

## Report from «Welcome to Friluftsliv», for Immigrants

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### Summary

One of the Norwegian Environment Agency's responsibilities is to teach people about friluftslivs traditions. This report shares our experiences from three days introducing Friluftsliv to immigrants at Bjørnebekk asylmottak, Ås, in January 2016, and gives a detailed description on how to repeat them. The days were successful. The key elements to this success was our focus on community experience, making fire and cooking food over fire, sharing knowledge and stories, close collaboration with Bjørnebekk administration and the immigrants and a focus on nature connection experiences.

Friluftslivs trips like we carried them out, can also have benefits outside of the Norwegian Environment Agency's main responsibility. Most of the immigrants have had traumatic experiences and feel lonely. A warm welcome considering this will support integration. Friluftsliv and nature can contribute to inner peace, and support integration even deeper. Norway works internationally for human rights and peacemaking. Inner and outer peace is strongly connected. Carefully designed friluftslivs trips can contribute to Norway's commitment to restore peace in communities, both in Norway and internationally.

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## Background

One of the Norwegian Environment Agency's responsibilities is to teach people about friluftslivs traditions, to make sure it is kept alive in our culture. Friluftsliv is a simple way of spending time outdoor, and it does not require much equipment. It is a way of getting personal experience with and knowledge about nature, and making people interested in taking care of it. Research has also documented physical, social and emotional benefits from practicing friluftsliv. Our law makes the forests and other wild land accessible and free to use by anyone. Over the last years the influx of immigrants has increased. Many of the immigrants become citizens of Norway and have a need of being welcomed into our communities and culture in a good way.

A good way to welcome the new citizens from another culture is to introduce them to friluftsliv. Nature itself and tourist cabins (both day visits and overnight) provide a healthy space where it can be easy to get to know other people. People tend to greet each other more on trails in the forest than in the cities. Sitting around the fire together to share stories and doing other activities outside is a good way of making friendships. These are all good ways of integrating newcomers into the local communities.

I experienced that most of the immigrants had experiences using nature in similar ways of Friluftsliv (see stories below). Nature were we were these days, seemed to remind many people about nature experiences at home. In both places, there are trees, water, birds and animals. According to some biologists (ie: Edward O. Wilson), all people have a genetic trigger to like nature. If this experience is true for most immigrants, introducing them to friluftsliv might be a way of making them feel at home in a new place.

Additional to these obvious reasons, some benefits outside of miljødirektorates responsibilities are worth mentioning. Carefully designed friluftslivs experiences may be a god way of introducing immigrants to the culture of peacemaking and human rights that Norway have committed to work for on an international level. This focus may also increase the life quality for the immigrants. Most immigrants have had traumatic experiences, are in a challenging transition and feel lonely. They come from war torn areas and seek peace, safety and a new home. Well



held talks around the fire is a good place to share stories, to get to know each other a little deeper, to be heard for some of what is stirring at the moment without it being a therapeutic situation.

It is easy to introduce nature's peacemaking qualities during friluftsliv so they can learn how to restore peace by themselves being in a foreign place and land. Norway has a good reputation working with peacemaking and human rights in Europe. People that have experienced war and that do not get sufficient support can tend to respond with aggression as a mean of fighting back. Some immigrants will return home because of declined application, and some may work here for years before they can return home to a safe country.

### Who is this report relevant for

This Welcome to Friluftsliv project is relevant for activity leaders at asylmottak all over Norway, for organizations who work with teaching friluftsliv to people with different cultural background in schools or other age levels. It may also be interesting to institutions who educate nature guides and naturveiledere.

### Goal

The overall goal for "Welcome to Friluftsliv" was to welcome immigrants to Norway by inviting them to a day in the local forest with local people. Sub goals were to:

- Provide experiences in friluftsliv that they can practice alone, with friends and family
- Teach them how to make fire (if they did not from before)
- Teach how to practice friluftsliv – law and common sense
- Build relationship with local people
- Get to know the closest recreational area.
- Create a feeling of being welcomed and a sense of being one family with people from many different cultural backgrounds
- Carefully designed talk around the fire to share stories from their hearts
- Introduce nature as a place to find peace and feel at home
- Raise awareness about peacemaking practices that friluftsliv can provide in a world that has chosen to reduce war.

