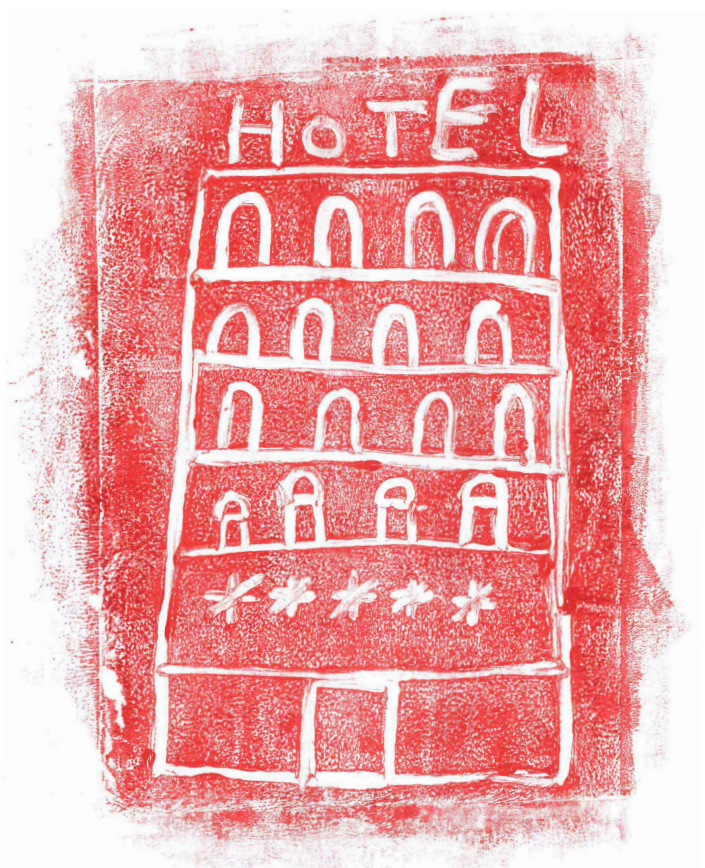


Comfort in Connection



Carla Smith, Jess Wilson-Leigh + ESOL Learning Group





With special thanks to the ESOL learning team at Aberdeen City Council who supported the facilitation of this project, in particular Aileen MacAlister, Emma Cresswell and Ana Miranda Ruiz.



ALI



As part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival 2025, artists Jess Wilson-Leigh and Carla Smith led two creative workshops with a group of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners through Aberdeen City Council.

Many of the participants are building new lives in Aberdeen, and the sessions offered space to connect, create, and share experiences together.



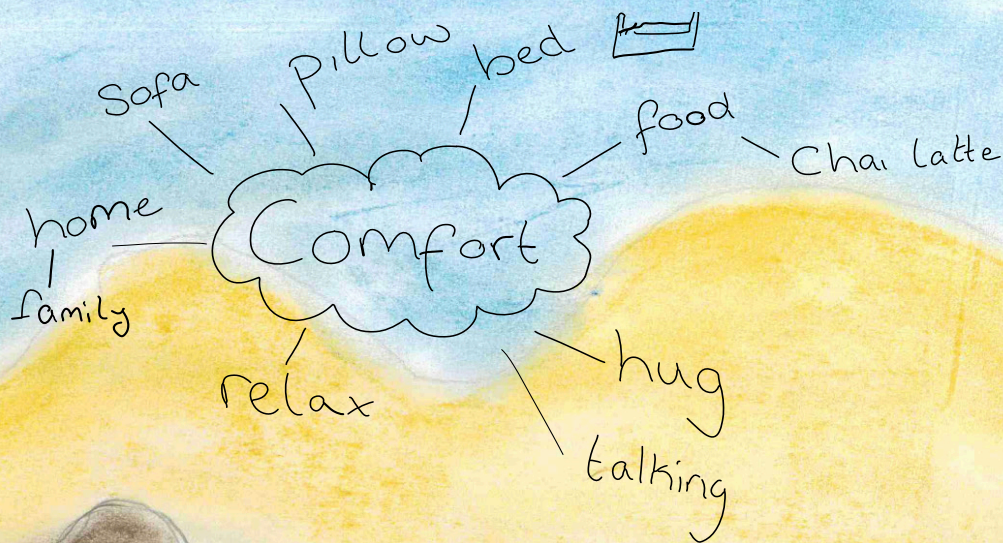
The workshops centred the theme of comfort - where we find it, how we create it, and how we can comfort and support those around us.

