

# The Baring Foundation

## CREATIVELY MINDED AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE: REVISITED

Reflections from the Baring Foundation's funding for  
creative mental health in Global Majority communities

By Sabra Khan and Daniel Regan



## CREATIVELY MINDED AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE: REVISITED

### About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation is an independent foundation which protects and advances human rights and promotes inclusion. We believe in the role of a strong, independent civil society nationally and internationally. We use our resources to enable civil society to work with people facing discrimination and disadvantage and to act strategically to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality. More can be found in [A History of the Baring Foundation in 50 Grants](#).

Since 2020, the Foundation has focused its arts programme on creative opportunities for people with mental health problems.

### About the authors

Sabra Khan and Daniel Regan are both Advisers to the Baring Foundation's Arts programme.

Daniel is a visual artist and creative health consultant. For over 20 years he has specialised in the exploration of complex emotional experiences through the arts. Daniel creates deeply personal artworks, devises and facilitates socially engaged creative projects and provides consultancy and more across

the creative health sector. Daniel is also the founder and Director of Arts & Health Hub, a non-profit organisation supporting artists that are exploring health and wellbeing in their creative practice.

Sabra is a General Manager for the West Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the Black Country portfolio for The National Trust. She has over 20 years' experience working at a senior level in arts and culture, with a particular interest in working in arts and health and with global majority communities. She was previously Executive Director of SAMPAD South Asian Arts in Birmingham and one of the founders of the BEDLAM Arts & Mental Health Festival.

### Acknowledgements

The Baring Foundation would like to thank Sabra Khan and Daniel Regan for writing this report, together with all the organisations who generously shared their insights through their cases studies and in the focus group.

This report was edited by Harriet Lowe, Communications and Research Manager at the Baring Foundation, and designed by Alex Valy.

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# Foreword

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**BY VICKI DELA AMEDUME**

**Vicki is Chair of the Baring Foundation.**

For some time now, the evidence has been impossible to ignore. People from ethnically diverse communities are more likely to experience poor mental health, less likely to receive timely or appropriate support, and far less likely to see themselves reflected in the systems, services and cultural spaces designed to help them. In the creative mental health sector, these inequalities show up both in who participates and in who leads. When we decided to fund this work in 2020, it was because addressing that imbalance felt critical and because the moment demanded more than good intentions.

The organisations featured in this report demonstrate what becomes possible when funding is aligned with trust, time and a clear commitment to racial justice. They show that culturally grounded creative practice can reach people who are otherwise excluded from support, build genuine connection, and create spaces where mental health is understood on people's own terms. They also reveal how much labour, care and persistence this work requires – particularly when organisations are working slowly to build trust, develop partnerships and support artists who are themselves navigating structural inequality.

Funding has enabled skills development, leadership pathways and organisational learning, and the benefits extend beyond individual projects. This is not short-term intervention; it is long-term change.

Our next step is therefore a deliberate one. We are ring-fencing further funding with a clear racial justice focus, prioritising support for diverse-led organisations that have shown sustained commitment to creative mental health work. This is about backing what works, deepening practice, and helping to build a more equitable and resilient sector.

We believe others should fund this work because the need is clear and the evidence is here. If we are serious about equity in mental health, then creative, culturally competent approaches cannot sit at the margins. They must be recognised, resourced and sustained. This report offers both proof of impact and a compelling invitation to act.

Artist Represent Recovery Network session. Photo courtesy of London Arts and Health, see page 58.



Photo courtesy of Artcore,  
the Untold Stories project,  
see page 15.



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# Introduction

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BY SABRA KHAN

Sabra is an Adviser to the Baring Foundation's Arts programme  
(for a full biography, see page 2).

## BACKGROUND

At the beginning of 2020, the Baring Foundation began to focus its arts funding on creative opportunities by people living with mental health problems, following on from an initial mapping study undertaken by Director, David Cutler, called *Creatively Minded*.<sup>1</sup>

In 2021, the Foundation published a further report – *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse*<sup>2</sup> – which sought to examine the degree to which the arts and mental health sector was meeting the needs of people with mental health problems from ethnically diverse communities. That report, as well as the views of many people the Foundation spoke to in the sector, encouraged it to make a series of investments over the next few years in creating more opportunities for participatory artists from ethnically diverse communities to work in arts and mental health and to expand the communities that benefit from it.

That investment has so far taken the form of two open rounds (in 2021 and 2022) and two invited grants, case studies from which form the basis of this new report.

## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This is certainly the biggest, if not the only, funding programme with the specific focus on opportunity for Global Majority artists, and communities, in creative mental health. This report intends to gather the rich experiences

of funded organisations in one place in the hope that others may find it a source of ideas and inspiration.

## CREATIVELY MINDED AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE: 2021

The first round, *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse*, invited eligible arts organisations to apply for up to £40,000 to either find ways to attract participatory artists from ethnically diverse communities into creative mental health and/or to offer creative opportunities to people from specific ethnically diverse communities living with mental health problems.

Organisations needed to be established arts organisations, with at least two years' experience delivering creative opportunities to people with mental health problems; committed to striving for racial justice in their work; and either with an extensive track record of working with ethnically diverse communities or a commitment to improve.

147 applications were received and in June 2021, Baring Foundation trustees awarded 25 grants.

## CREATIVELY MINDED AND GLOBAL MAJORITY: 2022

Only a quarter of successful applicants in 2021 were organisations led by people with a Global Majority background. Therefore, the Foundation decided that the second open round of funding in 2022 would have the explicit aim

<sup>1</sup> *Creatively Minded*, David Cutler, 2020: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded).

<sup>2</sup> *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse*, compiled by the Baring Foundation, 2021: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-ethnically-diverse](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-ethnically-diverse).

of supporting existing and / or encouraging new Global Majority led organisations in the field of arts and mental health.

Grants of between £20,000 and £60,000 were made available for projects of at least two years led by a Global Majority led arts organisation to deliver creative opportunities to people with mental health problems. The participants could be from a Global Majority community but did not have to be. The aim of the funding was to develop the skills of artists and the track record of organisations to deliver work in the creative mental health sector.

The Foundation used the Arts Council England definition of a diverse organisation, which is that 51% of the Board AND senior leadership should come from a Global Majority community. (See Definitions, page 10.)

That year, 79 applications were received and trustees then awarded 13 grants to successful applicants.

## FURTHER GRANTS

In 2023, the Foundation gave a grant of £100,000 to NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care to develop the Myriad programme, a training and support programme for Global Majority arts practitioners, and in 2024 a grant of £40,000 to London Arts and Health for the Artists' Represent Recovery Network, a support programme for Global Majority artists in London. There are case studies of both these projects later in this report.

## SUPPORT FOR GRANT PARTNERS

The Foundation hosted two networking opportunities for grant partners at Brixton House theatre in South London, with a further final open conference planned for early 2026.

## GRANTS IN DETAIL

At the time of writing, this funding amounts to £1,634,503 in grants. £1,494,503 was given through open round funding through 38 grants. An additional £140,000 was given through invited grants, see above.

## Arts, mental health and refugees

Alongside funding for ethnically diverse communities with mental health problems, the Baring Foundation has been aware of the importance of work with refugees. Although their status in the UK is different and largely different organisations work with them, refugees also frequently face racism as well as the traumas they have experienced as part of the journey of being a refugee. So we see this work as adjacent to our racial equity programme but it is not included in this report. In 2023, we commissioned a report by Counterpoints Arts,<sup>3</sup> which we followed in 2024 with a capacity building grant of £100,000, also to Counterpoints, to work on creative mental health. This has led to a number of events and commissions throughout the UK.

A full list of grants for both rounds can be found on page 88 at the back of this report, as well as on the Foundation's website.

## Geographical Spread

As a national funder, the Foundation was keen to have a spread of organisations across the UK but resource was also to be focussed on where the need was. The most ethnically diverse region in the country is London with 46.2% of the population identifying as Asian, black, mixed or 'other' ethnic groups, and a further 17% with white ethnic minorities (according to the Census 2021). The West Midlands is the second most ethnically diverse region (20.8%) and then East Midlands (13.1%) followed very closely by the North West (12.9%). As expected, the majority of grants – 20, half – were made to organisations that were based in Greater London although three of these were either delivering nationally or outside of London altogether. Four grants were awarded to Birmingham organisations and five across Manchester, Liverpool and the north west of England and three in Yorkshire (South and West). There were fewer applications from the East Midlands and only one grant to Artcore in Derby. Outside of this, grants were awarded to organisations based in and for projects delivered in Brighton, Sheffield, Ipswich, Milton

**3** *Creatively Minded and Refugees*, Counterpoints Arts, 2023: [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-refugees](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-refugees).

**GRANTS IN NUMBERS**

**Total grant spend**



**Open rounds**

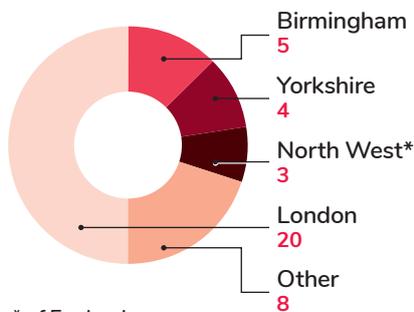


**Invited applications**



**Geographical spread**

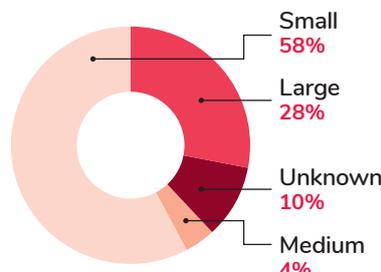
Number of grants



\* of England

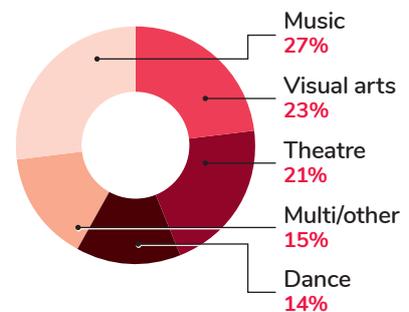
**Organisational size**

Percentage



**Art form**

Percentage



Keynes, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gloucester. No grants were made for work in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland; and only a handful of applications were received for work here.<sup>4</sup>

**Organisational size**

The majority of grant awards in the two open rounds – 58% – were given to small organisations with a turnover of less than £250,000<sup>5</sup>, although within this many of these had a turnover of less than £150,000. Medium organisations with a turnover between £250,000 and £750,000 represented 10% of the grants awarded and 28% went to large organisations (with a turnover of over £750,000).

**Art forms**

Neither round stipulated a preference for any particular art form. As highlighted in the Foundation’s original *Creatively Minded*<sup>6</sup> report, the art forms most prevalent in participatory arts activity for participants with mental health problems are visual arts, music and singing and theatre/drama. The organisations successful through these grant rounds also worked primarily with these art forms – with music, visual arts and theatre representing over 70% of the projects awarded funding through these two rounds.

Music was the main art form art form, accounting for 27.3% of the organisations. This reflects the popularity of music as a tool for creative community engagement. Visual

<sup>4</sup> However, the Baring Foundation has funded work in all three devolved nations – Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – under the Arts and Mental Health programme in general, largely but not exclusively through our partnerships with the relevant arts councils.

<sup>5</sup> The turnover figures relate to accounts filed in 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *Creatively Minded*, David Cutler, 2020.

arts was the second most common art form, making up 22.7% of the projects. Visual arts is a broad church – activities delivered as part of these projects included, but were not limited to, activities such as painting, weaving and photography. Theatre (drama) was also widely used, deployed by 20.5% of the organisations. Theatre projects often focus on storytelling and self-expression, giving participants the opportunity to develop their voice and tell their story their way. Dance also made a strong representation – accounting for 13.6% of the grants.

Many organisations used multiple art forms – combining music, drama, visual arts and crafts as a means of attracting participants and finally whilst only one organisation concentrated on writing on its own as a means of supporting self-expression and empowerment, writing featured in other projects where music and drama were also used as the main art forms.

### **Target groups**

A major objective of all of this funding was to increase the number of Global Majority arts practitioners working in creative mental health. One way to do this was to use funding to create employment opportunities for local artists from those communities, but many also offered additional training and other forms of career development support, of which there are a number of examples in the following report.

While the open round application guidelines did not stipulate who organisations should work with, the majority of projects were aimed at adults with mental health problems. Just over 25% grants were for organisations either working with children and young people who were adversely affected by mental health problems as part of their funded project or training artists to do so – see the case study by Akademi for example (page 12). Some organisations for such as Keneish Dance

and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra ran sessions for adults and young people – but separately. Others focused on particular groups, like Yaram Arts who engaged Global Majority mothers experiencing mental health problems in south east London, and Liverpool Lighthouse, who worked with refugee new mothers.

## **SOME DEFINITIONS**

### **Mental health problems**

Mental health is a highly contested area including in the language that is used. The Baring Foundation uses the phrase ‘mental health problem’, which is commonly deployed by organisations such as Mind and the NHS, but we recognise that some people may prefer other terms such as mental distress.

An entire book could be devoted to defining mental health problems, but currently these tend to be grouped into: psychoses (affecting around 3% of the population), of which Bipolar Spectrum Disorder is the best known; and the much more frequent Common Mental Disorders, especially anxiety and depression. Addictions, such as to drugs and alcohol, are included as mental health problems, as are conditions such as eating disorders and the poorly defined Personality Disorders.

### **Ethnically diverse communities**

There is no settled term to describe ‘ethnically diverse communities’ in the UK, with different phrases used over the years, including BAME, racialised minority and Global Majority, for example. We have used both ethnically diverse and Global Majority to describe this work and both terms are used in this report. We have not edited the language used in individual case studies, leaving writers to choose their preferred terms.

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# CASE STUDIES

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Photo courtesy of  
Bernie Grant Arts  
Centre, see page 24.

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# Akademi

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BY KAVYA IYER RAMALINGAM

Kavya is Programmes Producer at Akademi.

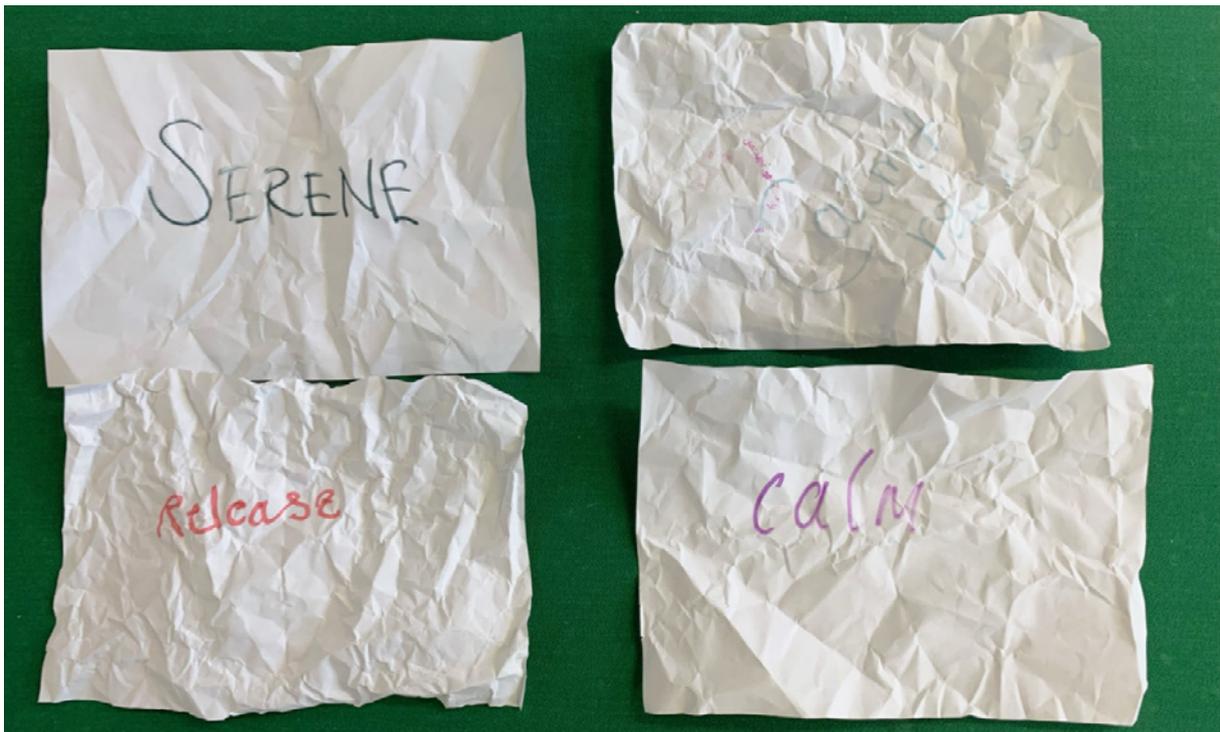


Photo courtesy of Akademi.