### This is how we did it

**10:30 Preparations** - We arrived to prepare equipment and to visit the fire site to make sure the site was clean. We oriented ourselves with any tracks of wildlife to share with the group later.

**11:00 Start** - It always took some time before they came, time turned 1130 the first two days before everyone were ready.

**11:30 Welcoming** - Welcome people and make sure everyone understands what we say. Some do not know English, some do not know Norwegian. We spoke in English and asked them who could translate for those who did not understand. Each day was organized so people with the same language group were participating, so we did not need many translators. When this is in place, say what they are invited to do today. Remember to talk slowly and with breaks often so the translators can remember what to say. Keywords for what to say about the day: Friluftsliv culture, timeframe, how long to walk (our firesite was 15 minutes away by foot), making the day together, make fire together, sharing stories around the fire, some activities, share food.

Good things we did in the welcoming circle:

- Tossing a ball and the one who had it was to say something they were happy about today.
- Everyone share their name and the meaning of their name if any



### **Getting ready to go**

Ask if anyone needs to borrow some warm clothes. (Be aware of that people unexperienced to the cold climate, don't know they need gloves or hood, and might say no. Bring extras anyway.)

Invite people to carry the equipment. It was very popular to carry reindeer skins.

### **Stop at the friluftslivs map at the edge of the forest**

Orientation about the forest as a friluftslivs area, basic about what you are allowed to do here and not allowed to, about dangers (no dangers in this forest - no animals to be afraid of), where we are related to the map. Invite people to walk in silence, (a part of the friluftslivs culture is to appreciate the silence of the forest) and to get to know the animals by looking for tracks.

I pointed out tracks along the way for those who walk close.

### **Preparing the site and fireplace**

First we invited people to take responsibilities for different jobs that needed to be done. Preparing the sitting area, providing tea/coffee, finding a place for food to share, responsible for making and tending the fire.

We made fire using ignition steel, cattail and birch bark. This was very popular.

### **Activities at the fireplace**

At the fire site we wanted to do three things: making food together, sharing stories and doing some nature activities and share some more information about friluftsliv. Listen to the group for the best timing.

### **About sharing stories**

Introduction to using a talking peace as a way of honoring each others stories. The one who holds the peace will be the one who talks, and the others will be listening. We invited them to speak what was true for them, from their hearts. Challenges: Very normal to interrupt each other, even though the invitation to speak in turns was clear. How to improve this?

Questions we asked (not the same questions every day).

- A place in nature at home where you feel peace.
- What do you love about your home country?
- What kind of relationship do you have with nature at home ?
- How was it like to go for the small walk in the area, what did you find? (we invited them to go for a walk)

Other activities:

- Inviting them to find a song that everyone knows and sing it. We sang some Norwegian songs. I had a flute with me and played some – they asked for it the last day – so singing and music might be a good thing to have as a part of a day like this. We only had song/music one day.
- Looking around and find something your eyes likes to look at.
- Go for a walk and explore the are – find a place you like. We called them back with the sound of a flute
- Listen to the most silent sound and point out the direction (with your eyes closed)

**15:00 Ending of the day** - We ended around 15:00-15:30 at the fire site. We all collaborated to clean up the site and to carry things back. "Leave the place even more beautiful". Last reflections from us on the day – anything we felt was needed to repeat from today about friluftsliv or other things. Last questions to them: what do you take with you from today that you want to do again (or similar).

## Equipment

- Some extra gloves, and hoods and other warm clothes was handy
- Can of water
- Coffee pot to boil water over the fire
- 4 thermoses with tea/coffee
- Some food to share – chicken sausage with lompe and stickbread (pinnebrød)
- 12 reindeer skin
- 1 bag of wood, ax and fire kit
- First aid kit

## Number of participants, including us

Tuesday: 15. One local volunteer.

Wednesday: 11. Two locals. Eva participated the first hours.

Thursday: 20. One local. Several returned from previous days to be with us again.

