

Mellie is one of the project initiated in the context of the DCU being a university of Sanctuary.

What is the background to this project?

In December 2016 the DCU University of Sanctuary initiative was launched, outlining a set of activities for welcoming asylum seekers and refugees into the DCU community, including English language and culture learning.

What is the project aim?

The Migrant English Language, Literacy and Intercultural Education (MELLIE) Programme is an innovative extra-curricular pilot project designed to facilitate language and cultural exchange between DCU students and staff and asylum seekers from Mosney Direct Provision Centre, Co. Meath. It is envisaged that through shared contact, migrants will improve their English, gain a better understanding of Irish culture, and potentially make new friends. For DCU colleagues, this is an opportunity to get to know asylum seekers on a first hand basis and thus learn a bit about their lives and experiences in Direct Provision here in Ireland, as well as to develop intercultural knowledge and skills.

When it was launched in the spring 2017, we were hoping for about 20 participants but it was quickly oversubscribed with over 75 applicants over campus from the entire DCU community - great to see such fantastic support to this type of initiative - in the end we had about 25 pairs

The project approach is based on storytelling, in which asylum seekers and DCU colleagues pair up on campus and tell each other stories about themselves and their lives, with the aid of a set of guided questions. They are then tasked with writing each others' stories down and, in the final weeks, co-creating a digital storybook.

The pilot run for 6 week - DCU students and staff and Mosney resident met once a week for a 2 hours session. Once in Mosney, and the rest of the time on the DCU campus and we went out for one of the session to see a play.

The energy we felt there during the session, was fantastic, the exchange seemed to have worked very well so we carried out a little study at the end and indeed 98% thought it should run again and 94% said they would participate again.

The answer to making friends was highly positive with a strong 88% reinforcing the hypothesis that integration will benefit from the fostering of meaningful relationships

Regarding the improvement of overall english language skills 65% of participants stated that they improved their listening skills and half of them agreed that their overall language skills improved and it was suggested that 6 weeks was to short

So based on this study and our great experience, we decided to run the program again this year on larger scale, for a longer period of time and with an improved training of the volunteers and the introduction of specific evaluation tools.