The group were provided with and supported to use new materials and techniques to explore the theme, including tinfoil mono-printing, watercolour paints and collage.

At first, participants were hesitant with the new materials, but soon everyone began experimenting freely, producing a wide range of thoughtful and beautiful work.

The second session was left open and flexible, giving space for each person to explore their own ideas. This freedom encouraged playfulness, confidence, and collective creativity.







Jess and Carla's collaborative practice is rooted in care, community, and connection. They often work with food and collective making as starting points for shared experience.

Together they deliver projects that prioritise wellbeing, and the power of art to bring people together.

Art can offer an alternative way to connect - beyond language - through image, mark, and shared making.

This project celebrates creativity as a tool for building connections, supporting mental wellbeing, and amplifying voices that are too often unheard.



What makes you think of home?

I cook, I like to drink coffee with my husband and very important my daughter with us and I am happy

- Anna Andryushenko

When I listen Ukrainian language, Ukrainian songs I am always thinking about my home

- Larysa Myronenko

I cook the food of my country because our food is very tasty - Mahabad Ali

When I look in phonebook, when I randomly meet someone who speaks (on streets) Ukrainian. When I think about friends and my parents, aunts, uncles etc. When I smell cut grass I remember my village

- Mykolo Ovcharuk

My Mum - Mahmood

My Family, food, music and culture

- Emilio and Angelly



Welcome To Joanne's Home



This book will be launched as part of a board games and language cafe, which started in November 2024.

The idea for the cafe came from a group of learners who had expressed an interest in helping to organise additional activities for learners to practise their English, meet other people and reduce social isolation. From the initial discussion, the idea of hosting regular board games sessions came about. Run by Aberdeen City Council's Adult Learning ESOL Team the sessions are supported by peer volunteers, former learners who give up their time to help those who attend.

The cafe is also supported by Community Development Workers from the Aberdeen City Council Resettlement Team.

The sessions started as a fortnightly event and are now run either once or twice a week, with the support of AAGM (Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums) who provide the spaces. They are held weekly on Friday afternoons at the Maritime Museum on Shiprow and fortnightly on Tuesday afternoons at the Aberdeen Art Gallery on Schoolhill.

They are open to anyone (16+) who is looking to improve their English or meet new people.

04/08/2025



How have you made friends in Scotland?

I have many Ukrainian friends. We come to Aberdeen from Oban in March 2025 (Ukrainian Scheme). One of this peoples study English with me in ESOL classes. His name is Niko - *Larysa Myronenko*

I don't have a lot of friends in Scotland, yet. But I try to communicate with people here in Scotland and I try to be kind when I meet people. I hope that helps me to find new friends. I hope that I find here a lot of friends and we have a strong friendship
- Mykolo Ovcharuk

Playing football - Emilio

I have made friends in my English class
- *Maria, Angelly & Nida*

I have two friends here and I love very much. Good friends is very difficult to fine - *Mahabad Ali*



What do you want to tell others about your experience living in the UK?

Living in the UK is very good but it is very cold in Scotland and the people is very nice and friendly
- *Motwakel*

I would tell that it is good experience for me. Good and safe country, I live near the sea - It was my dream. My son lives with me, he is safe, he is studying - It makes me happy - *Olena*

Living in the UK is a very experience. People in Scotland are multicultural and respectful
- *Ahmet Sinan Ozbilen*

The people are kind to me - *Angelly*

Great! Because I can meet people who has different ways of thinking - *A student from Yemen*

I am fascinated by the culture in Scotland - *Maria*



wahid



What spaces bring you comfort?

Spaces comfort sunny and warm water, reading and watches tv, travelling - *Olha*

The parks and racing track - *Nida*

The library and green areas - *Fatimah*

My family; my place is where my family is! - *Maria*

I like to be at home, but in the moment I don't have a lot of time with my family because I am working abroad. I like to be in my garden, in my kitchen and in the living room - *Anna Andryushenko*

I like some places near the Western Park and Rubislaw place. The most comfortable place in Scotland for me is little town Oban - *Larysa Myronenko*

Autumn is very peaceful for me - *Mahabad Ali*

I feel good in my home and in the class and in the library - *Motwakel*

My comfort space of course is my home (where my family is) - *Mykolo Ovcharuk*

I am very active and friendly person so I feel comfort with people. I like English classes, board games, dance classes and especially my home and flat - *Olena*