## Collaboration with Bjørnebekk Asylmottak

We had a meeting with the administration and representatives for the immigrants. We developed the project to meet their needs. They invited locals, provided warm clothes and gave information to the immigrants about the trips. The days were a part of their information program, learning about Norwegian culture and the local community. We sponsored ingredients so they could make traditional food, in total 567 NOK for three days. If doing so again – be clear about the total amount of money refunded. The last day they prepared an awesome dinner! It takes time, was very cozy and give less time to other activities.

## What we learned

The three days were very successful. Participants from the earlier days returned on later days even the temperature was low, - 14 at the lowest.

## Best practice we want to continue doing

- 12 reindeer skins to sit on. It was very popular to carry them!
- Focus on community building: “we make the day together”, instead of them coming to a ready prepared site.
- Share food around the fire
- Use local map/information point at the entrance of the forest.
- Give the participants responsibilities (like serving tea, tending the fire)
- Listen to the group needs, our natural flow and what best serves their wellbeing regardless of the plan.
- Making fire together. Some knew well how to do it – creates empowerment to invite their skills
- Talk around the fire with a talking stick

## What to improve

- Use the reindeer skin more fully to talk about reindeer in Norway
- Bring books with tracks and signs to show pictures of the animal tracks we found.
- Ways of introducing activities to explore the forest and connect with nature.
- Make sure in the beginning that everyone understands, and if not have someone translate. Speak slowly.

## Other experiences/reflections

- They kept talking in their mother tongue the whole day – a bit confusing sometimes to know if information was correctly received. A bit challenging to listen to what was needed due to different language.
- Need of being clearer about what we want to do? Did they read the invitation properly?
- Can do more activities, but making food, settling in at the site, walking, welcoming, all takes time!



- About the cold weather. In fact not much of a problem. The asylmottak had organized warm clothes for the participants. They learned to warm their feet at the fire. Some people returned because of cold, maybe in total 5, included a mother and a 3 year old child.

## Potential

Spreading the knowledge about and practical experience in Friluftsliv is an important task for the Norwegian Environment Agency. The flux of immigrants has increased over the last years. There is a high potential to offer a warm welcome to friluftsliv at asylmottak as a good start of the integration into the Norwegian society. The interest amongst immigrants was according to our experience very high for participation in this friluftslivs activity. Forty out of 200 (?) immigrants from Bjørnebekk asylmottak participated in the three days. To reach most of them would need about 15 more days. The turnover at Bjørnebekk suggests that this could be repeated 2-3 times during a year to introduce all of the immigrants to Friluftsliv. In total approximately 36- 54 days.

Potential outside of the Norwegian Environment Agency's main responsibility

- Mental and physical health and social benefits. Many immigrants are lonely at the asylmottak and have experienced traumatic situations. Coming to a new place with new people is challenging. Long waiting times and lack of activity can increase depression and make some people prone to crime. Welcome to friluftsliv has potential to reduce loneliness, and teach ways of finding stillness and a place to reflect about their life situation.
- Peacemaking practices, empowerment and community building. It is important to welcome people from war torn places with peace in order to restore trust and to signal basic and important values in the Norwegian culture. Welcome to friluftsliv was designed to give the participants peaceful multi-cultural and multi-religious experience. Most of the immigrants have escaped because of situations that have taken away their integrity. These are powerful people who have a sense of human rights. Norway is a country where human rights and the right of speaking our voice is lifted high. Welcome to friluftsliv was carried out so the participants were empowered by sharing stories and listening to the others through sitting in circle where everyone were equal – the leaders of the trip and locals too. The participants were also carefully empowered by co-creating the trip, taking part in the activity on the same premises as the local participants instead of coming to a ready “event”.

## Recommendations

1. Offer a Welcome to Friluftsliv daylong in each season of every asylmottak office in Norway and around the world, led by a man and woman with local volunteer support. Each day ends with a volunteer to co-create the next outing with a means to inviting others in the community, ideally to support future self-led and self-initiated sharing circles and outings.
2. We also recommend considering measurable outcomes and statistics that support the collective learning necessary to develop best practices that adapt and evolve to meet real needs.
3. Develop a Welcome to friluftsliv for immigrant's curriculum at schools for nature guides and friluftslivs activity leaders. Include classic friluftsliv, empowerment, community building and peacemaking principles.