## ABOUT US

Established in 1979, Akademi is a London-based organisation dedicated to the development, and promotion of South Asian dance. With over four decades of experience delivering dance in community and health settings, our mission is rooted in inclusion, care and artistic excellence. We are known for creating impactful programmes that extend the joy and benefits of South Asian dance to underserved and racially minoritised communities.

Our work includes Dance Well, a project supporting people of all ages to improve their health and wellbeing through dance in care homes, hospital wards, and community spaces,

and Reach Out and Reveal, which delivers specialist weekly dance sessions for children and young people with autism and SEND in schools. These long-term programmes reflect our expertise in co-creating meaningful, accessible arts experiences with diverse communities and sector partners.

Akademi embeds robust research and evaluation in all our projects and nurtures underrepresented artists to work confidently in arts and health contexts. We place care at the centre of everything we do – care for people, for dance, for community and for the planet – ensuring our work continues to be a source of healing, empowerment and connection across cultures.

## OUR PROJECT: FEET FIRST

Our pilot project, Feet First, funded by the Baring Foundation, and delivered in partnership with South London and Maudsley NHS Trust (SLaM), trained South Asian dance artists to work with young people from racially minoritised backgrounds preparing to transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS). Research indicates this transition can be a highly stressful and often unsuccessful process, leaving young people adrift to try to manage their illness themselves. Discussions with the Snowsfield (Adolescent Unit) clinical staff helped to create a project plan to investigate the question: does a co-constructed movement/dance programme help mental health symptoms over a period of transition for 17- to 18-year olds?

Whilst Akademi has strong and long-term experience working within participatory contexts (namely SEND settings, mainstream schools, hospitals and care homes), Feet First represented an exciting new development for the organisation and CPD opportunity for our associated South Asian dance artists.

A key success of the programme was the partnership established with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM), specifically the Snowsfields Adolescent Unit.

Crucial to this was the involvement of Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Dr Partha Banerjea, whose support enabled Akademi to build essential trust and buy-in from hospital management and clinical staff, particularly the lead occupational health professional. Dr Banerjea's deep understanding of the value of arts-based interventions in clinical settings was instrumental in gaining access to an in-patient mental health unit.

Dr Banerjea also played a pivotal role in artist training, offering insight into the young people's mental health conditions, the structure and operation of in-patient services, and examples of effective therapeutic interventions. This foundation allowed Akademi's artists to approach their work with greater sensitivity and understanding.



Photo courtesy of Akademi.

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“ I commend the dance artists on their ability to adapt to suit the needs of the young people ‘in the moment’ – particularly when things don’t go to plan – which is very hard to do. ”

**Head Occupational Therapist**

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Originally planned for 2021/22 with out-patient groups, the Feet First project was delayed due to Covid-19, prompting Akademi to adapt the programme for in-patient delivery with support from SLaM. Following research and planning in Autumn 2022, workshops ran from March to November 2023 after artist training sessions with Maudsley staff. The programme included:

- four artist training days and setting orientations with Maudsley staff and the consultant psychiatrist. Our South Asian dance artists were trained to facilitate co-created workshops using movement, rhythm, gesture and mindfulness to support mental health and self-expression.
- 25 in-patient workshop sessions facilitated by Akademi's two artists, with clinical staff in support and support from Akademi's Artistic Director and Creative Learning Producer for 16 of the sessions.

Participant engagement ranged from one to five young people per session, with three sessions having no uptake.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The Feet First programme offered profound insights into both training artists and delivering creative interventions for racially minoritised young people with mental health challenges.

A key learning was the importance of redefining what “engagement” looks like in mental health settings. Progress might be a participant simply choosing to stay in the room or returning for subsequent sessions after initially remaining withdrawn. These moments, though subtle, signified emotional breakthroughs and trust-building.

For artists, working collaboratively with clinicians and navigating participants’ varying needs was a significant professional development opportunity. Artists learned to be flexible, responsive, and co-creative, letting sessions evolve based on participant mood, energy levels, and interests. Engagement tools such as musical instruments, body percussion, and poetry proved highly effective, offering multiple entry points to movement and expression.

Additionally, the diverse personalities and strengths of the lead and assistant artists highlighted the importance of team synergy and adaptability in emotionally complex environments.

Clinical feedback confirmed that dance artists were able to connect with participants in ways that clinical staff could not, offering non-judgmental, relatable adult interaction that supported the therapeutic environment.

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“ The young people open up to you (the artists) in a way they don’t with us. They are able to relate to you more than the other adults around them, they still see you as authority figures but ones who are more open and relatable. ”

**Activity Support Worker**

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## WHAT NEXT?

Akademi has been committed to developing future work at the intersection of dance and mental health.

We recently delivered a programme at the Highfield Unit at Warneford Hospital, Oxford, for young participants with eating disorders and OCD. They reported feeling more energised, relaxed, and confident after engaging in our movement and rhythm-based sessions.

Looking ahead, we plan to build on these learnings by developing regionally tailored programmes, establishing long-term partnerships with NHS trusts and community health organisations, and to advocate for the role of South Asian dance in supporting mental wellbeing across underserved populations.



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# Artcore

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**BY RUCHITA SHAIKH AND PHOEBE SHAW**

**Ruchita is CEO and Phoebe is Community Programme Producer at Artcore.**



Photo courtesy of Artcore.

## ABOUT US

Artcore is a visual arts charity based in Derby, dedicated to supporting and collaborating with local groups. Our mission is to create a welcoming, inclusive space that nurtures creativity and fosters connections across diverse communities. We offer a range of creative workshops designed to engage people from diverse backgrounds, including recent immigrants facing language barriers, schools, young people, unemployed adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with mental health challenges.

We are committed to working with racially minoritised groups, providing a platform for cultural representation and ensuring that everyone has access to creative opportunities. Our inclusive approach ensures that members of our diverse communities feel valued and supported, and that all participants, regardless of background, can engage in the healing and empowering potential of art.

At Artcore, we understand the power of creativity to bring about positive change. We focus on using art as a tool for empowerment, particularly for individuals with mental health challenges, to promote healing, self-expression, and community cohesion. Whether it's through

therapeutic arts, creative workshops, or community events, we work to create a supportive environment where individuals can connect, grow, and express themselves.

Our work within the community reflects our belief in the transformative potential of the arts to build stronger, more resilient communities, helping people to overcome challenges, find a sense of belonging, and enrich their lives.

“ This city (Derby) is in my heart just as my home country. This city is where my children are born and my grand-children so it is part of me. ”

**Participant**

## OUR PROJECT: UNTOLD STORIES

Untold Stories was a collaborative project in partnership with the Derby Bosnia Herzegovina Community Association, the Sahahra Centre, which supports elders in the local Pakistani community, and Artcore. It launched in

Photo courtesy of Artcore.



February 2023 and workshops concluded in February 2025. The Untold Stories exhibition opened in March 2025. This two-year project was designed to support recent immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and members of Derby's Bosnian and South Asian communities, aiming to create a space where participants could share their personal stories and experiences through art, offering them a powerful way to express themselves, heal, and connect with others.

Creative arts workshops were at the heart of the project, offering participants a variety of mediums to explore their journeys, emotions, memories, and identities. By focusing on the art of storytelling, the workshops allowed participants to reflect on their lived experiences in a supportive environment, where they could break down language barriers and communicate their unique journeys in meaningful ways.

The workshops used a range of media to help participants articulate their stories. Clay workshops provided a tactile method for shaping their experiences; collage and painting offered participants the chance to combine colours, textures, and imagery, creating visual narratives of their past and present. Booklet-making sessions encouraged participants to document their stories in written and drawing form to capture their experiences.

These creative processes were a means of healing and empowerment, allowing participants to reconnect with their sense of self, reflect on their resilience, and communicate their personal histories.

Over the course of the Untold Stories project, we worked with 11 artists and engaged more than 500 individuals in the workshops across Artcore, the Bosnia & Herzegovina Centre and The Sahahra Centre. This initiative provided a space for meaningful connections within Derby's diverse community and fostered a shared sense of identity and resilience.

“ She had been told we (immigrants) eat people, so she was scared but eventually the more we got to know each other more well and became best friends. ”

**Participant**



Photo courtesy of Artcore.

Art enriches lives and serves as a powerful tool for self-expression and identity. Through this project, participants have found a safe space to explore their creativity, forge friendships, and discover their own artistic voices in a safe and inclusive environment.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Through delivering the Untold Stories project,<sup>7</sup> we gained valuable insights into the resilience, strength, and creativity of the individuals from Derby's immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking communities. We learned that art can be a powerful tool for healing, self-expression, and connection. However, we were also aware of the sensitivity required when engaging with these individuals. Many participants had experienced significant trauma, and it was essential to approach their stories with care, ensuring that our workshops provided a safe space without re-traumatizing them by forcing them to recount their painful experiences.

One of the challenges we faced was building trust and relationships with refugees, particularly those attending advice appointments at the Bosnian Centre. Many joined our sessions while waiting for these appointments, making it difficult to establish continuous engagement. The transient nature of their participation meant that it was challenging to maintain consistent attendance in the workshops.

Despite these obstacles, we learned that creating a supportive, non-judgemental environment was crucial; that participants needed to feel secure in their space; that even brief moments of creative expression were transformative; and that each engagement may look different for each individual.

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“ We miss our family back home but we have to support them, so they can go to school. Everyone else there is very old so they cannot work, so when you are young and able to work you try to support them. ”

**Participant**

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## WHAT NEXT?

We are committed to continuing the relationships and partnerships formed through Untold Stories by fostering ongoing collaboration with the Bosnian Centre, The Sahahra Centre, and Artcore. We aim to create further opportunities for the communities involved to express their experiences through art, providing spaces for healing, connection, and empowerment.

Moving forward, we hope to build on the trust established, offering regular creative workshops. Our goal is to ensure these individuals continue to feel supported, valued, and heard, using art as a powerful means of sustaining community resilience and growth.



[www.artcoreuk.com](http://www.artcoreuk.com)

[www.artcoreuk.com/uncategorized/untold-stories-report](http://www.artcoreuk.com/uncategorized/untold-stories-report)

<sup>7</sup> The Untold Stories exhibition booklet can be found here: [www.artcoreuk.com/uncategorized/untold-stories-report](http://www.artcoreuk.com/uncategorized/untold-stories-report).

# Arts 2 Heal

BY BANU ADAM BEM

Banu is Founder and Manager of Arts 2 Heal.



Photo courtesy of Arts 2 Heal.

## ABOUT US

Arts 2 Heal is a community charity based in Blackburn with Darwen, dedicated to supporting individuals, particularly from racially minoritised groups, who face mental health challenges through creative arts. Arts 2 Heal was founded with the mission to use art as a tool for mental wellbeing; our organisation provides a safe, inclusive space for people to express themselves while addressing the stigma around mental health, especially within diverse communities. Our secondary aim is to build employability skills by empowering

participants through leadership roles, volunteer opportunities, and structured training, helping them gain confidence and experience.

Our volunteer-led team is made up of local residents, many of whom have personal experience with the challenges faced by these communities. This allows us to offer culturally sensitive services that resonate with the people we support. We have extensive expertise in working with South Asian communities especially those who are economically disadvantaged, isolated, or affected by trauma.



Photo courtesy of Arts 2 Heal.

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“ Before this, I never do art.  
Now, I feel happy when I paint. It helps  
my mind stay calm. ”

**Participant**

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Arts 2 Heal has a proven track record of providing visual arts, music, and drama workshops that promote self-expression, confidence, and mental wellbeing. Our programmes are designed to break down barriers, promote understanding, and provide a safe environment for participants to explore their mental health. We emphasise the importance of culturally relevant, accessible services, ensuring that language and cultural norms are respected.

By empowering individuals to express themselves through art, we help participants gain confidence, build stronger connections, and improve their mental health. Our work bridges the gap in access to mental health services within racially minoritised communities and promotes a more inclusive, culturally aware approach to mental wellbeing.

## OUR PROJECT: CREATIVE CANVAS

From September 2021 to March 2023, Arts 2 Heal delivered an 18-month project using creative arts to support mental wellbeing within the BAME community. The initiative

aimed to breakdown mental health stigmas, provide accessible artistic opportunities, and develop long-term community champions who could sustain the impact beyond the project.

The project engaged over 80 participants through three structured phases. In Phase 1, we ran visual art workshops featuring culturally relevant techniques such as batik, clay, and ebru marbling. These sessions introduced participants to art as a tool for wellbeing, providing a supportive space for creative expression and personal reflection. Participants were encouraged to explore different artistic techniques while discussing their emotional wellbeing, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

In Phase 2, selected participants enrolled in the ‘Learner to Leader’ course, designed to equip them with leadership and facilitation skills. Through structured training, practical experience, and mentoring, individuals learned how to design and lead their own art workshops. This phase aimed to build confidence, enhance employability skills, and encourage participants to take an active role in their communities by promoting positive mental health through art. Participants worked with experienced facilitators, explored different art mediums, and developed their own workshop ideas.

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“ My family see me different now.  
Before, I stay home and feel sad.  
Now, I go out, make art,  
and help people. ”

**Former participant, now a volunteer**

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Phase 3 focused on empowering community champions to lead outreach activities. Graduates of the course collaborated with local organisations, hosting pop-up workshops and participating in community events to advocate for the mental health benefits of art. The champions played a vital role in engaging wider audiences, ensuring the sustainability of the project beyond its initial duration.

The project was culturally sensitive, accommodating religious and family commitments, and working with mosques and community leaders to enhance accessibility.

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“Talking about feelings is not easy, but when we do art, it comes out naturally. I don't feel alone anymore.”

**Community Champion**

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As a result, the impact extended beyond the workshops. Two participants progressed onto teaching assistant courses, several enrolled in ESOL courses, and one went on to study Art at the University Centre at Blackburn College. One participant has successfully started her own henna painting business, offering services at weddings and events as a self-employed artist. Additionally, several participants chose to remain involved with Arts 2 Heal, volunteering to peer-mentor, lead and support creative workshops at Arts 2 Heal.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

The project provided valuable insights into training artists and delivering creative opportunities for individuals from racially minoritised communities facing mental health challenges.

One key lesson was the importance of cultural sensitivity. Success depended on understanding and respecting participants' cultural and religious values. By working with community leaders and religious scholars, Arts 2 Heal built trust and ensured workshops were accessible and inclusive.

Flexibility and accessibility were also crucial. Offering free resources, allowing participants to take projects home, and scheduling sessions around family commitments encouraged greater engagement, particularly for those with financial or time constraints. The most significant takeaway was the power of empowering participants as community

champions. Rather than being passive recipients, they took on leadership roles, facilitating workshops and advocating for mental health awareness. By the end of Phase 2, 20 participants had successfully completed training, exceeding initial targets. These champions have since contributed to cultural events, such as the Preston City Mela, ensuring that mental health advocacy through art continues beyond the project's timeline.

The long-term impact is evident, with champions now delivering outreach workshops, mentoring others, and strengthening community ties. This sustainable model demonstrates how creative engagement can foster mental wellbeing and lasting community change.

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“I never thought I can teach, but now I help others in workshop. It gives me confidence.”

**Learner to Leader workshop facilitator**

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**WHAT NEXT?**

As a volunteer-led organisation, we rely on volunteers with diverse skills and local knowledge to sustain our work. We now run an additional two workshops led by volunteer participants from this project. Moving forward, we aim to support these emerging artists in achieving their goals of becoming paid community artists. By providing mentorship and opportunities, we hope to help them establish sustainable creative careers.

We have secured funding to replicate this model with men from South Asian backgrounds, extending our reach and impact within the community.



# Arts for Health MK

BY BEN HEYWORTH

Ben is Director of Arts for Health MK (Milton Keynes).



Collage poetry workshop. Photo: Amanda Holiday.

## ABOUT US

Arts for Health MK (Milton Keynes) is based at Milton Keynes University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, where we care for the art collection, the largest permanent collection in Milton Keynes. We work both with staff at the hospital and in the wider community, delivering art workshops for many different groups of people facing health challenges, including people with dementia and young people going through a difficult time.

Our longest running programme is Arts on Prescription, which offers free 12 week art courses for adults with mental and physical health issues.<sup>8</sup>

## OUR PROJECT

In 2023, Arts for Health Milton Keynes partnered with Milton Keynes Islamic Arts and Culture (MKIAC) and Milton Keynes Arts and Heritage Alliance (AHA-MK) to deliver our Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse project in Milton Keynes.

Our programme was created and delivered by professional artists from diverse communities, who represent culturally centred practice in their chosen art form and who identify with one or more of the following local communities: LGBTQ+ communities, Eastern, Indo-European communities, Black, South Asian and Chinese communities.

