

Barra Bunting – so far

The Project seed was planted at a meeting. One of the committee members was an avid fan of Kirstie's Handmade Britain and thought it would be nice to make an effort to decorate the community hall for the day of the show. But when we looked around the table realised that none of us had the time. So we decided on an all-inclusive, worldwide craft project that everyone could achieve and that will connect people to people and to the Islands. And the end result would be some lovely bunting to decorate the hall not only for the Show but many events.

Barra Bunting started in March 2012.

People and organisations were asked to make a bunting flag – the only qualifier to making a flag is that you must have set foot on Barra and/or Vatersay.

The aims of the project are :

- To be all inclusive - the bunting flag is an ideal project as it is small and attainable to give everyone the sense of achievement and pride in a finished item and also being part of something larger.
- To introduce people to textile crafts
- To empower the community, people of all ages getting together and doing something for themselves, working together, achieving, having fun and having a beautiful result to show for it
- To connect and unite a worldwide community by bringing them together on one project that everyone can participate in. People from Barra and relatives/descendants are spread around the globe due to island clearances and Barra also has very strong links to shipping and the merchant navy. Many people visit from all over the world and feel a strong connection for the place. This project allows people who live further afield to have connections and contribute to the community.

The project will highlight diversity of ideas and designs within the island and further afield and highlight the links Barra and Vatersay have with people all over the world. The result of the project will be a large amount of bunting that can be used at many community events on Barra and Vatersay.

Firstly the project ran local workshops to help people make their flags and demonstrate what the project is all about. It is a chance for many people to try something new and there are volunteer 'experts' on hand to give advice and help.

Fifteen workshops have been held so far in a variety of locations throughout the year giving people, residents and visitors, every opportunity to get involved. Locations include schools, learning centre, dementia daycare centre and island markets (farmers markets),

It is not necessary to attend a workshop to take part and a website was created with all the information on the project, instructions and pictures of flags already completed.

The project uses through different types of media to spread news of its existence around the world so facebook, twitter, pinterest, weblinks and more conventional articles in papers were all used to contact people who were from or had set foot on the islands. The project was the groups first experience of Twitter and we found it to be extremely effective for this type of project and made contacts with people all over the world who helps spread the project even further. Facebook has also been very effective for posting pictures and getting instant response.

Apart from some sizing guidelines there are no restrictions as to what your flag can be made of or how it is to be done. Every flag is unique to the person that made it, some are simple and some complex but every flag is of the same value to the project. The great variety of designs and ideas are amazing. People have been inspired by seeing what others have achieved and by the first strings of bunting when they were displayed. To accompany every flag there is an archive sheet about the person that made it, their connection to the island and what their flag represents. There are some lovely storied emerging such as the lady who came to Barra on guide camp and spent the weekend in the church hall due to the terrible rain, the man whose father fitted the clock in the church and had lovely memories of being here as a boy and Peter McNeill from Ohio who did his flag in memory of his father who

visited Barra long ago and was in the US Navy. Peter delivered his flag by hand on 18 July 2012. So the project is also creating a lovely archive of the flags and also people's memories, impressions, creativity and stories.

The project worked with schools and community groups including youth café, dementia daycare centre, church craft club and in particular the Adult Learners who hosted our first Big Stitch Up in August 2012. The Adult learners provided lunch and had baked cakes for the volunteers and they got stuck in preparing and arranging the flags for stitching. The pride of what they had helped achieve was visible in their faces when we strung the bunting up for the first time in Northbay Hall and we invited them over for a preview. Working with these groups not only made them feel part of the project but also part of the community. Everyone enjoyed making their flags, for some it rekindled a passion in crafts for others it was trying something completely new.

The Barra Bunting project was chosen by the Scottish Government Community Empowerment Department as one of the first five projects to be featured on their new 'Our Great Ideas' website.

Barra Bunting was launched on 1st September 2012 at the Barra and Vatersay Island Produce Show. The flags are now available for use by other community groups on the island to help decorate space for their events. They have already been used by the local MOD, the Community Council and the Agricultural and Horticultural Association.

This was the initial phase of the project, which was financially supported by a CNES Arts Revenue Grant. 180 flags have been created and more are coming through the post. Now that people have seen the flags strung up they have been inspired. Our next target is 400 flags and workshops will continue to be held on the island. The Adult Learners group have already volunteered to host the next Big Stitch Up in March 2013.

Sarah MacLean

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