

# Partners, Friends and Mischief Makers

The Scottish Crannog Centre  
The UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration  
through Languages and the Arts





The Scottish  
Crannog Centre

Welcome hands feet hearts  
leave traces of quiet witness  
on shorelines of our living art  
every touch a sense of feltness.

Tawona Sitholé  
Research Associate and Artist in Residence  
University of Glasgo

## Welcome – we are RILA glad to know you!

In 2021 the SCC was charged by the Scottish Government to have local, regional and international impact. For us to achieve this we welcome people as part of Crannog Community, being able to meaningfully engage with and contribute to our shared understanding of our history and heritage.

Since the fire in the Scottish Crannog Centre, the UNESCO Chair at the University of Glasgow has begun a journey of solidarity and care with us as partners who lost their heritage and are now moving. We found deepest meaning through working with the UNESCO chair for Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts. The partnership was a surprise, an accident of life, of fire and of serendipity. From it have grown workshops we have undertaken jointly in sustainable development, in overcoming domestic violence, in refugee integration, in craft and cultural anthropology, in music and storytelling, in cooking and collaborative drama.

We have been companions from our own experiences of loss and displacement, of love of heritage and of gatherings by firesides, of experimentation and of restoration. It's about the challenge of true collaboration, radical trust, uncertainty of outcomes and championing this uncertainty – we know it will be great but we don't know what it will be. The best work can often happen outside of designated funding outcomes.

There has been a lot of work and conversation around decolonising collections, but as evidenced by the supporting documents and quotes, this for us has been a person-centred approach, that has been shared between visitors, participants, partners and all of our team. Presenting challenging ideas and food for thought in a way that engages rather than disengages, shifting perceptions that last.

This partnership succeeds by encouraging people to be themselves – freedom of self and actually being free in each others company, underpinned with genuine care. So much so that you can talk about difficult things and still laugh and learn together. Common threads of humanity that bind us together are felt. This is implemented in practice through:

- Peer-to-peer learning – shared staff training days, shared meals, shared planning meetings.
- Contributed to shared events and conferences, ‘non-ferences’ – RILA Spring School, Rise and Shine at the Crannog Centre, Sustainability weekends with the Roundview, LitFest Harare, Zimbabwe – Memory for Healing–Amagugu Centre and Crannog Centre as Sites for Framing The Narratives
- Become friends more than colleagues or partners – shared meals, Christmas letters, personal connections – SCC museum director had a 6-year-old new Scot driving his car with him!
- Become advocates for each other in our work – goes both ways.
- Serving each other with total respect, and sharing a vision and approach to making the world a better place
- Play – learning together through craft and hands-on – sharing ways of cooking through traditional methods both used in Scotland and Gaza.
- Emotional connections through heritage – connecting to our collections in a precolonial setting. Establishing ‘feltness’ in a social space.
- Changing the story we tell – Hyab donated two Henshun stones from Eritrea – see podcast as supporting evidence. This changed how we interpret memory, the power of small stones and big actions.
- Being genuinely entrepreneurial – no bounds, bounds by common values.

This work is political – standing up for the power in broken things, the empowerment of mending people, and the trust we can establish when we share our struggles, our fears and our hopes. The relationships established through this process defy the centuries of museums as colonial powerhouses, and turns the concept of the curator on its head intentionally.

We continue to plan into 2024 and beyond, with our joint event ‘Rise and Shine’ showcasing the incredible talents of people from across Scotland, and culture, heritage and stories shared from around the world. This work is not a project, but core to what we do as a museum, to best tell the stories of Crannog dwellers from 2500 years ago to our audiences today.

“We’ve created friendships, it’s not about colleagues or partnerships anymore, it’s about a friendship and a shared sense of creating something or working to create something, which we don’t quite know what its going to be yet in the future, but its part of the whole, and we look forward to working alongside these folks in a world that’s suddenly gone absolutely crazy.

We kind of teeter on the brink of things at times, but clearly, keeping what is best about human beings and telling stories about what has happened is incredibly important at times like this, and I think that’s what everything that we do day in and day out is about. As a museum we have collections, objects, things, and those things get a power when you know what the story is.”