<sup>8</sup> [artsforhealthmk.org.uk/Arts-on-Prescription](https://artsforhealthmk.org.uk/Arts-on-Prescription)

Alongside the individual projects, a dedicated CPD day was held at the beginning of the programme in March 2022 enabling all the artists to meet and to introduce them to the creative health sector. From here, the artists were given free rein to develop their own creative project serving their chosen diverse communities. The projects ran at different points in the year from April 2023 with the last project closing in December 2023.

A small evaluation budget was allocated to the work primarily towards understanding the key challenges and outputs and impact of the project on Arts for Health MK as an organisation and the artists themselves. Interviews with artists and stakeholders were undertaken at the start and finish of the projects alongside analysis of project documentation undertaken by each artist such as their project diaries and visits where appropriate to projects. Insights from these conversations and analysis provided valuable learning.

Five artists, all but one in the early stages of their careers, and all but one with little to no experience specifically in the arts for health

**Wearable art by Alice, Luca Bosani workshop.  
Photo: Luca Bosani.**



sector, developed and delivered projects for local diverse communities – developing their skills, networks, income potential and feeling valued with increased confidence and self-belief. This has already impacted careers: for example, since working on this project, one of our artists has done a stint as a resident artist at the V&A and another used her experience on this project to support a successful Global Talent VISA application to continue her work in arts and health in the UK for another five years.

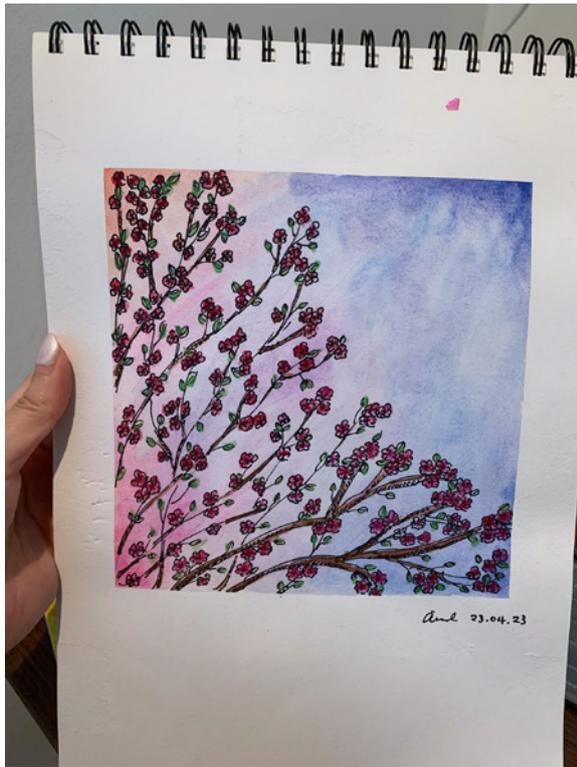
All of the participants and communities across the five projects reported improved mental wellbeing benefits: from young people being able to openly discuss racial bullying at school and realising they weren't the only ones experiencing this, to LGBTQ+ people exploring a part of their identity they never had before, or a South Asian woman making a new friend in a new city through dance. Participants reported increased self-confidence, reduced loneliness, new friendships, skills and experiencing fun and happiness.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Arts for Health MK has learnt a tremendous amount about what works and what doesn't when diversifying the artist talent pool and engaging target communities for greatest impact.

Dedicated project management and building trust through a wider partner network have been critical takeaways. We would argue that funders should set aside specific finance to support dedicated project management time and ideally, staffing. Arts for Health MK has developed positive new ways of working and resources as a direct result of this project and has developed several training resources in response to this project and will benefit from working with these diverse artists in future projects.

We've developed a new role called the Shadowing Artist, where we're getting some of those people that came through this project to work in some of our other programmes. They'll be supported by a more experienced artist in a Creative Health space, but still paid fairly. This is in direct response to the learning from this project and will benefit everyone.



Participant artwork, Ziyao Lin Art for Health workshop.

The artists and participants fed back observations around the spaces the work physically took place in. Being in a space that feels familiar was felt to have a significant impact on how open, frank and powerful the creative engagement and impact was.

Similarly, many of the artists self-reported current and past mental health conditions ranging from depression to eating disorders to anxiety. Some also reported low self-esteem and confidence. We realised how important it is to provide a work environment and culture that cares for our artists' wellbeing in the same way we care about our wider public beneficiaries. As a result of this programme, we now run 'Supportive Conversations' four times a year in partnership with MK Arts Centre to support

the artistic community in Milton Keynes, and these have been a great success. The sessions have touched on themes that include boundary setting, managing unhelpful behaviours, approaches to creating the right environment, listening to and raising quiet voices, and peer support.

In addition to supporting personal wellbeing, this project was a catalyst to developing some important CPD opportunities for artists working in healthcare settings. At the time of this project, we were unable to find any best practice benchmarks for introducing artists to arts for health and helping them to have a holistic view of the complex ecology of NHS systems. We devised our own dedicated CPD day at the outset of the project to 'onboard' our artists with the sector. Our CPD day was delivered by guest speakers, experts in their fields (including some grant partners from other Baring Foundation funded organisations), and spanned the Mental Health Service Ecology, Arts Workshops – Defining Quality, Safeguarding and Support and Cultural Perspectives on Mental Health among other topics. We now have a blueprint to run similar CPD days for the future.

Perhaps most critically we are now no longer an organisation that you could argue is only focusing on one demographic. The criticism that I heard when I came into Arts for Health MK, from the then chair, was that we do a great job of delivering things for young white girls. Now we're doing a lot more than that. The charity now delivers annually a programme of culturally adapted community outreach in partnership with the AFD (African Diaspora Foundation) and The Wisdom Principle, effectively engaging with BAME communities and supporting over 150 children and young people from these diverse communities to access workshops in visual arts.



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# Bernie Grant Arts Centre

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BY TEJ ADELEYE

Tej is a Producer at Bernie Grant Arts Centre.

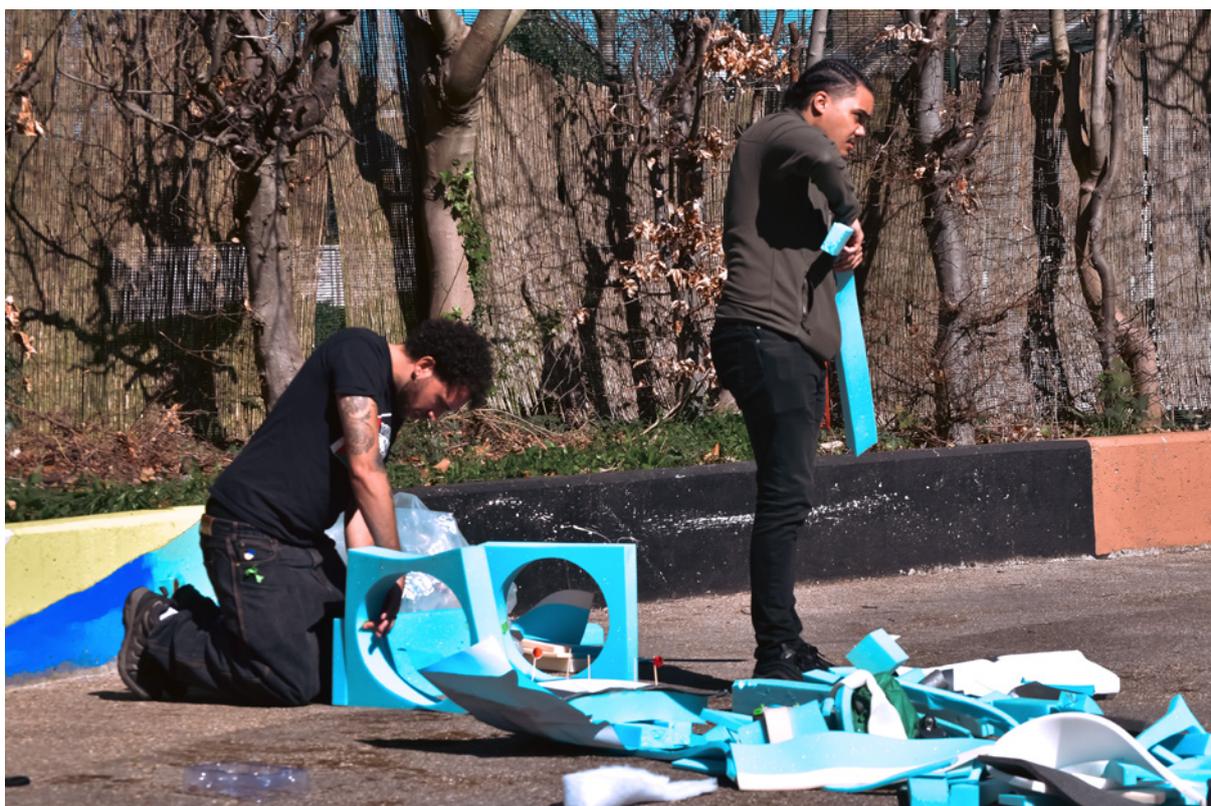


Photo courtesy of Bernie Grant Arts Centre.

## ABOUT US

Bernie Grant Arts Centre is a venue that platforms multidisciplinary art from predominantly Black and Global Majority practitioners. Although we are not mental health specialists, our team is made up of people who have worked in formal and informal education settings that support students living with complex mental health conditions and challenging backgrounds. As a Centre inspired by the legacy of Bernie Grant, we believe in the power of art to create environments, opportunities and processes that offer mental health support and interventions.

## OUR PROJECT

This project began with a vision to see how art could work as a supportive intervention tool for mental health. We have been working with our partners at Haringey Learning Partnership, an alternative provision school based in Wood Green. A core part of their offering is their RESPITE programme, where for six weeks excluded pupils are given support before, hopefully, reintegrating back into their mainstream schools or starting new chapters. The students are often a mixed group from year 7 to year 10. Cohorts typically consist of 8-10 students, who, alongside their academic

challenges, are often navigating mental health conditions and difficult circumstances in their familial and social lives.

We work with an established artist as our creative lead for each cohort. At the start of the six-week journey, we speak to teachers to understand the needs and backgrounds of each student. The RESPITE programme aims to take students on a transformative journey, where they can feel more hope and agency around their futures, and access support for their specific needs. Working with the artists, teachers and students to create accessible, trauma-informed programmes of activity that support this journey, we also hope to offer opportunities our students might not otherwise have.

To date, we've been lucky to have worked with the visual artist Olivia Twist to paint a vibrant mural in a disused part of the school; music producer and sound artist Melo Zed to create immersive soundscapes as part of an exhibition at the Centre; and we are currently working with the artist and musician Jacob V Joyce, who is also doing PhD research exploring education and school exclusions – to build live racing car sets to explore trauma, emotions and communication.

A huge part of the work is also about tuning into the complex needs of the students, so we have had cohorts visit the London Equine Therapy Centre for integrated therapy sessions with horses and ponies for people with mental conditions, complex trauma, who are neurodivergent or need somatic support. These sessions help with processing experiences, confidence, leadership skills, emotional regulation, somatic awareness and communication.

Our model then allows for students to explore both their own creativity and their experiences through an artistic medium: by working with world-class artists, we offer students opportunities and space to explore their own creativity.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We've learnt how to integrate input from various stakeholders to build a dynamic arts education programme. This includes working with teachers, counsellors and support staff, taking into account existing relationships (and

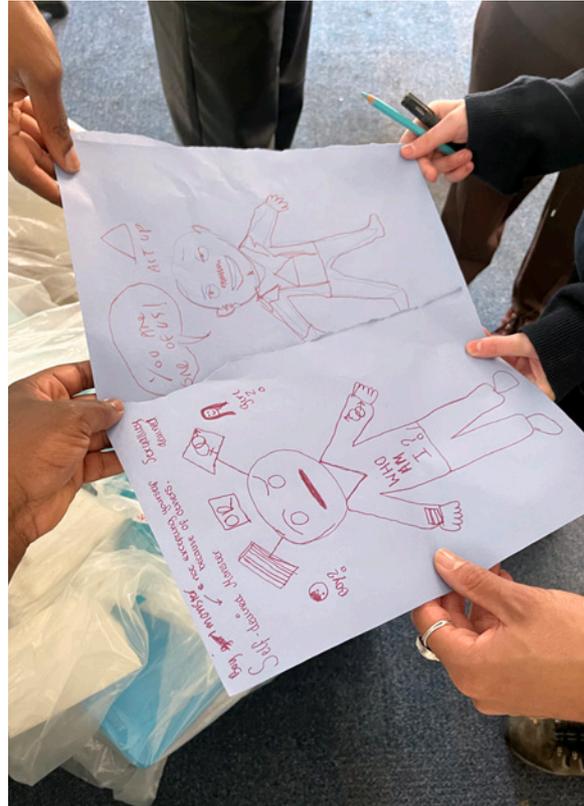


Photo courtesy of Bernie Grant Arts Centre.

correspondence) with caregivers and the students' original schools. A big part of this has been integrating our creative plans with the individual profiles we are given for each student, so that our programme supports the 'transformation' journey the students undertake whilst they are on the RESPITE programme.

We've had to create a flexible programme that accounts for the changing needs of the students – over the course of the programme our students have had intense crises, including serious hospitalisations and transitions in care, alongside navigating the day-to-day challenges of their conditions.

We also worked with the school to develop creative approaches to support the emotional triggers of the students working through challenges around their ethnic/racial identities, and traumas around their countries of origin alongside. Some of this is about making space to process issues of identity for students who are Black, Kurdish or from a Global Majority background, but also complex issues around gender and sexuality.

We designed the project to facilitate Black/Global Majority artists as leaders for the project, so we could support more practitioners

to work in the realm of creative health. Our project offers space for training and development for each artist to grow their facilitation skills and to make creative work in an unusual way. The project pushes us to think about how to create a programme of work that supports the mental health of our artists in the process of delivering this work with students living in very challenging contexts.

### WHAT NEXT?

Over the next year, we plan to collaborate with mental health practitioners, education activists and artists to deepen our practice and create a resource that can be circulated with educators, artists and mental health providers. We see this as part of our work towards racial justice – our work with the school to date has illuminated just how much minoritised young people are still falling through the cracks of mental health provision. One of our artists wants to incorporate this project and continue working with the school as part of their PhD. We hope to offer young people more opportunities to develop skills and make work. We plan to work closely with local mental health providers to understand how to improve access to support for students.

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“ I’ve said it before, but we have to trust the process, and today we had some really profound breakthroughs from some students, and BGAC has been the catalyst. It takes a lot for our young people to open up and reflect on their own experiences of bullying, and place that at the centre of some of the behaviours which have led them to us.

Another young person felt comfortable enough to ask some incredible questions around LGBTQ+ identities. I’m not sure it was apparent, but some other students were milling around that conversation, maybe not confident enough to join in, but certainly taking it in.

It’s such important work you do with our students, and yet again with this cohort there have been some beautiful moments. ”

**Colm Connell, Head of RESPITE programme,  
Haringey Learning Partnership**

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# Bethlem Gallery

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BY SOPHIE LEIGHTON

Sophie is Director of the Bethlem Gallery.



Amber Roper, courtesy of the Bethlem Gallery.

## ABOUT US

Bethlem Gallery is a visual arts organisation in south-east London. An independent charity, we are based at Bethlem Royal Hospital, a psychiatric hospital that is part of South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. SLaM provides the widest range of mental health services in the UK.

Bethlem Gallery was established in 1997 to work closely with the occupational therapy department and showcase the professional

work of artists connected to the hospital. Today, our remit has broadened and artists remain at the core of everything we do. We work with artists to programme creative activities, projects and commissions. Working across South London and the UK, we support artists' professional development and socially engaged practice.

Many of the artists we work with have experienced mental health services and intersectional discrimination including racial discrimination.

## OUR PROJECT

This funding enabled us to fund two artist commissions for artworks by Global Majority artists; support a co-production process with a steering group including service users, carers and NHS staff; provide 1:1 supervision sessions with a psychologist for artists and staff on the project; support a trainee producer with a development opportunity; and provide staff training sessions.

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“I needed to talk to somebody about what just happened just to air things because I was feeling particularly emotional, so we would always do a debrief after each session, because they were intense. I wasn't used to debriefs, but it was really helpful to start that process.”

**Commissioned artist**

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This work formed part of a project to commission artworks for a new hospital building, New Douglas Bennett House<sup>9</sup>, and to give the gallery team more resource to develop a specifically anti-racist approach. The wider commission project took place from 2022-24 and worked with 157 participants across the hospital community, and delivered 31 workshops. There is a full evaluation for the wider commissions programme.<sup>10</sup>

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“The producer was like the conduit between me and the staff, like introducing me to people I didn't know and sorting all this stuff out. So I think if it hadn't been for her, it would have been awkward for me to gain access to that environment. So it was lucky having somebody who supported you from the site itself.”

**Commissioned artist**

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The specific commissions this grant supported were by artists, Nisha Duggal and Amber Roper.

