



The Evoke Culture Festival

The Need

The complexion of Abingdon-on-Thames is changing!

The changes that the EVOKE Culture Festival responds to are the evolution of an increasingly diverse population living and working in Abingdon.

As more and more African-Caribbean and other ethnic origin families come to live in Abingdon, the social, cultural and racial dynamics of the town also changes. To ensure a vibrant, socially cohesive town which is economically buoyant, just and equitable, it is imperative to create clear strategies which create the conditions for all to thrive. In essence, this is a social justice vision of belonging for all.

Impulse

Evoking Belonging is a body of work that lies at the intersection of social justice, social transformation, regeneration and place-making. Created by Dr Dianne Regisford, Evoking Belonging is a co-created cultural practice.

Comprising various expressions, this transdisciplinary practice is:

- ...An enquiry
- ...A movement...
- An act of Social Sculpture...

The Evoking Belonging approach is rooted in Ubuntu: An African Bantu philosophy and cultural practice illuminating our collective humanity. In this humanity, we are all inter-connected and, from this perspective, we are invited to co-create our human being in community.

In the Evoking Belonging practice, we focus on race and equity through the lens of Ubuntu for the enlivenment of Belonging for all communities.

Impact

For this social justice vision of a connected, socially cohesive, culturally diverse Abingdon to be achieved, the Evoke Culture Festival was created by Dr Dianne Regisford as platform to achieve the following objectives:

1. Cultural Awareness
2. Cultural Education
3. Cultural Engagement

The strategy is to create multiple opportunities for community engagement building up to a summer festival in the Abingdon Town Square. Through a series of small cultural, public-facing events taking place at the Makespace Charter Studios, Dr Dianne Regisford is leading a process which invites multiple stakeholders to work collaboratively towards a shared vision.

As such, Dr Dianne REgisford has partnered with One Planet Abingdon to feature the Evoke Culture Festival at the One Planet Living Festival on June 15, 2024.

This will be the first time in Abingdon's history of public events, that a cultural festival which platforms Oxfordshire based, African-Caribbean culture, local entrepreneurs and artists will take place.

The envisaged impact includes:(to name but a few)

- Public Exposure for African-Caribbean artists, entrepreneurs, performers
- Black-led management team leading on strategy, implementation and
- The first collaboration between a social value, impact driven, local businesses

The process will be documented as a learning journey and will be measured against the stated objectives in a way that respectfully considers the social value created in qualitative, quantitative and 'evocative' cultural measures.

Background: Belonging, Heritage, and Culture

Belonging, heritage, and culture are intricately interwoven threads that shape individuals' identities and perceptions of the world around them. At the core of human existence lies the innate desire to connect, to feel rooted, and to understand where we come from. Belonging encapsulates the feeling of being accepted, valued, and integrated into a community or group. It is the sense of fitting in, of being recognized and embraced for who you are.

Heritage refers to the legacy passed down through generations, encompassing traditions, values, language, and customs. It serves as a reminder of our ancestors' experiences, struggles, and triumphs, grounding us in a shared history that shapes our present and future. Heritage provides a sense of continuity, anchoring individuals amidst the ever-changing currents of life.

Culture is the vibrant tapestry woven from the threads of heritage, reflecting the collective expression of a community's beliefs, rituals, art, cuisine, and social norms. It is a dynamic force that evolves over time, influenced by interactions with other cultures and the challenges of modernity. Culture enriches our lives, fostering creativity, diversity, and resilience.

For many, belonging is intimately linked to their heritage and cultural identity. It is through the lens of culture that individuals find meaning, forge connections, and navigate their place in the world. Whether through shared experiences, language, or rituals, culture provides a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries and unites people across continents.

However, the journey to belonging is complex. In an increasingly globalised world, individuals often find themselves straddling multiple cultural identities, navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity, the local and the global. The quest for belonging can be fraught with challenges, particularly for marginalised communities whose heritage and cultural practices have been historically suppressed or erased.

Yet, amidst these challenges, belonging, heritage, and culture continue to serve as sources of strength and resilience. They provide a sense of belonging, grounding individuals in a shared history and empowering them to celebrate their cultural identity with pride.

Ultimately, the journey of belonging is a deeply personal and collective endeavour, one that invites individuals to embrace their heritage, honour their culture, and cultivate a sense of belonging that enriches both their own lives and the communities they inhabit.

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