Needlework project brings cultures closer

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Women from a Bangladeshi group in the Borough have taken part in the first focus group in the project Stitch - Wandsworth, run by the cultural arts organisation Bridging Arts in partnership with Wandsworth Council and the Royal School of Needlework.

For their inaugural meeting the women brought suitcases crammed with treasured traditional embroidery to a meeting with a tutor from the Royal School of Needlework and talked about what the scarves, shawls, rugs and wall hangings meant to them. The work was photographed and carefully documented.

As the project progresses in the New Year, women from this and other local groups will visit London-based collections of Islamic embroidery and British patterns influenced by this rich heritage. For many, it will be their first trip to a museum.

A series of practical workshops, led by the Royal School of Needlework, will run through spring and summer culminating in a show of new embroidery created, alongside the traditional patterns and garments that inspired it. Educational information based on the project will also be collected for use in local schools and libraries.

In all up to 16 half-day workshops will be held during the project and up to 250 women will share knowledge, learn new skills and be encouraged to create new patterns to reflect their life in the UK today.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: “This project provides a fascinating opportunity for an exchange of skills between two traditions while creating new work that draws on the differing heritage of the participants.”

For Bridging Arts, Founder and Director Susan Roberts, said: “Sewing is a skill and interest shared by women of all cultures and all ages. Our first focus group uncovered a wealth of stitches and patterns. It was really exciting for us – and the Royal School of Needlework – to see the range of embroidery involved, in particular some of the regional stitches from rural Bangladesh. It will be fascinating to investigate shared traditions as the project develops.”

Notes to editors

Bridging Arts is a not for profit community arts organisation which enables communities to express themselves through art, photography and design.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,000 projects, allocating over £4.2billion across the UK, with over £840 million has granted in London alone.

Further information

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