Nisha Duggal developed Wanderings, a series of ten calming and playful murals based on the outcome of creative workshops with service users of Nelson Ward, the adult acute inpatient ward for women at Lambeth Hospital. Working with a variety of materials, the participants developed the concept of co-produced murals together. Each piece incorporates mark-making gathered through the workshop sessions, expressing the joy of the handmade, the cathartic power of creating and the value of collaboration.

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“Today's workshop brought a burst of much needed focus and creativity to an otherwise very tense and unsettled ward... Anxiety levels were high and many women complained that they hadn't been able to sleep at night because of noise levels.”

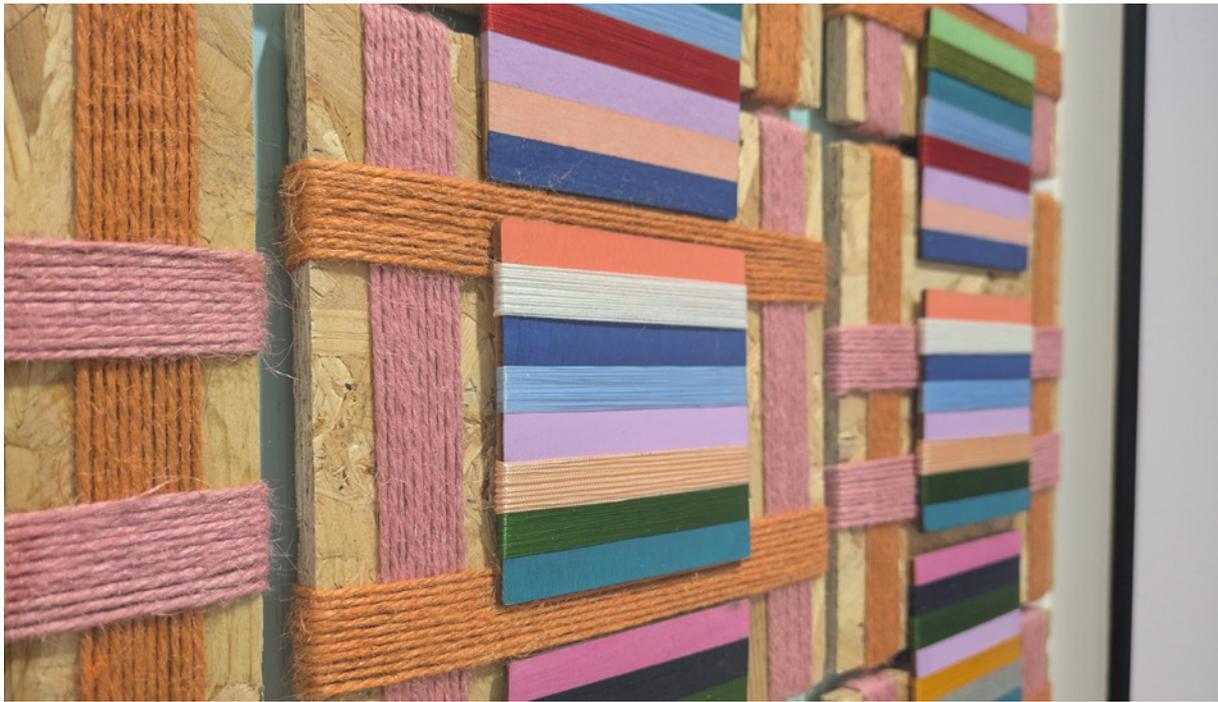
**Ward Staff Member**

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Amber Roper developed Grow Closer, a series of seven artworks based on the outcome of weaving, collaging and wrapping workshops held with adults with experience of mental health services, and their loved ones. Amber Roper curated a space for attendees to share their feelings and ideas regarding places of support for mental health, through conversation and creating artwork. Discussions around colour, the lack of fresh flowers, and artworks being 'the window of the room' in mental health facilities, informed Roper's intention for Grow Closer, a series of weavings that serve as a talking point to bring people together.

<sup>9</sup> [bethlemgallery.com/projects/pears-maudsley-centre-and-douglas-bennett-house](https://bethlemgallery.com/projects/pears-maudsley-centre-and-douglas-bennett-house)

<sup>10</sup> *Bethlem Gallery Capital Build Art Strategy Report 2024*: [bethlemgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Bethlem-Gallery-Capital-Build-Art-Strategy-Report-2024\\_R02.pdf](https://bethlemgallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Bethlem-Gallery-Capital-Build-Art-Strategy-Report-2024_R02.pdf).



Amber Roper, courtesy of the Bethlem Gallery.

“ I loved it! I almost didn't come due to my anxiety and I'm so glad I did. I loved the conversations and learning the techniques, it was inspiring! It really made a HUGE difference to my day. ”

Service user

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We learnt that projects, particularly co-produced projects, need a lot more time and resource than can ever be anticipated. This was also the case as it was part of a capital project where deadlines changed. We had factored in co-produced brief development, supervision time, peer support opportunities and development opportunities for artists, but of course we could have factored in more resource.

Each artist had different access needs and ways of working, and so the team evolved ways of working to suit the artists, the steering

groups, and our resources. Initiating oversight therapy earlier in the process proved crucial for supporting artists dealing with the emotional challenges of developing their work in mental health settings.

Some of the feedback from service users participating in workshops highlighted the importance of participants feeling represented across the project team. There was also a lot of learning for the Gallery team and artists in navigating ownership of artworks made in participatory ways, and expectations of art commissions specifically in hospital settings.

## WHAT NEXT?

We have developed our ways of working and developing commissions, and have been able to work in more depth with subsequent commissions. We plan to evolve this work, dependent as always on funding. As a gallery team, we think a lot about how we support and value intersecting identities. We are always working on inclusive practices, and supporting and developing anti-racist, ethical approaches to making, showing and selling artwork.



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# Creative Future

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**BY MATT FREIDSON**

**Matt is Deputy Director at Creative Future.**

## ABOUT US

Creative Future is based in Brighton and works nationally to support underrepresented creative people – those who face barriers to access and opportunity due to mental or physical ill-health, disability, neurodiversity, survivors, substance misuse, and people from racially minoritised, LGBTQIA+ and working class backgrounds. Two of our most common user groups are those with mental health challenges (60%) and racially minoritised backgrounds (30%); however, most of those we support face interdependent/intersectional barriers.

Our focus is on artistic, career and professional development, which we achieve through workshops, training, mentoring, networks, competitions, showcasing and publications.

## OUR PROJECT: IMPART

With the support of the Baring Foundation, Creative Future delivered IMPART – a training, development, mentoring, and workshop programme for emerging global majority writers with mental health issues. It aimed to:

- address the key issues for writers who face barriers to working as creative writing tutors;
- provide opportunities for participants of these backgrounds to engage with creative writing;
- provide a staff opportunity at Creative Future for a Project Assistant from a Global Majority background.

The project accomplished the following.

- We recruited and provided training for six writers to develop skills, confidence and experience in teaching creative writing.

- We matched these writers with mentor/trainers who are experienced creative writing tutors from the same backgrounds (10 hours of mentoring/1:1 work each).
- Trainee/mentees and trainer/mentors co-designed and co-produced 34 sessions (84 hours) of unique workshops for 70 underrepresented people.
- We facilitated five Zoom masterclasses on safeguarding, non-traditional spaces, teaching writing with children/young people, online & DIY writing workshops.
- Through the project we increased the size and diversity of our pool of writing tutors, for future workshops as well as others in our partner networks.
- The Project Assistant we recruited for the project has been offered an ongoing role.

We kept a flexible approach as a pilot project co-produced with the mentors and mentees and made several changes from our original proposal. We:

- offered a training bursary rather than face-to-face meet-up days at the mentees' request;
- increased paid hours to mentors/mentees to improve learning, development and quality;
- increased the Project Assistant's fee due to inflation/more competitive recruitment.

Since the project completed at the end of 2022, we have stayed in touch with all six writers. Three of them continue to teach workshops for Creative Future. The Project Assistant has since been promoted to Administrator and remains part of the Creative Future staff team.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

- A training bursary from the start and/or a structured formal external training package would have enhanced the programme.
- A larger cohort of writers would have created a larger peer group for future connections/ shared learning. One writer had to drop out part-way and the slot could not be re-offered due to time/resources already committed.
- Peer mentoring is crucial for those from the target backgrounds.
- A more structured initial approach to setting up the mentor/mentee relationship is warranted.
- Confidence building and making allowances/ adjustments for people's ongoing issues are key.
- People with mental health issues face compounded and ongoing difficulties, requiring extended timeframes, pastoral/ ongoing support, and confidence building. Additional staff time and/or resources for external coaching would alleviate this.
- Discussion/consultation is needed around labelling/targeting, especially around beneficiaries' willingness to identify publicly as having mental health issues, but also around the diversity of experience within racially minoritised communities.

## WHAT NEXT?

We have been seeking support to continue, expand and roll out this work since the end of our grant from Baring Foundation, but have not been able to secure further resources. Our key aims are to:

- provide a menu/package of training/ CPD to our creative writing tutors in key areas (e.g. Mental Health First Aid, Trauma Informed Practice, Working with Neurodiverse People);
- provide reflective practice sessions, either 1:1 or in a group, for all our writing tutors (all of our writing tutors are past service users with lived experience of underrepresentation);

- provide further bespoke/1:1 support for prospective tutors with lived experience who require support and development to deliver their first course;
- ideally, to run a second, similar/improved IMPART programme for an additional and somewhat larger cohort (10 writers).

In developing our original proposal, we continuously circled back to a comment by a past Creative Future Writers' Award winner from a Black British background:

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“ In my family (and for others I've spoken with) people don't think of setting up a career in the creative industries because it's not what people in their world do! As a child, wanting to write was my guilty secret, an impossible pipe dream. As an adult, I felt I couldn't afford to fail as I had bills to pay etc. and so the dream receded further.

If you try something and fail it confirms the narrative in your head that you weren't good enough in the first place and so you retreat. So, until I met Creative Future, I didn't think seriously about dedicating my life to trying and repeatedly failing, but now there's nowhere I'd rather be. ”

**Past participant, winner of the Creative Future Writers' Award**

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She became a mentee on IMPART. At the end of the project, she wrote to us:

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“ Just to say thank you for the amazing support and opportunities you've given me to learn and grow. I read the comments on the evaluation forms and feel so proud of what I've achieved so far. You actually change actual lives. ”

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# Creative Health Camden

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BY LI WILLIAMS

Li is Project Manager and an Artist Facilitator at Creative Health Camden.



Photo courtesy of Creative Health Camden.

## ABOUT US

Creative Health Camden is a social prescribing charity, based in Kentish Town Health Centre, North London. We deliver projects that encourage patients to use the arts as a complementary addition to their health and wellbeing. We also offer a benefits advisor service and previously, a food bank.

We work in partnership with the James Wigg and Queens Crescent GP Practices. Participants can be referred by their GP or approach us independently.

We have a gallery space, on the first floor of the health centre, with further display space on the ground floor. Our exhibitions are generated from our creative arts groups, and from artists with practices that focus on arts and health.



Photo courtesy of Creative Health Camden.



Photo courtesy of Creative Health Camden.

## OUR PROJECT: SOCIAL SHAPLA

Our Social Shapla project for Bangladeshi women was developed with the aim of diversifying our demographic, and is currently the only CHC project aimed exclusively at a minority ethnic group. We recognised that reluctance to access health services may be due to language barriers, medicalised vocabulary and cultural attitudes to mental ill health. Therefore we needed to offer a safe, easily accessible space for this community, with opportunities for creative social activity, encouraging them to regard the health centre as a benign resource.

Initially the project was to have a larger reach amongst Camden's minority ethnic residents, but connections were difficult to make and we decided to focus on the established Bangladeshi community in Kentish Town.

The project began in November 2021. We held focus groups, seeking opinions on creative projects and health centre use – what would encourage or be a barrier to participation? Many in the focus group used little English and we found others were speaking for them. Consequently we recruited an outreach worker, someone local, a familiar face in her community and a Sylheti speaker. It was important we involve someone who could access closed community events and religious settings and speak to the community. We also recruited two bilingual interns from the local area. One, a recent fine art graduate, was asked to help develop and facilitate some of the workshops.

“ I never thought I'd print a moon from a polystyrene plate, I never did these things even when I was young. ”

**Participant**

We offered weekly Wednesday art sessions experimenting with the following:

- drawing with different mediums – pastels, pencils, charcoal, biro, inks, electrical tape, collage
- painting – watercolours, acrylics and oils
- printmaking techniques
- willow weaving
- clay work
- textile printing
- bookmaking
- embroidery
- textile weaving

As the participants became comfortable using the project, health talks/activities were introduced, for example Breathing for Wellbeing and Menopause talks with a Q&A. These were popular and later supported by themed art projects, allowing issues to be discussed further.

In August 2023, the Social Shapla project held an outdoor event in the health centre garden. Family and friends were invited to enjoy art projects, play areas, mehndi, face painting and refreshments. One of the group,

a caterer selling to the Bengali community, was employed to provide food. The event was successful with good feedback.

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“ I look forward to coming every Wednesday, I have made new friends. ”

**Participant**

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In June 2024, an exhibition of the project's artwork was hung in both Kentish Town and Queens Crescent GP practices. Our group, none of whom had had experience of work displayed publicly, were surprised and delighted by its impact and the positive feedback it generated.

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“ It (the exhibition) made my work look important, like we had something in common with famous artists - like Picasso or Monet. ”

**Participant**

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We also included sessions for Bangladeshi teenagers in the school holidays and some of these girls assisted with art projects and refreshments at the outdoor event. The Baring Foundation funding had been used by February 2023, but we sought further funding and are currently continuing the project.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The challenges connecting with this community meant that the project developed more slowly than anticipated. We found it difficult to persuade participants of the value of leisure time for themselves.

Project logistics need to accommodate religious beliefs which strongly influence everyday life. Sessions were developed to create as little disruption as possible to prayer times, family duties and religious practices. Attendance lowered during Ramadan (with simpler activities offered), and sessions around Eid were cancelled. Workshop content had to be culturally sensitive and also accommodate literacy and language constraints within the group. Most attendees were unused to making art and were pleased and surprised with their work. They often reported elevated mood after the sessions.

We realised the group needed weekly phone reminders, which also reassured them that they had become part of a small community and were missed when they couldn't attend.

As participants became familiar with the CHC/Health Centre provision, some requested assistance booking menopause clinic and health appointments. We also saw an increase in Bangladeshi women using the food bank.

While this was not originally intended as a single sex group, it became apparent that a mixed group offer would not have been successful.

The inclusion of a skilled outreach worker from the local community proved to be very valuable, allowing us to gain trust and transcend the language barrier.

## WHAT NEXT?

We will continue to encourage new participants and seek further funding to continue the project, including holiday workshops for the 12-18 age group.

We are planning a further art exhibition and summer garden event, as well as gallery visits. Social Shapla will also be collaborating with The Museum of Youth Culture on an intergenerational project later this year.



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# East London Dance

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BY NZINGA MASCALL AND MAREN ELLERMANN

Nzinga is Community & Wellbeing Manager  
and Maren is Creative Producer at East London Dance.



The BRAINWAVES cohort. Photo courtesy of East London Dance.

## ABOUT US

East London Dance (ELD) has been a pioneer in dance development for 37 years. We support young people, artists, choreographers, producers, and east Londoners to express their creativity, gain professional opportunities and inspire positive social change. Rooted in Newham, we're proud to serve a community with rich diversity and cultural heritage; 76% of our beneficiaries and artists we work with are from the Global Majority.

We invest in the next generation of dance leaders, supporting their development and inspiring them to enact positive social change. Each year, our programmes engage thousands, providing training, participation opportunities, development programmes and pathways into sustainable, healthy, creative careers.

Producing outstanding performances and events showcasing the next generation of creative talent, we average a yearly 10,000 engagements across 700+ workshops, classes

or events. We support 100+ early-career artists through employment, free space and mentorship. 75% of those employed are from the Global Majority.

Structural inequalities are deep-rooted in east London; with the UK's highest youth unemployment levels. Social isolation in London's young people leads to poor levels of mental wellbeing, with 50% of lifetime mental illness starting by the age of 14. Our local community face many socio-economic and health inequalities. Newham is one of the most deprived authorities in England, with 24.5% of Newham residents earning below the Living Wage and 49% of children living in poverty. Newham is also in the top 10 most dangerous boroughs for crime, particularly knife crime.

We stand as a catalyst for change, promoting creativity and wellbeing as the foundation of broadening perspectives. Our aim is to build a more equitable and inclusive creative industry, by removing the structural barriers that people we work with face in pursuing creative careers and improving their outlook and resilience to mental health challenges.

## OUR PROJECT: BRAINWAVES

BRAINWAVES is a transformative artist development programme dedicated to nurturing the wellbeing, resilience, and mental health of participatory dance artists from the Global Majority. This initiative has empowered artists with essential tools to lead, create, and support communities navigating trauma and mental health challenges.

