctuary seekers, include a Creative Workshop Volunteer, Volunteer to support with Front of house duties in BALTIC's Front Room and BALTIC Library Volunteer. In Autumn 2022 this will expand to include roles within BALTIC's production and curatorial teams.
- **BALTIC programmes celebratory, faith-based and community events** that explore different cultures, traditions and faiths within sanctuary seeking communities. Holi Festival of Colours on Saturday 19 March will celebrate spring and colour and is organised in collaboration with Gem Arts.

- BALTIC stages a second **Open Iftar** on **Monday 25 & Tuesday 26 April 2022**, following the first iteration in 2019. This event brings together people of all faiths and those without faith to explore and engage with the Islamic faith tradition of breaking fast during Ramadan through wholesome food, alongside inspiring talks and engaging discussion.
- **BALTIC runs the International Art Club (IAC)**, an after-school art club delivered at Carr Hill Community Primary School, Deckham. Mindful of how migration and refugee resettlement programmes have impacted, and continue to impact, the demographics of schools in the North East England, IAC provides a platform to connect sanctuary seeking children with local children, using art to safely and creatively explore ideas around culture and identity.
- **BALTIC offers English language learning opportunities.** BALTIC hosts visits by ESOL learners with their college classes to BALTIC to see the building and galleries and offers artist-led, exhibition inspired activities. A monthly **Language Café** in person and online offers a free, safe and family friendly space for informal language learning as well as socialising and intercultural exchange.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art creates and produces exhibitions, events and learning opportunities which explore the role of artists from across the world. Located on Gateshead quayside, BALTIC has 2,600 square metres of exhibition space making it the UK's largest gallery dedicated to the art and artists of today and tomorrow.

BALTIC welcomes visitors free of charge, all year round to experience art, talks, performance and activities in a fully accessible building. Over 8 million have walked through its doors since opening in 2002. Beyond its bricks, BALTIC connects and exchange with communities, individuals and groups exploring creativity, social connections and wider understanding of the world.

In 2022, BALTIC will present a series of projects, celebrations and events to mark its twentieth anniversary.

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Wed-Sun 10am-6pm



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