Mike Benson – Director, The Scottish Crannog Centre

“The vulnerabilities we have experienced on our journeys from war, conflict, persecution, and torture have torn our hearts and opened us up to new conversations and through these we have made new friends. We have been companions from our own experiences of loss and displacement, of love of heritage and of gatherings by firesides, of experimentation and of restoration.

Through the mutual, gentle sharing across seasons from fire, to ashes, to uncertainty and hope we have known, deep down, that we have so much in common. Even across the 2,500 years since the Crannog People made their own homes and houses, in an era before the violence and lived trauma of colonisation and conquering, we can find traces and a feltness of love rekindled.

Together, ours is an epic story and an ordinary story, for people have always had to adapt and change to tragedy, to fire and flood and war and cruelty, and find better ways of make a fabric of life. Of life that is just, peaceful, ordinary, secure, that comes with its conflicts and crises, but also with an understanding and practice of overcoming these.”

Professor Alison Phipps – UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts

**Dr Hyab Yohannes**  
Academic Co-ordinator, The School of Education, University of  
Glasgow

Since I left my home country of Eritrea in 2011, I was trying to look for something that is outside of these parameters of state and colonial structures, and when I came to the Crannog here, I found objects that are 2500 years old, and all the stories that are outside of these structures that always take our humanity away. So that really connected me to this place, and my thinking was basically there were points of interaction where this evolutionary history that was evolving here in its pure form is interrupted by new things happening because of colonialism, of capitalism, but how do you understand the pure humanity of the people who lived in this area outside of these things. So this is the best place for me to come, to reflect on things, listen to the stories, and to look at these objects and to hear what they might be telling.

<https://crannog.co.uk/blog/whats-happening-blogs/hyab-yohannes-unesco-a-trip-to-a-crannog/>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/56KapP17xZ6XTteRPeBDtd>

Finally, I want to finish my reflection on a subject that is close to my heart and way of life: “restorative integration”. Restorative integration is a decolonial process of re-building the unfinished project of humanity that was interrupted by colonisation and coloniality. The Crannog and Loch Tay present to us traces of this interrupted project of humanity through the carefully preserved pre-colonial artefacts and footprints. The excavations (e.g., the fingerprints and artefacts) of the Crannog embody the point of interruption of the ‘human’ without identity and labels. The work of restorative integration—the restoration of the primacy of the ‘human’, not only of the citizen, and the preservation of the right to have equal rights—must begin at this point of interruption. As a former refugee myself, I found the crux of the restorative integration in the touch of the fingerprints of the ancestor. It gave me a kernel of hope for a non-exclusive humanity in which we all belong to each other.



University  
of Glasgow



January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Letter of Support

### Scottish Crannog Centre Partnership with UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Languages and Arts.

"This place is a well." These are the words of our Zimbabwean colleague Tawona Sitholé when he first visited The Crannog, just after the fire.

"This is the first time I have been in a place that is not trying to colonize me" These are the words of Dr Hyab Yohannes, survivor of torture and trafficking and researcher of restorative integration for communities working with refugees.

"I've found my happiest place" These are the words of Pinar Aksu, survivor of child detention and the asylum system and now a leading community organizer and a PhD student.

"We had an absolutely magical day at the Crannog Centre – everyone up there have been so amazing, they were just true to who they are, so hospitable, welcoming, and treated us like 5-star guests. The only downside was leaving. We had the time of our life" Maryhill Integration Network guest.

Since the fire in the Scottish Crannog Centre we, the UNESCO Chair at the University of Glasgow, have begun a journey of solidarity and care with our partners who lost their heritage and are now moving to new location. We have



been companions from our own experiences of loss and displacement, of love of heritage and of gatherings by firesides, of experimentation and of restoration.

The partnership was a surprise, an accident of life, of fire and of serendipity. From it have grown workshops we have undertaken jointly in sustainable development, in overcoming domestic violence, in refugee integration, in craft and cultural anthropology, in music and storytelling, in cooking and collaborative drama. The abundance astonishes us all and comes from the well that is the Crannog Centre.