Recognising the urgent need for accessible mental health training, we launched an open call, selecting 10 artists, educators, outreach workers, and community leaders to form our first cohort. From May to December 2023, they engaged in certified training, workshops, peer learning, and masterclasses, setting in motion a ripple effect of improved mental health and wellbeing throughout the dance industry.

Participants were paid to complete specialised training in Mental Health First Aid, Suicide Awareness, NSPCC Level 1 Safeguarding, Trauma Aware practices with Spark2Life, and Trauma and Adversity Training with YoungMinds. Equipped with these skills,

they have begun applying their new knowledge, reinforcing safer spaces for both themselves and their communities.

Beyond personal growth, the programme had a broader impact by:

- strengthening our in-house expertise by certifying a Youth Mental Health Facilitator to offer affordable training to artists and the wider sector;
- producing a comprehensive evaluation report, enabling peers to build on shared learning;
- enhancing our understanding of how artists can navigate triggering subject matter while safeguarding their own wellbeing;
- identifying the need for culturally competent mental health training and role models with lived experiences leading the way.

100% of BRAINWAVES participants said:

- the programme allowed them to be themselves;
- the sessions gave them the tools to feel more competent in their creative practice;
- the programme had a positive impact on improving their confidence, resilience, wellbeing, creativity, motivation to lead and ability to collaborate.

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“ BRAINWAVES has given me the confidence, validation and crucial information to make sure that I can move forward as a facilitator that takes mental health seriously and is able to safeguard all of my participants – able to understand where people are coming from. ”

**Cheyenne Ettienne-Chen, facilitator**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

### Accessibility and representation is essential

For freelance artists, mental health training is often financially out of reach. BRAINWAVES challenged this reality, providing a paid opportunity for participants to engage in

certified mental health training. This allowed the participants the freedom to fully engage with the programme without the burden of lost income.

### **Demand for this programme was high**

The demand for this initiative was undeniable. 42 dance artists applied, highlighting recurring themes that shaped the programme itself: stigma, identity, safety and language.

### **Diversity of mental health professionals is needed**

Our Community & Wellbeing Manager trained as a Youth Mental Health First Aid Facilitator. As the only black woman in her course, she recognised the need for mental health training models that reflect diverse lived experiences and address mental health stigma within Global Majority communities. BRAINWAVES opened up critical conversations with training providers, advocating for more inclusive and culturally competent frameworks that acknowledge race, religion, and culture in mental health training.

### **Creating a supportive environment enhanced engagement**

Recognising the emotional depth of these sessions, we provided the participants with hot meals, fostering an atmosphere of care, connection, and mutual support. These moments of sharing meals strengthened relationships, ensuring that artists felt valued and protected while tackling challenging topics.

### **Employability**

By equipping the BRAINWAVES cohort with certified training and confidence to work with people with mental health challenges, their employment opportunities have substantially expanded, both within an East London Dance setting and beyond. In the current mental health crisis, artists with understanding of the urgency of artistic mental health interventions are extremely desirable.

“Skills sharing was a highlight, learning from each other and gaining different skills from different conversations and practices... It's the community that's being built at East London Dance through a mental health and wellbeing practice.”

**Isaac Ouro-Gnao**

### **WHAT NEXT?**

Looking ahead, we hope to see artists from the Global Majority not only receive essential training but help reshape the conversation around mental health in creative spaces.

It is clear BRAINWAVES is an essential programme that should run yearly to maintain this level of proactive intervention and continue to equip communities with the tools to navigate mental health challenges with confidence and care.

We continue to share our expertise, offering training sessions to help institutions embed culturally competent mental health strategies in their work. Our current longstanding relationships with Young Minds, CAHMS and recently with SOAS CAHMRA are key to widen our reach and maintaining relevance, ensuring that mental health support is integrated, community-driven, and tailored to the diverse needs of artists from the Global Majority. Strategic impact-sharing moments with partner organisations will highlight the transformative effects of BRAINWAVES, encouraging greater investment in Global Majority communities.

BRAINWAVES continues to have sector-wide impact. It laid the groundwork for continued advocacy and employment support for artists, within East London Dance and beyond. It shifts the landscape of mental health training in the dance industry and empowers artists from the Global Majority to become role models in their respective communities.



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# Good Vibrations

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BY JANE GIBB

Jane is Head of Delivery at Good Vibrations.



Photo courtesy of Good Vibrations.

## ABOUT US

Established in 2003, Good Vibrations is a national charity working in England and Scotland. We are all remote-based with a registered office in Sheffield.

We support marginalised people in the UK to develop life and work skills through communal music making, primarily using the Indonesian gamelan orchestra.

We work in prisons, YOIs, secure hospitals and in the community with people excluded from the arts.

Our courses support people to see themselves in a more positive light, to reach their potential, and to develop their confidence and communication skills such as listening and team-work.

We work with approximately 700 people yearly, with a mix of regular weekly sessions in secure hospitals and the community. We also run week-long intensive courses in prison, offering people the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised accreditation.

Many of the people we work with have mental health issues, many of whom are also neurodivergent. In Glasgow, we work with people who have learning disabilities, who are supported by carers. In Sheffield, our weekly sessions are with adults from ethnically diverse backgrounds, with mental health issues, who are often isolated in their communities. We built up a network of organisations supporting worked with such as those working with asylum seekers, refugees, women experiencing isolation, and men facing poor mental health and isolation.

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“ I loved being in a creative space where it was made clear that there were no wrong creative actions. It was great to meet, talk to and make music with people I normally otherwise wouldn't meet. ”

**Participant**

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## OUR PROJECT

In June 2021, we were awarded a two-year grant to extend our 'Resonate' community music project in Glasgow to reach more ethnically diverse participants, and to train four ethnically diverse music facilitators.

In the first year, the groups we worked with had very complex life situations and we didn't progress in the way we had hoped. After discussion, we changed delivery of the gamelan sessions from Glasgow to Sheffield where we were setting up a new community hub. Learning from past difficulties, we decided to run the gamelan sessions on a weekly basis rather than intensive weeks to accommodate people's commitments.

We re-orientated the two, week-long intensive projects to run 22 weekly sessions and taster sessions for groups supporting people from ethnically diverse backgrounds. We built a network of organisations supporting asylum seekers, refugees, women experiencing isolation, and men facing poor mental health and isolation. We ran a series of gamelan sessions exclusively for Family Voice Sheffield, for women with limited English who face



Photo courtesy of Good Vibrations.

multiple barriers to accessing services and support. In total, we worked with 43 people who regularly attended the sessions.

In year 1, we trained two assistants from diverse backgrounds to become fully-fledged facilitators. They are an incredible addition to our team, delivering weekly gamelan workshops, week-long projects in the community and in prisons.

In year 2, we recruited and trained two ethnically diverse musicians who had come through our Keeping In Touch programme and who had been project participants. They went through a recruitment process and a formalised training programme. One is now a successful performance artist, poet and playwright. The other is a successful rap artist and talent agent.

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“ The equality in the group and the empowerment. Everyone feeling like they can take part. ”

**Participant**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

This work challenged us to think deeply about how we remove barriers to equality and how we actively engage with people from all backgrounds. We felt our approach, values and activities are inclusive. We work with a diverse range of people but we are still not yet as diverse, or as representative of the people we work with, as we want to be.

It also enabled us to decide we would no longer run week-long, community-based projects as we learnt that people in the community have very complex lives and cannot commit to a week-long course.

We also learned about the best way to build community networks – and through Baring Foundation support our Sheffield project was then funded for two years by the National Lottery. We have funding for another 10 months, and we will be fundraising to keep the Sheffield project going.

We are now committed to training two people each year from ethnically diverse backgrounds – which has been part funded by the National Lottery.

**Good Vibrations has now sadly closed.**



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# Greater Manchester NHS Integrated Care: Myriad Project

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BY JULIE MCCARTHY

Julie is Strategic Lead for Creative Health at NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care.



Myriad networking event. Photo © Richard Tymon.

## ABOUT US

Greater Manchester's Creative Health Programme is a nationally recognised model for how place-based strategies can embed creativity and culture into health and social care. Myriad sits at the heart of this programme and has been delivered through a collaboration between Greater Manchester Integrated Care, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the VCSE sector and cultural partners including

Community Arts Northwest, Music Action International, Afrocats, Company Chameleon and Factory International.

We know that mental health is shaped in communities, not just clinics. In Greater Manchester, we've long understood that statutory services account for only a small proportion of health outcomes. Our Live Well approach champions the role of community assets in prevention and early intervention

and aims to ensure that excellent, everyday support is available in every neighbourhood. Myriad is part of this approach – amplifying the role of cultural, creative and community-rooted responses to mental health inequalities.

### OUR PROJECT: MYRIAD

Myriad was commissioned by Greater Manchester Integrated Care as part of its commitment to enhance mental health services, support individuals with mental health conditions, and reduce mental health inequalities across the city region. It has a dual focus: supporting individual creative health practitioners and shifting structural barriers in mental health systems – offering valuable learning and ways of working for others working nationally to improve cultural competence and reduce inequities.

Myriad (2023–2025) has supported the global majority creative health workforce and contributed to a stronger, and more culturally competent creative, mental health offer with and for global majority communities. Each element of the project was designed not only to meet immediate community needs, but to

influence commissioning, referral pathways and workforce development in the longer term. Across the project we have delivered:

- a Core Competency Framework to support practitioner training and development, recruitment, and self-evaluation;
- the Spark Training programme for early-career creative, mental health practitioners;
- Action Learning Sets and Time to Reflect sessions for global majority practitioners;
- five community-led Test and Learn projects;
- a website to support dissemination of resources and learning.

The Myriad Core Competency Framework was developed through interviews, focus groups, surveys and testing with partners across the VCSE, culture and mental health sectors. It outlines the knowledge, skills and values required to deliver culturally competent creative mental health support, and is already being used by individuals, teams, and organisations to guide development and delivery. The co-production process also helped us to understand the needs of global majority creative health practitioners and those of the mental health providers who may employ them.

A Myriad ‘time to reflect’ session. Photo © Richard Tymon.



“For me, cultural competency is about more than understanding, it’s about trust. It’s the smile that welcomes someone in without making them explain who they are. It’s knowing that a dance workshop might not feel safe to an Afghan participant, but that storytelling or poetry might. It’s about knowing your community well enough to choose the right path to healing.

I believe programmes like MYRIAD are essential for Greater Manchester, to equip diverse practitioners with the tools, language and support they need to lead this work well. It’s how we move from intention to impact, and make mental health support truly inclusive, effective, and resonant. ”

**Mohammad, film maker, facilitator and Myriad training participant**

The Spark Training programme responded to a call from early career and established practitioners alike – telling us that there was a lack of relevant training for global majority practitioners wanting to integrate creativity into mental health practice, and vice versa. The five-day course equipped participants to align with the competency framework and sometimes to gain more confidence about the skills they already possessed.

“I don’t take continued professional development lightly...as a practising counsellor and creative practitioner, I wanted to marry the two sides of my world, mental health and the arts. The SPARK training programme has given me the tools to do this. The continuity in support for global majority communities begins the process of true meaningful change...it seems so simple; we need more of this. ”

**Lorraine, counsellor, creative practitioner and training participant**

We invested in peer support and reflective spaces too because a sustainable workforce needs community and a space to talk. Our WhatsApp network, Action Learning Sets and the ‘Time to Reflect’ sessions created infrastructure for wellbeing, mentoring and solidarity.

The five Test and Learn projects offered innovation funding for VCFSE partners to develop creative, mental health offers with local global majority communities. These explored trauma-informed storytelling, faith and mental health, creative recovery, and intergenerational practice – working with partners Ephrata Church Community, 42nd Street, Portraits of Recovery, Talk Changes and Greater Manchester Youth Network.

An [evaluation](#) of the Myriad programme is now available.<sup>11</sup>

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Myriad has demonstrated that building a resilient global majority, creative health workforce is essential, and possible, but requires investment, time, and systems thinking.

We learned that:

- global majority practitioners are often isolated, underpaid and unsupported, yet full of leadership potential;
- peer networks (even simple tools like WhatsApp) play a powerful role in connection and continuity;
- practitioners need not only training, but supervision, coaching, and time to reflect;
- barriers to access can be reduced through bursaries, paid placements, and inclusive recruitment processes;
- VCFSE partners benefit from support to design, deliver, and evaluate creative health offers and welcome this support;
- co-design is key. Where we have had most success is where communities have been at the heart of Myriad; informing project design, shaping training and identifying the competencies needed to do this work well;

<sup>11</sup> The evaluation report is available here: [myriadproject.co.uk/evaluation-report](https://myriadproject.co.uk/evaluation-report).

- creativity opens doors to conversations around mental health, but services must be culturally competent if they are to have any impact on structural and health inequalities.

System change is only possible when pilots influence commissioning. That's why Myriad has worked across organisational boundaries to model new ways of working that can be sustained and scaled.

## WHAT NEXT?

We are actively developing plans for Myriad 2.0, expanding our training offer, scaling our framework, and building strategic partnerships nationally.

Stage two will focus on:

- further development of the Core Competency Framework to include advanced competencies for experienced practitioners;
- creating resources that facilitate roll-out of our training offer;
- supporting creative health leaders from global majority backgrounds;
- continuing to advocate for creative health approaches as an effective tool to address health inequalities.

We're in conversations with NHS partners, VCFSE networks, cultural organisations and universities to take this work further. Our aim is a nationally connected, locally rooted infrastructure for creative health that is truly inclusive, sustainable, and scalable.

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“ There is no health without our mental health so it is crucial that we are able to provide access to the right support as early as possible which includes therapeutic choices that are biological, social and psychological for all people across all of our communities. Mental ill health can affect anyone at any ages and from any ethnicity, it does not discriminate and nor should we when delivering services.

Creative arts have a huge part to play in mental health from prevention to prescription and resources like MYRIAD are so important in developing the creative toolkit further so that we have holistic care packages and choices but also delivered by a workforce that reflects its community and the diversity within it. Creative arts also provides us with a universal language for care.

As a Clinical Director in Mental Health and a Clinical sponsor for the creative Health Strategy in Greater Manchester, I am a strong advocate for this new Vitamin C - CREATIVITY! ☺☺

**Professor Sandeep Ranote FRCPsych (Clinical Director Mental Health, NHS GM Integrated Care. Consultant Paediatric Psychiatrist. Hon Professor in Mental Health, University of Salford)**

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A Myriad 'time to reflect' session.  
Photo © Richard Tymon.

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# Hear Me Out

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BY JOHN SPEYER

John is Director of Hear Me Out.



The Hear Me Out Band performs at the Amersham Arms. Photo © David McCairley/Hear Me Out.

## ABOUT US

Hear Me Out uses music and other art forms to support people held in immigration detention and asylum centres by the Home Office. We're based in London but work in places of detention (and their neighbouring communities) wherever we can get access and resource. For most of the last 20 years we have focused on immigration detention centres, but in the last few years we have widened our focus to include asylum hotels and barracks, in response to the much larger numbers of people being held in these improvised and

deregulated facilities. Our participatory creative programmes aim to improve their wellbeing and agency, build understanding and solidarity across social divides, and produce work of high artistic quality.

The people we work with have in common their experience of the immigration detention and asylum system, and most of them are from the global majority. The traumatic effects of detention, the accompanying insecurity and the government's avowedly hostile environment make mental health issues intrinsic to that experience. Key studies tell us that:

- detention has a negative impact on mental health;
- the longer someone spends in detention, the more negative its impact;
- depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder are the most common mental health problems;
- all immigration detainees face challenges to their wellbeing, and even if they do not reach a clinical threshold, their distress is still disabling and can be life-threatening;
- four out of five detainees meet a clinical threshold for depression.

## OUR PROJECT

We have mainly done group work over the years, but the grant helped us make intensive work with individuals an integral part of our programme. The grant supported five strands of work over the three years from April 2021.

### Strand 1

We piloted a creative mentoring scheme with 11 musicians, most from racialised/asylum backgrounds. Individual development/support packages included instrumental coaching, purchase of equipment, developing workshop facilitation skills, advice from music industry professionals and counselling/therapy.

### Strand 2

We supported 11 public performances by three bands:

- the pop-up Band from the Barracks, which grew from our group sessions at Napier Barracks;
- the Hear Me Out Band, three of whose members had spent time in detention centres;
- The Unknowns, formed by participants in asylum hotel group sessions.

### Strand 3

We supported five residencies for the Hear Me Out Band and The Unknowns, totalling 15 days of intensive studio sessions. These led to the above performances, plus a four-track EP by each band.



**Hear Me Out's Band from the Barracks perform at the Dover Multicultural Festival. Photo © Benjamin Film Photography / Hear Me Out.**

These bands had distinct styles and likely audiences. But in both, artistic quality was high, they'd created original repertoire, remuneration of 'artists' and 'participants' had become equal, and there was appetite for more. So we sat down with each band and worked out plans to build distinct band identities, profiles, audiences, repertoire and gigging opportunities.