## Some stories from the days

The stories they shared were very touching. We tried different questions each day. Here are some of the answers.

Day one:

What do you miss about your home land? Everyone mentioned they miss their mother, amongst many other, like family in general. “I miss everything.” “I miss the view over the whole Damaskus.”

Day two:

What is your relationship with nature where you come from?

- “My tribe used to make fire like this and to share stories and knowledge around fire.”



- “My parents were catholic, my grandparents are muslim and before that we connected directly with nature, lakes, forest, fire. People were healed.”
- “I have a fireplace in this forest. I go there and contemplate, some people call it meditate. I reflect on what had worked well in my life and what has not worked, and I also think about what I want in the future.” - Stephen from Uganda.
- “One of my best nature experiences from home is with my grandmother. She used to carry water and collection plants early in the morning. I love to carry water!”
- “I have been in nature many times, but never in the snow.”

What was the highlight of today, in one word, something you would like to do again? Many said things like connection, communication, community

Day three:

Describe a place at home in nature that makes you feel at peace.

- “I like nature because it is pure and it is a creation of god.”
- “We used to go as a family to the sea and to the forest to eat food. This place and what we do here remind me of what we did at home.”

Say one word about what you have experienced today and that you want to do again:

- “I really like these trees.”
- “I like the contrast of the fire and the snow, it is like the desert and the sea (where I am from).”
- “I have had a good day.”

Other comments:

- “When I went into the forest, I felt her as my mother.”
- “This is the first day in Norway that I feel happy.”
- “I walked for 1 month to get from Iraq to Norway!”

## Pictures

A complete collection of picture from each day with immigrants is available here:

<http://www.DeepNatureGuides.com/community-quest-pictures.html>

## The invitation



# Welcome to Norwegian Friluftsliv!

## Connecting to Nature in Community, for Immigrants in Ås, Norway

Why do Norwegians spend hours in nature, even in winter, and have fun? Come and join us, taste traditional fire food and find out! We would like to get to know you, play some games and share stories together. We encourage locals to join us, too.

You are invited to join us around a community fire in the neighborhood. As the winter sun rises from the east slowly growing each day longer, this season and New Year marks new beginnings for all of us. Let's hear and honor each other's stories, see each other's faces and smiles, and be fully welcomed to this beautiful place and New Year.

We would like to introduce you to "friluftsliv" – the Norwegians culture of spending time in nature. We hope you also will fall in love with the native trees and birds, and feel welcomed to share it with your friends and family.

## Community Day in Nature

Date: January 12, 13 or 14 (Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday) 2016

Time: 11:00am – 3:30pm

Where: Outside the office at Bjørnebekk asylmottak

Maximum: 15 people

Sign up with Eva Iren Kind: [Eva.Kind@as.kommune.no](mailto:Eva.Kind@as.kommune.no), 64 97 49 60. Local guests, please reserve your spot before January 10.

The day will be in English. We will be sitting still for a while sharing stories, so children who can join us in this are welcome.

What to bring: Clothes to keep you warm, cup, bowl and spoon. Optional: Blanket, a song and traditional food to share. We will bring firewood, reindeer skins to sit on, tea and some traditional firefood.

Live S. Danielsen from Statens Naturoppsyn (The Norwegian Environment Agency) invites you to this day, and has invited Scott Davidson to join and inspire us!



**Live S. Danielsen** is from the suburbs of Oslo and has lived in Ås for 17 years. She has spent almost all holidays since she was a child in the mountains and by the sea, and in the forests surrounding Oslo. She works as a ranger and mentor in nature connection (naturveileder) since 2009. She is passionate about weaving nature and people together in a way that supports joy, deep connection and health and a sustainable future.



**Scott F. Davidson** is from the wild edges of coastal California, USA. He is deeply curious about how to live in reciprocity with diverse waters, lands and peoples around the world in service to future generations. He is a nature guide who cultivates an ecology of belonging through a conscious weaving of wildlife tracking, habitat tending and rites of passage in community.  
[www.DeepNatureGuides.com](http://www.DeepNatureGuides.com)