For a team working in the hardest of circumstances in the world, including those in the Gaza strip where 15 years of our work and many of our colleagues have been displaced or killed, the Crannog is our place of physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual restoration. It is where hope is drawn up from the well and we find complementarity and connection.

Three years on we cannot imagine a calendar without events both here, and in other UNESCO TRAIL locations, and at the Crannog. We have taken time to get to know each other through many difficulties and found that the expansive nature of our mutual permaculture visions allows us to know that abundance and care are always present.

Yours sincerely,

**Alison Phipps, OBE, D.Litt. (*honoris causa mult.*), PhD, FRSE, FAcSS, FRSA**  
**UNESCO Chair: Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts**  
**Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies**  
**Ambassador: Scottish Refugee Council**  
**Chair: New Scots Refugee Integration**



**A Poem by Abdullah Jabban**

*In Glasgow's embrace, on a sunlit day,  
To Crannog Centre by bus we made our way,  
Singing tunes of joy with each passing mile,  
As Scotland's beauty greeted us with a smile.*

*At the Scottish Crannog Centre, we arrived,  
Brimming with pipeline music and history alive,  
Around us, the whispers of lives long past,  
Written by nature, a story to outlast.*

*By the river's edge, ladies deftly at play,  
Moulding plates from earth, a dance of clay,  
Beside a gentle fire, stories softly told,  
Of ancient tales and traditions bold.*

*Amidst the golden rays, cotton lines sway,  
Bearing witness to a timeless display,  
A lady beckons, "Come inside, be our guest,  
With story and music, let us do the rest."*

*Through woven tales and melodies sweet,  
The spirit of Scotland, in us, did meet,  
With Maryhill Integration, history's blend,  
A day of wonder that shall not end.*

Written about his visit to the grand opening of the Scottish Crannog Centre, 31.03.2024. He's a doctor who cannot work in the UK as of yet, and has started to write poetry since he came here.

## More than Just a Warm Welcome at the Scottish Crannog Centre

Pinar Aksu

Navigating the asylum process is not easy.

People experience stress and unknowns daily. While seeking asylum, people are banned from working which means they are not able to share their experience, expertise, and contribute to society. For many people, this may mean waiting in the process for years, unable to plan a future, meet new people and continue with your life. It means living with the constant knowledge of all that has been left behind and separations and loss.

Navigating the education system for asylum seekers is not easy. Whilst for those who can a place at college or in school are possible, but if they want to attend University they will be treated as international students which means they are expected to pay thousands of pounds to go to university. Although there are scholarships available, they are very limited in numbers. And so, another barrier is erected, for a people already surround by stifling borders, in any attempt to plan for a future.

For those who are newly arrived in communities in Scotland the accommodation and housing crises which has led the Scottish Government to pause the Ukrainian supersponsorship scheme, sees people living for months and months in hotel accommodations across the country. A hotel is not a place from which a new life in a community can be attempted, it's not in concert with the New Scots Integration Strategy which stresses integration as a whole society endeavor. Being isolated from local communities, far away from connection and support is devastating to already isolated people. This changes 'welcoming' into 'unwelcoming'. It removes easy, embedded opportunities for people to meet the local community, take part in activities, learn a new language, and express themselves. To be accorded the kind of human dignity each of us would wish for ourselves, and hopefully for others.

These three factors raise questions about basic rights- the Right to Work, Education and Shelter. Removal of these hard-won rights creates many new ways



of discriminating against people and also forcing people into extreme poverty, destitution, and closing down possibilities for the future.

On the one hand there is a significant job to be done, by statutory providers, in ensuring the delivery of services that ensure integration into the basics of health, education, accommodation, language, security. This is largely the responsibility of the state, local authorities, and those now in receipt of Government contracts to provide accommodation, for example. On the other hand, the more intangible cultural work is that of ensuring we all live within and can enjoy restorative, vibrant spaces that constantly welcome new people in and do so with understanding of the concerns they are going through as well as celebrating every moment of joy. This is the work that community organisations like Maryhill Integration Network (MIN) create for others and for themselves. Since 2001, MIN has brought people seeking asylum, refuge, and the local community together by providing a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space. It does so by placing people at the centre of projects, understanding cultures, traditions, and languages.