### Strand 4

We developed support for people's practical and emotional needs, including:

- helping people find a lawyer, understand their legal position, avoid homelessness, sort benefits, travel to appointments;
- writing letters to support asylum claims, address accommodation problems, challenge deportation;
- providing hardship payments, refurbished phones/laptops, storage space;
- being with people when they were most distressed or needed to talk.

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“ I had no idea that I would start legal act[ion] and try to try to sort this out again... And if not for your help, I'm not sure if I could try. ”

**Participant**

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## Strand 5

We made real progress in embedding co-creation in our organisational structures, and growing talent/leadership among people with lived experience.

- We held two co-creation good practice events, set up an externally facilitated Working Group and started work on a multi-year action plan. We began reviewing how our Board operates to make its style more open and creative.
- People with lived experience worked on communications and fundraising projects, performances, programme planning, practice forums and recruitment panels, and joined our Board and co-creation working group.
- Successive recruitment rounds trialled new methods to increase applications from people with lived experience and diversify our team of 10, which went from all white (2022) to six white and four members of staff from Global Majority backgrounds (2024), including one migrant and three children of refugees/migrants.
- A group of people with lived experience, facilitated by an HMO artist and fundraiser, devised and produced a successful public individual giving campaign called 'More Than A Label'. A band member, mentored by one of our Associate Artists, has started to co-lead group workshops.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

This work was rich in learning for our future practice.

Our mentoring pilot went beyond traditional mentoring. Creative support took many forms, while some people's difficulties made us think about how to respond and to what extent we could help. We learned that when people face multiple challenges, we must work holistically for support/development packages to be effective, and be clear about what we can and can't help with. We've needed to improve the integration of creative mentoring and support/casework.

“ I have never been put into that kind of position, like having to contribute an opinion on who to hire or which one is better. So it lifts up whatever potential I have inside of me. ”

### Participant

We saw the bands providing role models to others with similar lived experience, helping us reach target audiences and supporting changes in public awareness/attitudes. To extend these effects will require stronger repertoire, brand identities and promotion, and a mixed charity-industry business model. This is new work for us and unusual in the sector.

People with lived experience became much more closely involved in our organisation, and the work knitted us together. It came to feel natural for experts by experience to be involved in organisational processes. We expect this will increase our impact, because decisions will be better and the process has its own outcomes: developing talent, skills and new practices, and creating a safe, inclusive environment for more people to join.

## WHAT NEXT?

We're seeking funding to advance ambitious band development plans.

We will be using mentoring, storytelling and project work to develop lived experience leadership in our organisation.

We have started working through a succession strategy to transform our senior leadership. We expect that within 12 months there will be five Trustees with lived experience of detention/asylum, within 24 months one of them will be Chair, and within 36 months someone with lived experience will be Director or Co-Director of this organisation.

We are looking at ways of sharing our experience more widely and exploring the potential to offer support and guidance to other organisations.



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# Hospital Rooms

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BY HALEY MOYSE FENNING

Haley is Head of Impact at Hospital Rooms.



Rubbena Aurangzeb, *Deaf and Diverse* (2022) Springfield Hospital. © Hospital Rooms. Photo: Damian Griffiths.

## ABOUT US

Hospital Rooms is an arts and mental health charity that transforms mental health inpatient units with extraordinary artworks, founded by artist Tim A Shaw and curator Niamh White in 2016. Our mission is to radically transform these spaces with world-class art and to support people in their recovery through meaningful creative engagement.

We are committed to co-production and inclusivity, with a strong emphasis on working with racially minoritised and marginalised groups. We collaborate with diverse artists, many of whom have lived experience of mental health services, and we conduct comprehensive research and development to ensure our projects are tailored to meet the needs of specific service user populations, including



Recovery College

*Sutapa Biswas, and all  
around me, my gathered star  
(2022) Springfield Hospital.  
© Hospital Rooms. Photo:  
Damian Griffiths.*

people from the d/Deaf community, young people, people with complex trauma, and those with experience of the criminal justice system.

Our work is grounded in partnership – with NHS Trusts, service users, staff, and cultural institutions. We ensure artists receive specialist training and support to work in complex clinical environments.

Hospital Rooms has its offices in Bow in East London and we have around 22 staff on payroll.

## OUR PROJECT: SPRINGFIELD HOSPITAL

Through this funding, Hospital Rooms delivered an ambitious and inclusive project at the newly built Springfield Hospital in South West London. This two-year project embedded high-quality, co-produced artworks across inpatient wards and communal areas, engaging service users from racially minoritised communities at every stage.

We commissioned 23 artists – 15 from racially minoritised backgrounds – and at various career stages, from emerging voices like Jasmin Sehra to renowned artists such as Hurvin Anderson, Sutapa Biswas, and Yinka Ilori. We provided these artists with training to prepare them for safe, effective and meaningful engagement with mental health service users. Together with these artists, we delivered 159 art workshops to over 1,000 service user participants. Notably, 72% of participants identified as ethnically diverse (i.e. not White British), reflecting the community served by the hospital.

Workshops were tailored to each ward's needs and co-produced with service users, enabling meaningful collaboration and ownership. For example, Yinka Ilori led a session in a medium secure ward, exchanging Yoruba parables and lived experiences with Black British men, building shared understanding and cultural affirmation.

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“Normally my hours feel like days but being here my hours felt like minutes. I feel a sense of euphoria!”

**Participant**

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“I found this programme really brought me out of my shell. I didn't realise that I had any underlying ability or talent. Through these workshops, the artists have encouraged me. And when I said, 'I can't do this, help me', they said, 'Yes, you can', and I surprised myself.”

**Participant**

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The project aimed to challenge and re-balance entrenched power dynamics in mental health spaces, where Black adults are nearly four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act and disproportionately face excessive restrictions through Community Treatment Orders. Through representation, participation, and visibility, we sought to disrupt long-standing inequalities in access to creative health.

This programme resulted in Hospital Rooms' 20 most ambitious permanent artworks to date, transforming the visual landscape of the hospital. It also embedded an artist support structure to ensure emotional care for those delivering work in challenging environments. The project firmly positioned creativity as a right, not a privilege – and embedded this belief into the culture of the new hospital.

For this project, the Baring Foundation played a key role in being the first funder (£40,000) of the project and not requiring us to have any existing funding in place. We were then able to leverage this grant to raise more funding – including from the NHS and Arts Council England, accelerating the project's impact. The project ended up being worth £400,000.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We learned that representation – both in who delivers creative opportunities and the cultural relevance of the content – is key to meaningful engagement with racially minoritised communities in mental health settings. Participation was strongest when artists shared aspects of identity with service users, such as Rubbena Aurangzeb-Tariq's workshops with the Deaf Muslim community or Jasmin Sehra's workshops with Punjabi

participants. These sessions created safer, more affirming spaces where people felt seen, heard and respected.

Many racially minoritised service users are structurally excluded from creative opportunities by the way they enter and experience mental health services. Responding with care and cultural sensitivity allowed us to build deeper trust and stronger relationships, designing workshops which would leave a lasting positive impression about what it means to engage with creative activity and art.

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“ Since leaving hospital, I’ve been attending regularly the workshops here at Recovery College and some at the Courtauld as well. And as time has gone on, I’d say that it’s had such a positive effect on how I felt. The ability to create and learn from artists, you know, who are well established who give their time really freely... it’s been amazing. ”

**Participant**

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This approach led to our most diverse cohort of participants and the highest workshop attendance we’ve seen to date. Crucially, we learned that to sustain this engagement, creativity must be embedded within the fabric of care. Access to high-quality materials, inspiring environments, and ongoing programming is essential for long-term impact and for supporting healing beyond the project’s timeline. South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust, within which Springfield Hospital is located, has one of the

highest rates of engagement with our Digital Art School – a free, nationwide programme that provides service users with online artist-led workshops and art materials. Their continued involvement signals a meaningful cultural shift and shows that creative engagement is now an embedded part of recovery at the Trust.

**WHAT NEXT?**

We have recently embarked on a three-year major project, delivered in collaboration with four strategically located NHS Trusts nationwide, ensuring that the communities most impacted by the Mental Health Act – young people, adults in the criminal justice system, Black communities, and people with learning disabilities and autistic people – have fair and meaningful access to high-quality cultural and creative experiences.

Working in partnership with NHS Trusts in Birmingham, Bristol, North East London, and South West Yorkshire, we will:

- commission 52 site-specific artworks;
- deliver over 150 artist-led workshops;
- foster major cultural partnerships with local organisations.

As part of this project, we will also develop and publish the first-ever National Framework for Equal Access to Arts in Mental Health Services, providing a scalable model for application nationally and internationally.



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# Keneish Dance

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BY KEISHA GRANT

Keisha is Founder and Director of Keneish Dance.



Photo courtesy of Keneish Dance.

## ABOUT US

Based in Birmingham, Keneish Dance operates under the charity KD Culture, delivering dance experiences that support self-expression, creativity, and holistic wellbeing. Delivered by an international team, our work incorporates interdisciplinary collaborations to educate and entertain audiences and participants of all ages.

Our community classes include Dancing Roots for mature adults which celebrates dance techniques and styles from the Caribbean, Flow Fusion which fuses contemporary dance with Caribbean jazz and improvisation, Young Warriors for young people and Yoga Flow for students and graduates.

Our motto is Mind, Body, Soul, Dance, and we believe dance is 'spirit, rhythm and emotion'. We strive to use dance as a vehicle for self-expression and combine improvisation, free form with set dance genres.

## OUR PROJECT

Following a year-long pilot bringing a combined dance and movement practice onto acute wards for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trusts, we discovered that 99% of the service users had an improvement of mood by the end of the session.

We used the investment from the Baring Foundation to enable better understanding of how dance and movement can be used. It doesn't have to be a 'product' – which is a misconception and turns people off, but can be purely about the experience too, a route to recovery, building self-confidence or just simply pleasurable, relaxing and fun!

Our project focused on using dance practice for prevention and recovery in community settings. Targeting Sandwell and the wider Black Country, we first delivered taster workshops to therapists and support workers, as well

as holding focus groups with service users, before going on to deliver workshop sessions for a two-year period from August 2022 – August 2024.

In this time we delivered sessions for Sandwell African Caribbean Mental Health Foundation's men's group, working with a core group of six and their support workers delivering fortnightly sessions over six months.

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“ I feel so relaxed  
and free after doing that. ”

**Men's Group participant**

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We also worked in partnership Black Country Health Care Youth Team, delivering dance workshops during half term breaks at community centres in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley, working with a total of 40 young people.

In partnership with the Black Country Health Care team, we also worked with Sandwell Museums and Arts Service to deliver a two-day family fest which included mindfulness, dance workshops, dance performance and arts and crafts activities. This was a hyperlocal event attracting a diverse range of local residents during the day and mainly Birmingham based residents for performances. The family fest was subsidised by Arts Council England as part of Balance, a nationally touring show.

We also delivered taster, feedback and answer sessions for the therapists at RoSA in Warwickshire, a charity providing confidential services for survivors of rape and sexual violence, before going on to deliver two workshops for their service users. As a result of pre workshop anxieties and last minute drop outs, the attendance was low at only two people, but the service users who attended enjoyed how the dance and movement workshops made them feel.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Our practice sometimes combines yoga and, although we don't use any mudras or religious references, a few adults mentioned they were concerned it was going against their Christian religion. We reassured the support workers that the practice had no association with any other gods other than any they believed in. We used yoga as a light touch approach to feeling the body.

Despite us doing focus groups before physical workshops, we believe that people who don't have a lot of experience of different dance styles may need encouragement from the practitioner to try them, depending on the associations they have with that movement practice. We learned that each practitioner will teach our practice differently and service users with mental health vulnerabilities or disorders may be hyper-sensitive to how the practitioner behaves. We also found that support workers can have a huge influence on what the service user thinks is right to be doing.

## WHAT NEXT?

We plan to continue focusing most of our energy delivering for mental health prevention and recovery. We have a new studio that we can access all year round which will help achieve this, as well as supporting other practitioners that use dance and movement for people's mental wellbeing.

We plan to keep our practice eclectic and tailor workshops according to the circumstances of each service user. We want to continue to offer a mix of ways in which people can rage and scream through their embodied expression, as well as more relaxing ways to use the body and ways to re-associate themselves with their bodies.



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# Liverpool Lighthouse

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BY HELEN BROWN

Helen is Development Manager at Liverpool Lighthouse.



Photo courtesy of The Reel Thing.

## ABOUT US

Liverpool Lighthouse is a Black-led arts and community centre based in Anfield, North Liverpool. Over 25 years we have existed in the community as a Creative Sanctuary – a safe space focused on creative wellbeing for the most vulnerable in our community. This has included working with refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants and people with mental health problems over many years.

After the arrival of a new Artistic Director in 2021 we adopted a new focus on Creative Health, partnering with Edge Hill University Arts and Wellbeing Hub, NHS services and

other VSCEs on projects aimed at using the arts to improve mental health for people with mental health problems and to develop and train lived experience leaders to use creative tools to influence healthcare services to better meet the needs of vulnerable, excluded and marginalised communities.

Our When You Know – Childbirth in the Asylum System<sup>12</sup> is an award-winning film and set of training resources created by lived experience Creative Influencers that is being rolled out as training on national NHS platforms, prompting conversations in the Houses of Parliament and is leading to actual changes in policies and services for vulnerable migrants.

<sup>12</sup> [www.liverpoolighthouse.com/childbirth-in-the-asylum-system](http://www.liverpoolighthouse.com/childbirth-in-the-asylum-system)



Performance of *Building a Best for Baby Revolution*.  
Photo © Brian Roberts Images.

## OUR PROJECT

Our funded project began in November 2022 and finished in December 2024. It was made up of several elements. Initially, we worked with a group of 26 refugee or asylum-seeking women who were perinatal, identified as having mental health challenges and from global majority backgrounds, in a creative wellbeing programme. We also partnered with a local refugee women's organisation to recruit and support participants.

“Thursday [the perinatal refugee women's group] is where I get my medicine. So, I have to go to Lighthouse. Without Thursday, my week is not OK. That's the facts. My support worker I was working with, now she moved me over to the support worker that helps with family now because she said I am better, I have Lighthouse now, so have help there now. ”

**Participant**

The programme used multiple artforms including drama, music and dance. Using expertise from our partnership with Edge Hill University into cutting edge practice in arts for wellbeing, we developed a creative-led programme aimed at targeting factors that are known to influence mental health, including confidence, self-esteem, social connection and feeling empowered to make a difference.

At the same time, we offered a robust wrap-around practical support programme, including food support, help accessing services, including making and accompanying participants to appointments, help with housing issues, etc. This, along with practical access support such as reimbursing travel costs and an onsite crèche, were absolutely key to supporting the participants to be able to engage.

Emerging from this programme, we identified five women to take part in our new Creative Influencer programme. They were supported in their own artistic and creative development and trained in creative wellbeing skills and techniques as well as creative advocacy, with the goal of empowering them as lived-experience leaders to both lead creative wellbeing within their own communities and communicate the lived experience of their communities on wider platforms in healthcare and society.

Alongside this programme, we also worked with five additional established artists from Global Majority backgrounds, providing access to training and mentoring in creative wellbeing, including training in [Arts for the Blues](#)<sup>13</sup> – a research programme developed by Edge Hill University aiming to establish creative group approaches for people with mental health problems for whom talking therapies are either inappropriate or ineffective. They also worked with artist mentors experienced in creative wellbeing to develop their skills and lead sessions with both our perinatal asylum seeker and refugee group and other groups where the majority of participants were from a global majority community. We also supported them with their own mental health and creative work.

“ Lighthouse has been the place that I have learned to love myself in. I have learned to enjoy the little things like singing, ‘listening to the weather’ [a reflective drama activity] and meeting people has been helpful and influential to me. The little things I have learned from Anu. The song, ‘Lean on Me’ that she taught me has helped me to cope within these last two weeks which have been tough. ”

**Participant**

## WHAT WE LEARNED

We were already committed to a practice of sharing power and co-creation with our participants, but the strength of engagement, personal impact and remarkable work created through this programme, and the impact it has gone on to have within wider systems and structures, confirmed how both essential and powerful this approach is.

Another key point identified in the evaluation is how impactful it was for the women to feel empowered to tell their own stories through art. Although this needs to be handled carefully and sensitively to avoid re-traumatisation, it

was a repeated theme: being able to express their experience and moreover, feeling heard, believed, and that they could create work that would change perceptions, minds and systems was something the participants returned to again and again when reflecting on the difference the project had made to their mental health.

We also found that for many of the artists we engaged, supporting and resourcing them in their own creative work and with their mental health, alongside the upskilling, training and mentoring we were offering in creative wellbeing, was essential to them and therefore to the programme.

