

'Das ist meine rhythm' – the refugee theatre project for women

SOS Kinderdorf, one of Misch Mit's partners, recently finished one of its first major projects for women from the refugee community.

The project was set up by Linda Ebbers and Jana Anajregrub. Over the course of three months, the women, both of whom have strong experience in the theatre industry, hosted an intimate theatre group for women and children, set up to help them forget about the challenges of their daily life, and to offer them a space to share some of their feelings about what they have been through.

Linda said: “The idea was to create a peaceful forum for these women. They are facing a lot at the moment. They're living with their families in one room, some are without any kitchens, and there doesn't seem to be a solution to their housing problem. So we wanted to set something up where they could forget about their problems.”

Jana added: “We wanted to help women de-machinise their body, using senses - feel, touch, listen and smell - individually,” Jana said. For this, Linda and Jana employed a particular type of theatre called 'Theatre of the Oppressed', a form that was created by a prominent theatre practitioner called Augusto Boal in Brazil in the 1970s.

Jana says: “The Theatre of the Oppressed method allows people to speak about themselves in a non-verbal way. It's designed to inspire people to have courage, space and express their ideas.”

Misch Mit recently went along to one of the weekly sessions. There were eight women, including two young teen girls, and they started off with a warm-up to help them connect with their own rhythm. Standing in a circle, they first said their names and then started to sing them. And over the course of three hours, they went through 12 different exercises that would involve singing, chanting, floor movement, group work and performances to the rest of the group.

It was a fun three hours, with the women leaving behind any shyness and laughing their way through each exercise. One of the participants Misch Mit spoke with told us she really enjoyed the session and would keep coming if they continued.

The project though, hasn't come without its challenges. Linda said: “We went to different hostels in the area to let women know about the project. But because of the reality of the situation for these women, coming every week hasn't always been possible and each week we have had different women. So that can sometimes be difficult to adjust to each time. Plus, there can sometimes be a language barrier, as some women don't speak proper German and only Arabic, Kurdish or Farsi, and us not having translators in all those languages.”

So as the three month sessions come to an end, there's a lot for Linda and Jana to think – and be positive – about.