The charred remains of an Iron Age Crannog on the banks of Loch Tay in Highland Perthshire, seems a very long way from the experiences of refugee integration and celebration of cultures happening in Maryhill in Glasgow.

At the Crannog Centre in Scotland, a fire destroyed the Crannog, known and loved by many visitors and locals, and not least by those who had their livelihoods within its bounds. The fire did more than destroy a uniquely special space, it also took away a part of the crannog's sense of belonging. It dramatically changed the story of the Crannog from one of a certain continuity as a site of experimental archaeology and presentation of finds in a museum, to one which needed to contain an unthinkable story of loss. A story of when the Crannog was destroyed by fire. Because this is what had happened. It was as if the ashes from the fire scattered a culture and language over Loch Tay and far away. It was, as in the face of all forms of loss, hard to find words to express what it meant. Shock does this. It robs you of speech and the ability to make meaning. The people experienced a sense of loss just as the people who are on the move fleeing war and persecution experience profound loss and are often lost for words.

It would have been easy for The Crannog to close, to give up, or to turn inward, but not only did they stay open for business, they concentrated on working to restore the place of hospitality they had created with a greater vision and a wider

generosity of spirit to many who had had experiences not dissimilar to their own. It is perhaps no accident that it was at this point in the Crannog's own story that they began to make new friends with those who had themselves become homeless, had had to flee their homes, had seen their towns and villages destroyed. In encounters with those who have sought refuge in Scotland, the Crannog came alive in new ways. New stones were added, gifted by Hyab Yohannes, a survivor of torture and trafficking who could see a place of restoration for precious objects he held as reminders of atrocities in his own country. The quartz of Loch Tay spoke to the quartz of East Africa in an action that reversed the normal patterns of colonial theft, with gift and co-curation. If you visit the Crannog, you will find this story, co-created amongst the many intriguing finds in the Crannog Museum.

And the broken shards of pottery awaiting cleaning and preparation for the move to the new site for the museum, offered an opportunity for The Crannog Centre to invite members of MIN for a day trip to Loch Tay, and to welcome people, literally from all over the world. This ignited a sense of belonging to a place of healing for the visitors, kindling new relationships out of the ashes.  
Welcoming.

Experiencing the difficulties of everyday life while seeking asylum is not easy. Continuing to talk about concerns and problems is not easy. People want to live a normal life, connect with each other, provide for themselves, and share their cultures. Being welcomed at the Crannog centre enabled members at MIN to take a break from their ongoing worries, to lay their burdens down for a day. More than 25 people made the journey to the Crannog centre and what a journey it was, an antidote to those made when fleeing. The singing started in Glasgow and continued for nearly two hours until the bus arrived. Everyone at MIN was welcomed by the staff at the Crannog Centre. From a warm smile and hospitality to engagement with the people making their livelihoods in the centre, the sense of being welcomed was the opposite of the hostility created by the Home Office's policy of a hostile environment and enforced by the new Nationality and the Borders Act.

Group members met new people, different people, kind people, experienced people, old people, young people, and people who'd known loss through the fire and were learning to tell its story safely. They were invited to learn about the



history of Scotland before the colonisations that had taken root in so many of the countries the visitors had come from. It enabled everyone to place themselves into a different history and a different geography, making a new world with possibilities.

The pottery session enabled people to express themselves by creating traditional objects using the clay and, to their pride, some of those will be displayed at the Crannog Museum. The visit to the Museum was fascinating as similarities with some cultures were immediately apparent to many people- especially with traditional objects and materials used in Scotland and 'back home'. It was also a friendly atmosphere for children. It can be difficult for the children to understand why their parents are not allowed to do certain things or to find answers to certain questions, to be constantly held within borders and boundaries, but at The Crannog, the children were freely running around, being creative and making new friends, laughing and being children, rather than forced, as so many who seek asylum are, to be old before their time.