Although this programme has been effective and provided important learning from an artist development and creative wellbeing standpoint, the most impactful work that has emerged from this project has been in the area of Creative Advocacy and systems change. This is both in terms of mental health of the participants, but also in the impact for social change for racially minoritised, vulnerable and marginalised groups. This is the area we are taking forward, with a Creative Health programme targeted at improving access to health services, increasing engagement with public health interventions and better shaping services to meet the needs of vulnerable migrant communities.



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## London Arts and Health

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**BY ANNA WOOLF WITH JEMILEA WISDOM-BAAKO,  
RACHEL NELKEN AND DANIEL REGAN**

*Anna is CEO and Jemilea is Project Manager at London Arts and Health;  
Rachel is Director of Raw Material Music and Media; and Daniel is Director of Arts & Health Hub.*



Photo courtesy of London Arts and Health.

### ABOUT US

London Arts and Health (LAH) is a charity which creates and promotes opportunities for the arts to reach everyone in society – regardless of their health or personal circumstances. It has two primary focuses: creating opportunities for people experiencing ill health to engage with the arts; and raising awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging with high quality creative activity. We have a wide-ranging free-to-join membership that consists of

people from health, culture, practitioner, artist, commissioner and researcher workforce pan-London.

We believe that participating in the arts and exploring creativity makes a crucial difference to the health and wellbeing of individuals and of society. LAH is a central pillar in the fast-emerging world of Creative Health. LAH has been at the forefront of this work for many years and is widely respected for the support it offers to individual artists, patients and service users, health professionals and the wider

public. The organisation works collaboratively in everything it does, partnering with a huge range of colleagues to increase the impact the arts can have on the health of everyone in society.

It is a small organisation with a core team of expert staff, a strong and engaged board, diverse and strong networks and a commitment to quality and equity in the delivery of its work.

Core programmes include the Artists' Represent Recovery Network, delivered in tandem with our project partners: Arts & Health Hub and Raw Material; our national festival of Creative Health 'Creativity and Wellbeing Week' which aims to empower and amplify diverse artists, programmes of work and provide advocacy for the sector; our Action on Representation in Creative Health senior stakeholder group which advocates for diverse leadership in Creative Health; our Creative Health City mapping tool; as well as many free or low cost workshops and trainings.

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“ [ARRN] really ... allowed me to try things out of my comfort zone and I thought oh that's actually quite enjoyable so I could use that. ”

**Participant**

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## OUR PROJECT: ARTISTS' REPRESENT RECOVERY NETWORK

The Artists' Represent Recovery Network is a professional development programme open to London-based, freelance, ethnically diverse artists who identify as black, brown, people of colour who have faced systemic racism, and who are working in arts and health in a participatory or community setting.

The grant from the Baring Foundation supported a second cohort of artists to take part.

This year (2025) the project supported ten artists with at least three years of experience in this field, and each artist accessed a mix of professional skills development sessions both in-person and online. These sessions were delivered from January 2025, facilitated by Daniel Regan and Jide Ashimi, with a mix of



Photo courtesy of London Arts and Health.

visiting artists such as poet Arji Manuelpillai and other diverse arts and health practitioners, with a focus on supporting mental health through artistic activities including reflective practice, utilising the creative health quality framework, exploring art forms, and working with a variety of organisations across the sector.

The sessions ran monthly until July 2025 whereby the cohort went on placement with a range of placement hosts from across London, including South London and Maudsley (SLaM) hospital ward, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Crisis and The Bay Tree Centre.

For Cohort 2 we achieved 97% attendance in the programme and 100% attendance to participant mentoring, which showed strong need and adherence to the programme. 88% of our cohort reported an increased confidence in Creative Health practice:

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“ ...when I've ...watched other facilitators do what they do in the past ... I would put them on pedestals and I'd ...[think] 'it's gonna take me years to get to that place' and you know within the time frame of starting the [ARRN] course I've received really phenomenal powerful feedback [for my own work]... ”

**Participant**

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“I think my confidence has improved... early on [in the programme] I was asked to facilitate a workshop and I think [someone] seeing my skills in ARRN and hiring me to do that job, and having a back and forth about what the workshop would entail, I thought that was very autonomy-giving, to practice what we had learned so quickly and be hands on – that felt like a real vote of confidence. ”

#### Participant

In the mid-point survey (90% response rate), 40% of respondents said they have had more opportunities to secure paid work with significant stakeholders. In interviews (60% of the cohort group), 100% of those interviewed reported that they had secured new paid opportunities in creative health settings. This shows that the network has provided confidence in implementing the learnings from the Creative Health training and that this has translated into new opportunities. Furthermore, 88% of survey respondents said their understanding of working with participants across Creative Health settings

had improved. This was affirmed by 100% of those interviewed (60% of the cohort). There was also a huge increase in the quality of creative practice development as assessed through session feedback.

100% of those interviewed reported improvement in their freelancing and creative enterprise skills.

Overall, the training programme has had extremely good adherence and impact for the second cohort, as well as strong and lasting impacts for the three partner organisations.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

The programme looks to address the lack of diverse representation within London's creative health sector, with a majority of practitioners and leaders being white British. This is despite London being one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the UK, (the 2021 census found that 46.2% of residents identified as Asian, black, mixed or other ethnic groups). We have also found that the creative health sector is based on the hard work of freelancers, who are often paid below the minimum wage. The 2023 Industria report, *Structurally F\*cked*, found that the median hourly pay for artists was just £2.60 per hour.

Photo courtesy of London Arts and Health.



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“ The actual facilitators and artist cohort – every person really brings a new skill and point of view and I have genuinely learned something from each person. ”

**Participant**

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The purpose of this project is to provide the support and pathways for global majority freelance practitioners into the creative health sector and particularly, how to work with participants experiencing ill mental health. With a spread of generous funders (Baring Foundation, Arts Council England, Greater London Authority) and a team of three organisations all with different strengths, this project has had strong foundations and roots in which to grow and flourish. We have been able to take on feedback from the first cohort and be responsive to what practitioners need. With the addition of a dedicated project manager in phase 2 (Jemilea Wisdom-Baako), the cohort have been even more supported in their training. We have given long-lead times to applicants resulting in around 80 applications to each phase, showing a huge appetite and need for this training programme.

We have seen the networked effect of the ARRN with both cohorts 1 and 2 rippling out into the sector, delivering workshops, running events, having connection with their placement hosts and finding employment. We have also noticed other applications of the ARRN model spreading out across the sector, for example the ‘Stepping In’ programme piloted by the Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network (WAHWN) which was developed to address the lack of practitioners with lived experience.

Each cohort gives the three organisations a wider pool of trained artists to work with and commission, as well as deepening our connections with other organisations in the sector. The effect of this close connection with a cohort is manifold and can be seen in the mutual opportunities afforded to both.

### WHAT NEXT?

We would like to continue to support the sector with this training and see the continuation of the cohorts working together. For example, artist/practitioners from Cohort 1 came back and worked with Cohort 2, providing a through-line of knowledge and sharing. The training has been refined, and we have listened and learned through each evaluation phase to work out the most useful parts of the training for the cohort, and the best ways to continue relationships after the training has ended. We would like to see more uptake of the ARRN model by other organisations, ensuring the artists are paid to train, experience high quality placements and through the seed money, given autonomy to catalyse their own projects and ideas in Creative Health.

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“ Just being whole and bringing yourself as you are and everybody being welcomed – that had a lovely impact. I remember one session where I became quite emotional and in spaces where that where that’s happened in the past it’s felt really scary and in this space it felt really warm and welcoming which was nice. ”

**Participant**

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# Protégé

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BY SABITA KUMARI-DASS

Sabita is Director of Protégé.



Photo courtesy of Protégé.

## ABOUT US

Protégé is a unique, small charity providing tailored learning for marginalised and complex young people. We are based in a gallery/studio in Brentford, west London, but also work off-site in hospital schools, mental health wards and school exclusion units. Creative skills development is also delivered one-to-one at the homes of young people leaving long-term hospitalisation.

We work closely with referral partners in education, mental health, hospital schools, refugee support and youth justice. Our bespoke provision is delivered through small group and one-to-one support that can last as long as is necessary for the young person to catch up and/or reintegrate. Protégé's focus and ability to support young people long-term is rare in all the sectors we work in.



Photo courtesy of Protégé.

“ I learned more  
in one day at Protégé than I learned  
in a whole year at school. ”

**Young participant**

## OUR PROJECT

Our grant from Baring Foundation was crucial in helping us develop opportunities for racially minoritised artists and creative practitioners to increase their experience and skillset for working in mental health settings. As a result of this grant, we have been increasingly involved in Hospital Discharge Planning Meetings and Clinical Review Meetings.

This funding covered:

- Two BME trainees/refugee women to work and train alongside our team and develop skills to run creative workshops in mental health settings and with small groups of neurodiverse children and young people.
- Two creative practitioners with expertise delivering creative workshops in mental health settings who helped us design and deliver an organisational development programme of continuing professional development for our trustees and team, including new trainees. This helped us to formalise our provision through recognised training and develop resources for embedding learning.

- Approximately 35 days/workshops. The number of participants attending workshops over the grant period (August 2021-August 2022) was approximately 30, but it is worth noting that referrals from mental health partners increased as a result. Workshops covered a range of art forms including film, photography, digital, painting, drawing, textiles, sewing, embroidery and poetry.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

As a result of shared learning and collaborative project design with mental health experts and healthcare teams, we have become a more neuroinclusive organisation, and developed systems, language and resources to support our methodology. We have developed our provision, so complex cohorts can achieve their first qualification. This is crucial for young people who as a result of long-term hospitalisation fall behind, lose their confidence and enter adulthood with no qualifications or familiarity with workplace culture and etiquette.

We have also been a provider of the first formal UK qualification for refugee girls and young women, who often find their qualifications from their country of origin are not valid in the UK. They have been able to attend training, achieve UAL and Arts Award certificates alongside developing workplace and transferable skills to increase their employability, integration and economic sustainability.

Both refugee women who participated in the training have secured jobs in the cultural sector – one of whom is specifically training other racially minoritised young people with digital production skills at Morley College.

We will continue to deepen and broaden our expertise in creative participatory work in mental health and neurodiverse settings and to create workplace training opportunities for BME creative practitioners and emerging artists to develop skills for working with mental health referrals and neurodivergent young people with complex needs. We have built strong referral partnerships to devise collaborative projects that deliver our shared ambitions for progressing marginalised young people.



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# Rambert

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**BY CLARE THOMAS-POWELL**

**Clare is Senior Participation and Communities Manager at Rambert.**

## ABOUT US

As one of the world's most diverse companies of dancers, we transform everyday spaces by making dance that is awe-inspiring, adventurous, dynamic, and relevant, and taking it to our neighbourhood, the nation and the world. Through performances, classes and participation projects for people of all ages and abilities, we want to be inspiring, engaging and relevant to everyone.

Close work with local authorities and grassroots organisations in London (where we are based), Liverpool, Mansfield and Greater Manchester enables long-term citizen-led community projects, complementing our touring programme with more in-depth interventions.

We know engagement with dance and creativity has enormous impact on wellbeing and mental health. Since 2022, we've developed key partnerships with organisations across Manchester, including Manchester Mind and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, to work towards a creative health strategy that improves the mental health and wellbeing of local people.

In 2022, we partnered with Manchester Mind on a project to support their service users through regular movement sessions. Through these sessions, we aimed to promote the role that dance and movement can play as part of the Five Ways to Wellbeing and people's everyday creativity, to help improve the mental health of people in Manchester.

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“I gained feeling safe in movement and my body once again, to reconnect mind, body and soul.”

**Participant**

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Through our partnerships in Greater Manchester, we identified the need for support for those working in early education settings, who experience disproportionate levels of mental health problems stemming from work-related pressures. We therefore began working closely with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to develop a dance and movement programme to support the mental health and wellbeing of this workforce.

## OUR PROJECT

With this grant, we developed a programme of dance and movement sessions to support mental health and wellbeing, in partnership with Manchester Mind.

We recruited an expert facilitator from Greater Manchester to lead and develop the sessions, which began in January 2023. They continued through to March, before we took a break to evaluate and develop the programme and ran sessions again from May 2024 until April 2025.

We had approximately 12 participants in the first cohort, and then approximately six regular attendees for the 2024/2025 sessions, who were all Manchester Mind service users. The sessions aimed to use dance as a way to improve mental health and wellbeing, and included guided breathing, guided and improvised movement, as well as space for creativity and individuality.

“ The huge surprise was that what had been almost debilitating fatigue at the beginning of the session had almost gone by the end of it. ”

#### Participant

In the most recent cohort, 100% of respondents reported that they felt creative, brave and part of a community during the sessions and that the sessions helped them practise the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Their highlights included meeting new people, connection with others, sharing experiences and creating movement together.

We have continued developing our relationships with Manchester-based organisations working in this field. Alongside working with Manchester Mind, we also met with Company Chameleon to discuss their work, to avoid any crossover and promote synergies. It was from these meetings that we recognised the need of support for mental health in the early years space. Since then, we have developed partnerships with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Julie McCarthy, Lead for Creative Health at Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership, in order to support the mental health and wellbeing of early education practitioners.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

We now have a much greater understanding of the issues of the pipeline for creative health practitioners, evidenced through the recruitment process for our project facilitator. There was a lack of diversity in the shortlisted panel of candidates, which we reflected on during a break between cohorts. We used this time to develop a partnership with the

University of Salford and their MA dance courses, creating a paid assistant position for the project, whereby students could shadow our experienced facilitator and build their facilitation skills in this space, with an aim of providing a pathway for more facilitators from the Black and Global Majority to gain experience working in creative health.

We have also learned more about the extent of the resource needed to run these sessions effectively, especially in relation to the support of the service users. A lot of pastoral care was required in the running of the project, and Manchester Mind needed more support and resource to be able to provide it. We also learned the value in the quality of sessions over quantity of sessions. We have increased our understanding of working with partners already working in similar spaces locally.

#### WHAT NEXT?

We have built a solid partnership with Manchester Mind and a delivery model that we will draw on in our future work with communities across the UK. We are now building a pilot project to train early education practitioners to deliver creative dance sessions in their settings, aiming to help the mental health, wellbeing and job satisfaction for the diverse range of people working in this field.



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# Raw Material Music and Media

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BY RACHEL NELKEN

Rachel is CEO of Raw Material Music and Media.



Photo © Oliver McKenzie.

## ABOUT US

Raw Material Music and Media is a community arts and enterprise hub based in Brixton in the London borough of Lambeth. Founded in 1993, Raw Material has run the Raw Sounds programme since 2012, which offers young people and adults experiencing mental ill health creative opportunities around music creation, production and performance. Raw Sounds works directly with a target group

who often lack representation and a voice in society. Due to our location in the heart of Brixton, and the disproportionate levels of African, African Caribbean and mixed heritage populations experiencing mental ill health, we reach a high percentage of these communities, with around 50% of yearly referrals falling into these groups. 65% of people admitted to the borough's acute psychiatric wards are from African and Caribbean backgrounds, despite forming only 20% of its population.

Raw Sounds participants include:

- the most vulnerable in society, who often have the least access to therapeutic creative activities, which can be particularly beneficial to this client group and support ongoing recovery. Their respective conditions or ongoing trauma often means they find it hard to engage in mainstream society;
- highly skilled, talented musicians, who may have studied or had careers in the music industry but have been unable to continue due to their condition. The Raw Sounds model incorporates culturally-relevant music activities and partnerships with local organisations. It is designed to incorporate progression with volunteering opportunities for participants who have direct experience themselves of the settings we are delivering in, so provides credibility through role modelling and visible progression opportunities for those taking part.

### OUR PROJECT: RAW SOUNDS+

In 2021, Raw Material received a grant from the Baring Foundation for Raw Sounds+, a new programme of creative courses for people from Lambeth's diverse communities experiencing mental ill health and to offer further development opportunities to their ethnically diverse artist team.

Photo courtesy of Raw Material Music & Media.



Raw Sounds+ ran from August 2021 until March 2022. The new courses we developed for Raw Sounds+ grew out of reflective sessions with artists as well as through our regular participant consultations, and included:

- a five-day intensive performance course led by one of Raw's longest serving tutors Flo or Floetic Lara, supported by freelance creative Tagz. The resulting project 'Raw Connect' combined vocal performance, spoken word and free devising to create a final collaborative piece which dealt with themes of mental health, isolation, loneliness, racism and connection. The piece was performed at Paines Plough theatre's pop-up, the Roundabout;
- a new Advance Logic (music production) course led by tutor David Henry;
- 1-2-1 tuition opportunities in vocals and collaborative ensemble-making led by tutors Abimaro Gunnell and Rhoda Dakar;
- a new song-writing and music production course for women aged 40+ from ethnically diverse communities experiencing postnatal or menopausal depression, led by Eve Horne.