My home brings me comfort because it is safe
- *Ahmet Sinan Ozbilen*

My comfort places are the beach, the park, the spa and my home - *anonymous*

Meeting my friends - *Ahmed*





Ali



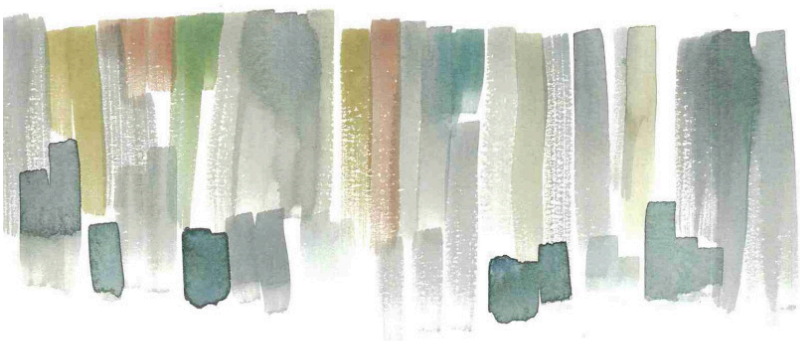
What do you want to tell others about your experience living in the UK?

My main advice is communicate with people, it doesn't matter, if you know people or not. And doesn't matter if that person is born in Scotland or not. I meet a lot of kind people here in the UK but don't forget if you be kind with people then people be kind to you
- Mykolo Ovcharuk

I like living in UK because friendly people, beautiful nature and there is support from the state
- anonymous

For me difficult adaptation in Aberdeen because my eldest son is not integrative in Scotland
- Larysa Myronenko





NALEA



Home

There are two places I can genuinely call home. The first is South Korea, where I was born, grew up, and my family still live. The second is Japan, where I studied and worked for several years. Aberdeen, here in Scotland doesn't quite feel like just yet, as I have only been here for less than a year.

When I first found that I would be moving to Aberdeen, I have to say I felt rather uncomfortable. English is not my first language (I'm sure my English teacher will fix my writing. Thank you Aileen!) I'd never been to the UK before, and I was not keen to leave my job.

But actually, living in Aberdeen has been much better than I thought. To be honest, it's more than just 'not bad'. How wonderful is it that the only thing I worry about before I go to sleep is 'What I will eat for dinner tomorrow?', not meetings or work deadlines. Living here has also given me lots of opportunities to travel both in the UK and to other European countries. Every journey inspires me and gives me fresh energy and I am genuinely thankful for this situation.

However enjoyable the holidays, I always return to everyday life in the end. When I'm back in Aberdeen and see the familiar roads, trees, and all that scenery, it makes me feel comfort and I feel like I belong. I suppose I can, shyly, call this place 'HOME'.



Blooming season makes me think of home! All these vibrant colours in spring remind me of the place I was born - *Anonymous*

When I see trees and plants and when I am outside the city, I see animals grazing and I see old people on the road - *Motwakel*



We are extremely thankful to the participants of the project that have shared their experiences and perspectives as part of this project.

With thanks to

Nalea	Anna Andryushenko
Joanne	Olha
Ali	Larysa Myronenko
Motwakel	Ahmed
Wahid	Ioma
Mahmood	Nida
Emilio	Fatimah
Angelly	Emilio
Mykolo Ovcharuk	Angelly
Olena	Mahabad Ali
Ahmet Sinan Ozbilen	Maria

and other ESOL learners that participated without including their names.

We are lucky to have such a wonderfully broad and diverse community in Aberdeen and believe this should be celebrated and supported wholeheartedly.

This project shares perspectives from:

South Korea	China
Yemen	Sudan
Syria	Eritrea
Ukraine	Russia
Columbia	Iraq
Brazil	Turkey
Thailand	



This project was part of Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival 2025 and funded through the Regional Participatory Arts Fund.

The Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival (SMHAF) has been running since 2007, presenting hundreds of events each year across artforms such as film, music, theatre, writing, and visual art. The festival shows how creativity can open conversations around mental health and support people to live healthier lives.

Led by the Mental Health Foundation, the UK's leading charity for mental health, SMHAF brings together artists, communities, and organisations to celebrate creativity, share experiences, and challenge stigma.

Thank you to SMHAF team for the opportunity to deliver this work.



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