It's nearly a month since MIN's first visit to the Crannog and people are still talking about the trip and the journey to Crannog Centre. People are still singing and saying.

*'It was the best day ever'*

The idea of being outdoors and in nature without the worry of the Home Office is a temporary escape for some people from the harsh realities of everyday life. For others, it also offered the possibility to reconnect with their roots and to see similarities across borders and be able to express themselves freely by understanding very different aspects to Scottish history, than those of colonialism.

From ashes to new possibilities, the Crannog Centre is recognising the importance of intercultural connections, of love across borders and is welcoming people to learn, reflect and create new beginnings together. Who knows what the next visit will be, but one thing is sure, there will be singing.

*Pinar Aksu is UNESCO RILA PhD student at the University of Glasgow and Human Rights and Advocacy Coordinator with Maryhill Integration Network*



# The Scottish Crannog Centre

*Alison Phipps is UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts, University of Glasgow.*

*With contribution by Anastasia Maria Tariq, Development Officer, Maryhill Integration Network*



## **Ehsan Samei Mehrabani**

### **Finishing the Roundhouse Thatch**

Ehsan is originally from Iran, and has a background in cabinet making, fencing, decking, and decorating. When he came to us, thatching was entirely new to him. (You wouldn't believe it from how good it looks!)

Working at the Scottish Crannog Centre has been far more than just a job for him, he has learned so many new skills and met so many friendly people. He even wants to do a small bit of thatching in his own garden!

There's a misconception about the intelligence of those who came before us, when in actuality, their engineering skills and knowledge is highly advanced. He said that although people believe if it's modern, then it must be the best way to do it, but that's not necessarily true. Thatching takes time, and precision, and if done correctly can last for decades. He comments on how things are worked around here, for example, due to the volume of rain there is in Scotland, people would take clay from the land and use it to cover the tops of their homes, ensuring that it is waterproof.

He wants to come back to the Crannog Centre to further help with the build and even has plans to install an interactive birdhouse on site!

"There's good people here," he told me. "Nobody treats you like a stranger. Now I have found my family."

Ehsan came to us through our work with UNESCO RILA and the Maryhill Integration Network. We have been working closely with Pinar Aksu to support the Lift the Ban campaign – giving people seeking asylum the right to work. "Pinar is like a key," Ehsan describes. She gets you where you want to be, takes into account your background and finds places in which you can thrive.

For us at the Scottish Crannog Centre, working with Ehsan has been incredible, it has gifted us with skills, talent, knowledge, creativity and fun, someone who we would not have been able to work with before he got the Right to Work.

Ehsan is not only crafty with wood and thatching, but he is a tattoo artist! If you would like to support him further, find him on Instagram: @Esmtoo.





## Report on UNESCO RILA / Scottish Crannog Centre Workshop, Kenmore, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Seven members of staff from the UNESCO RILA team met for a day's scoping workshop with staff members and apprentices from the Scottish Crannog Centre.

The aim of the day was to:-

- a) Deepen the emergent working relationships between staff
- b) Hear about the roles and responsibilities of the staff and their development ideas
- c) Make international connections to the archaeology and experimental work of the Scottish Crannog Centre – via those who have migrated and sought asylum in the UK and those who preserve indigenous traditions in the diaspora and in the Global South

Each member of staff and apprentice described their role by means of an object from their work and brought artistic or administrative connections to bear on the common projects.

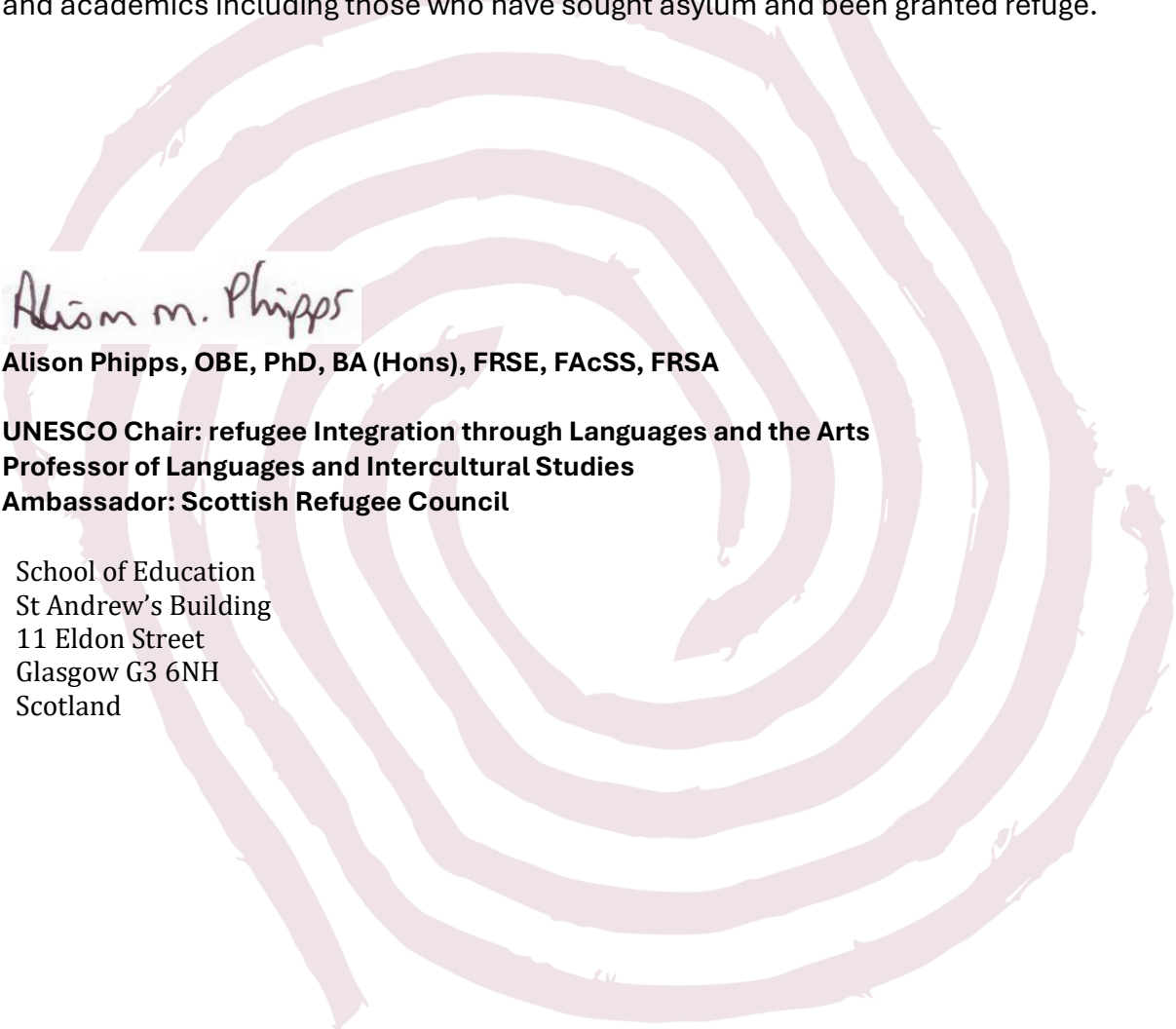
These activities are undertaken at this moment of change and development for the Scottish Crannog Centre under the auspices of Perth as UNESCO Creative City of Folk Art and Craft in partnership with the UNESCO Chair for Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts.

Presenting this partnership to the workshop, by both Crannog and UNESCO RILA directors, and with representatives of Perth UNESCO City of Folk Art and Craft, staff were able to explore new connections and ideas and develop plans and proposals for the next stages of the partnership.

The combination of the artistic and administrative function was especially important to the workshop, fusing functions which are often separated so that realistic and workable plans were formed.

The results of the workshop have been collected in an ideas matrix and will form the basis for future funding bids and scoping grants, for research project development and ethics planning.

This was a unique gathering of artists, administrators, directors, international partners and academics including those who have sought asylum and been granted refuge.



*Alison M. Phipps*

**Alison Phipps, OBE, PhD, BA (Hons), FRSE, FAcSS, FRSA**

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