Fifty-four participants took part in the above courses, many of whom were new to Raw Material and have continued learning since.

All the artist leaders taking part received a bursary to use for a development or training opportunity of their choice through a new programme we called 'Direct Your Own Development'. Inspired by Arts Council's Develop Your Creative Practice programme, we offered bursaries of up to £300 for individuals to choose an area of skill and development related to their practice. 15 individuals took up opportunities ranging from keyboard lessons to mentoring in playwriting, mixing and mastering skills, jazz theory and musicianship, sound production courses etc.

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“I am still so excited after the performance yesterday. That was such a cool feeling. I really liked being pushed out of my comfort zone. Please let me know when there are other courses like that! ♡”

**Mrs A.**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

This programme was a great opportunity for Raw to invest in artists who are rooted in our local communities, as well as reach out to new participants we haven't worked with before. The Direct your Own Development scheme was particularly popular with our artists and perhaps unsurprisingly enabled a much greater take-up of training opportunities than we had seen previously.

The programme for women experiencing menopause led to Eve Horne developing the We Are the Unheard Academy, which specifically enables under-represented women and non-binary folk to develop their music tech skills and has been funded by the Arts Council England and become a highly prestigious Talent Development Partner for the PRS Foundation.

We also identified a need within our own freelance pool for artists to gain experience working in mental health settings. Amongst other gaps we identified, this led to our co-founding, with Arts Council England, an initiative called the Artists' Represent Recovery Network (ARRN), a professional development

programme and network for ethnically diverse artists, working in the field of arts and health. The project is now managed by London Arts and Health, with Raw Material and the Arts & Health Hub as delivery partners.

## WHAT NEXT?

Working with ethnically diverse practitioners and communities is core to our organisation and so this funding really allowed us to further enhance what we were already doing. We have offered Direct Your Own Development again as a training option as it was so popular with our freelance tutors. We have continued to work with LAH and Arts & Health Hub on the ARRN which is now a programme in its own right. (See also page 58)

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“Raw helps me to get up every morning. Something to look forward, to be creative and expressive with. Please don't take my sunshine away.”

**Adult participant**

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# Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

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BY BRADLEY GILL

Bradley is Trusts and Foundations Manager at the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO).



Photo © Chris Winter.

## ABOUT US

The Royal Philharmonic is “an Orchestra on top form” (The Guardian, 2025). Our mission is to enrich lives through musical experiences that are uncompromising in their excellence, wide-ranging in their appeal and inclusive in their delivery. At the forefront of music-making in the UK, we also act as cultural ambassadors on the world stage, performing 200 concerts each year, reaching a worldwide live and online audience of around 85 million people.

Passion, versatility and uncompromising artistic standards are our hallmarks, as we embrace a broad repertoire across film, TV and videogame soundtracks, concerts with pop stars, and the great symphonies and masterworks of the orchestral repertoire.

The London Borough of Brent attracts residents from all over the world. Latest census data shows that c.55% of the population was born outside the UK, and 83% are from global majority backgrounds. We have worked in



Photo © Chris Winter.

Brent for over 30 years, building a detailed understanding of local needs. In 2022, and in response to the disproportionately high rate of residents experiencing mental health challenges compared to the national average,<sup>14</sup> we began a pilot programme of activity – using group music-making opportunities to reduce isolation, foster community connections and complement existing mental health services.

“It’s great to see so many familiar faces, to have a warm welcome and feel at home... I like getting the worries off my mind – my mind goes to another space when I’m here and it’s a relaxing, refreshing, enjoyable space.”

**Participant**

## OUR PROJECT

Support from the Baring Foundation allowed us to build on the success of our initial investigation, strengthening our partnerships and joining the network of local partners across mental health provision. We worked

with experienced workshop leaders, Caroline Williams and Sigrun Sævarsdóttir-Griffiths, to formulate engaging and responsive music workshops, supported by a carousel of visiting professional musicians from the RPO.

We delivered three main strands of activity during 2022-23:

- monthly drop-in sessions for referred adults from across Brent;
- a shorter-term programme of fortnightly taster sessions for adolescents referred by council mental health services. This culminated in a two-day intensive project and is now known as the ‘Young People’s Wellbeing Collective’;
- a programme of six sessions with adult and adolescent groups at The Kingswood Centre (a mental health inpatient unit at North West London NHS Foundation Trust).

These strands were supported by three local musicians, recruited through mental health partners and Brent Black Music Co-op, who received paid training and practical experience co-leading sessions in a range of settings.

Each workshop followed a creative music-making process, supporting participants to work alongside professionals collaboratively in the

<sup>14</sup> According to the Mental Health QOF prevalence, in 2021/22, 1.15% of patients were recorded on practice registers as having a mental health diagnosis. The average for England is 0.95%.

creation of new music and song. Activities were planned so that no prior musical experience was needed; improvisation and aural learning allowed for a shared ownership and quality artistic outcomes. Thanks to the support of our partners and the continued enthusiasm of the participants themselves, we have been able to continue programme delivery into 2025, following broadly the same format.

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“ I have always enjoyed taking part. It’s exciting to learn different types of music and meet new people, doing an activity that’s for myself and helps with my wellbeing. The project is terrific and I hope it continues. ”

**Participant**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

The project demonstrated the need for investing time in understanding our participants’ individual needs to optimise activities for musical and mental health outcomes – initially by connecting with partner organisations in the referrals process, then by building strong relationships with participants themselves. Everyone involved in the project worked together towards the core ambition of building rapport. The key successes were developing trust with inpatient participants, and our contribution to a broader sense of community at drop-in sessions (where many participants still return on a regular basis). We learned that trust should form the foundation in creative opportunities for people with mental health problems.

To achieve this in a rotating team of people with different musical backgrounds and skills sets required dedicated training sessions and continued monitoring from our workshop leaders. They encouraged the delivery team to understand human behaviours in more detail, bringing an ‘in the now’ mindset to develop the following creative skills in participants:

- problem solving
- creative language use: writing lyrics
- musical understanding and instinct: improvisation and composition
- communication and collaborative working.

Beyond this, by working with the same participants over sustained activity, Sigrun identified a correlation between the state of an individual’s mental health at a given point and their capacity for accurate musical pulse and rhythm. There is scope to investigate this further as the programme continues.

In September 2024, we showcased our renewed commitment to supporting people from across Brent, announcing a new name for the programme: Sound Sanctuary. We are continuing to deliver monthly community drop-in sessions in partnership with Brent Mencap, specifically supporting Disabled adults and their carers. Alongside this, we continue to support those in the community living with mental health challenges through a programme of monthly drop-in sessions which move around different venues in the borough each month.

2025 also sees the pilot of a new strand of Sound Sanctuary, expanding the programme with a multi-day music project in collaboration with local arts organisation We Restart at a refugee hotel in Wembley Park.



# Sampad

BY SABRA KHAN

Sabra is the former Executive Director of Sampad.



Photo courtesy of Sampad.

## ABOUT US

Sampad's mission is to connect people with South Asian and British Asian Arts and Heritage. We are based in the West Midlands. Sampad is a platform for emerging and established artists to showcase their work and reach new audiences while nurturing talent and supporting professional development. Our engagement projects work with communities across the UK and aim to provide access to the arts and promote social cohesion. Sampad's Associate Schools Scheme connects young people with South Asian arts and heritage.

A key programme pillar for Sampad is our arts and health work which engages communities, amplifying their stories and through South Asian arts supporting them to improve their wellbeing and resilience. Over the last eight years we have developed various arts and wellbeing programmes which have focussed on responding to the needs of older people, LGBTQ+ people, asylum seekers and women.

## OUR PROJECT: CREATE & CHANGE

This grant has supported our Create & Change project from 2022 to 2025 – an arts and wellbeing initiative delivered in partnership



Photos courtesy of Sampad.

with Dolphin Women's Centre (DWC) in Washwood Heath, Birmingham. This area, in the Ward End constituency, is among the top 10% of most deprived nationally, with 86% of the population from South Asian or Black African/Caribbean backgrounds, 45.5% economically inactive, and 11.5% unable to speak English 'well'.

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“Sampad is very important to the Dolphin Centre. Participation has grown and grown and now includes women with additional needs. There is a waiting list – we could easily fill two workshops a week. It's not 'just art' – it's much, much more than that. You cannot underestimate what coming here and taking part does for the women and where it can take them.”

**Maxine Mills, Dolphin Women's Centre Manager**

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In its first year, funding from the Baring Foundation enabled us to employ an Artist Practitioner to develop and lead the project, with plans to expand to a local library. However, engagement dropped significantly due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and capital redevelopment work at the Dolphin Women's Centre. Feedback also suggested that working with a single artist limited creative variety.

In response, in the second year we revised the project to a termly model, introducing a new artist each term. This increased engagement. We also focussed on support for artists new to community-based practice, with our

Learning Officer attending every workshop, building rapport with participants and offering hands-on support to the artist and Centre in the delivery of this work.

Over the course of the project, we've worked with artists at different career stages, including Nilupa Yasmin (lens-based and craft artist), Tarla Patel (photography and heritage), and Abeda Begum (costume and textile artist). Participants have created work to take away, to display at the Centre, and in 2025 their work formed part of an exhibition at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Each term, we deliver at least ten workshops, two family days reaching 50+ participants, and one cultural trip – including visits to the Midlands Arts Centre and the National Trust's Back to Backs. We've involved four volunteers and ensure mental health support pathways are clear to participants and artists.

We now have 20 participants, with an average attendance of 16. A waiting list ensures we can welcome new women into the project as places become available.

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“Life can get too much and coming to the Sampad days is an escape from being alone. You can come and do the arts activities and there is no judgement and a lot of support and help. There's a wide age range and you get to meet people, make friends and try different things and learn new skills.”

**Participant**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

Our key learning included the following.

- Be prepared to adapt and change in response to how a project is unfolding, and have that conversation with funders to try and make it work in a different way. For example, changing art form and location has helped to strengthen our project. Being able and prepared to make some difficult decisions for the long term success of a project was vital for Sampad.
- Successful community engagement with least engaged communities needs resource – not just the artists you contract to deliver them but the in-house consistent presence of a team member that is building an ongoing relationship with participants.
- Projects develop over a long period: we are now in our third successive year and have a waiting list for the sessions. This is not something we would have envisaged in Year 1.
- We knew there wasn't a large cohort of South Asian artists available to us who would have experience in this context – however, we have given one 'shadowing' opportunity to an emerging artist (and intend to build this into the next year), we have offered artists training in working in mental health settings and we have also encouraged them to become part of our wider delivery teams (for example schools projects) so that they can continue to develop their experience and benefit from any ongoing CPD training that we schedule in.
- Working with participants to develop the project over a longer period is important. For example participants asked to have their work be displayed, to have an exhibition of their work in a public place, and we have worked hard to build this into future terms/ years of activities.
- We have learnt a lot about working with participants of different abilities and so have our artists. This group has wheelchair users and participants with learning disabilities. It has been very important for us to ensure the project is inclusive and we have worked with artists to ensure they adapt their workshops to meet the needs of our participants.

- We learnt in the first year of this funding that it was important for artists to be able to access support so that they could 'download' their experiences with an experienced supervisor. We offer all artists on this project Artist Wellbeing sessions.

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“ I live alone and can get very depressed. Coming to the Sampad classes is important for my mental health and wellbeing. It gets me out and about and surrounded by kind people. I can't feel more confident when I am here. Doing the arts makes me smile and I feel lucky and blessed. ”

**Participant**

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## WHAT NEXT?

Sampad is committed to its work in arts and wellbeing.

- We will work with Dolphin Women's Centre this year to secure further funding for Create & Change to continue. We will explore the possibility of expanding the programme as there is a waiting list for this project.
- We are building in another shadow artist opportunity as part of our project this year to enable less experienced artists to learn from others and to have the opportunity to see if working in this context is for them.
- We are exploring other partnership opportunities – we worked with Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for one term, which added to our offer, giving participants a unique opportunity to delve in SBT's archives, visit its attractions and understand more about Shakespeare, thus widening their cultural experiences. Working alongside our Lead Artist, the women developed an authentic response in the form of an exhibition that was displayed at the Trust – a national visitor attraction – showcasing their voices, perspectives, and achievements on a prestigious public platform.



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# Together Productions

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**BY JEREMY HANEMAN, WITH HOLLY JONES  
AND ALEXANDRA GODFREE**

*Jeremy is the Director of Together Productions,  
Holly is a co-Director and Alexandra is Head of Programmes.*



The Singing for our Minds group. Photo © Joladé Olusanya.

## ABOUT US

Together Productions is a ground-breaking social change organisation founded in 2017, working across London and Essex. We produce innovative collaborative arts projects that connect people, organisations and audiences across social and cultural divides. We use music and the arts as a catalyst to break down barriers, reduce isolation and enhance well-being. We produce high-quality artistic work that is grown through creative collaboration, participation and experimentation. Our work includes those who are marginalised or excluded, such as torture survivors, refugees and those seeking

sanctuary, people facing mental health challenges, racial minorities, the elderly, the financially disadvantaged and socially excluded. We know that choirs are an incredible way to build community, improve mental health and build empathy and therefore choral singing is a big part of our work.

We run the Mixed Up Chorus, a group uniting people across faith and non-religious backgrounds through singing, including refugee members and people with mental health challenges. In 2017, the Sing for Freedom Choir, co-created with survivors of torture and their allies, became part of the Together Productions family. These projects expanded into vibrant,



Photos © Joladé Olusanya.

supportive, sustained communities that offer not only creative expression but also social connection, wellbeing and advocacy opportunities with a focus on positive mental health. Together with our community, we have since developed seven core programme strands that reflect their needs, interests and aspirations for change. This work is responsive and evolving, and extends beyond singing, encompassing storytelling, heritage and oral history, visual arts, film-making, leadership training and creative community building.

## OUR PROJECT: SINGING FOR OUR MINDS

As a result of the grant, we created the Singing For Our Minds programme in late 2021, for artists and producers from racially minoritised communities currently under-represented in arts leadership, offering development in musical leadership with a focus on positive mental health outcomes, inclusion and building community across difference.

“I have gained confidence and feel more equipped than I thought to deliver a choir. I have increased my understanding and awareness of singing benefits for wellbeing and community building, my knowledge and awareness of mental health issues and an increased network of people that I can share with.”

**Trainee practitioner**

“Mental health issues are normal responses to life situations... We must not pathologise all mental ill health. It is healthy to feel depressed after a bereavement not unhealthy – the slowing down and sleeping which often accompany depression help us to heal. Healing is easier if we are robust and we have support.”

**Louise, Wellbeing Choir Champion**

The first phase of the programme, developed in partnership by Together Productions and the Mind and Soul Choir at the Maudsley Hospital, ran from January 2022 – February 2023.

A cohort of ten artists and producers from racially minoritised backgrounds was engaged in partnership with diverse networks including London and Thurrock Music Hubs, Black Lives in Music, Singing for Health, Association of British Choral Directors, Natural Voice Practitioner Network, Spitalfields Music Trainee Network, and others.

Singing For Our Minds was also underpinned by an advocacy programme for singing and mental health led by ten choir singers from diverse backgrounds (Wellbeing Choir Champions), including those with lived experience of seeking sanctuary and/or mental health challenges, who became points of contact for mental health challenges within their choirs, as well as advocates for the power of singing for mental health outside of their choir settings.

An intensive programme of training and workshop sessions for both cohorts was led by course leaders and specialist practitioners from a diverse range of backgrounds. These focused on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for those experiencing mental health challenges through music-making and singing. The sessions covered a range of topics including self-care, mental health awareness training and the relationship between singing and trauma. The sessions were complemented by observation visits and 1:1 coaching sessions.

The Wellbeing Choir Champions met regularly, visiting one another's choirs, discussing the role they could play in their own choirs, and how they could collaborate as part of a peer support network.

Both cohorts collaborated to make a short film advocating for the positive mental health benefits of singing with others.

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“I have enjoyed great warm ups and the opportunity to reflect on my own practice along with some great advice from the leaders.”

**Sri, practitioner on Singing for our Minds**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

From our evaluation, our practitioners reported that having a diverse delivery/leadership team and participants was particularly important for them. Trainees shared comments such as “music is a global language”; “really enjoyed being with diverse range of people”; “ethnicity is a hard feeling”. They found that it provided a safe space for them to learn from each other and explore something new/different.

Our trainees also demonstrated increased awareness of their own mental health and the impacts of music on our mental health. For example, one trainee reported “the training made me look at myself and my practice;

made me change my way of interacting with members; I think of more approaches to include mental health”. Others demonstrated increased understanding of the importance of self-care, i.e., looking after their own mental health as they lead a diverse group. Further, trainees highlighted their own personal growth through the programme.

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“I've been thinking about the programme, and it has had an unexpected and profound effect on how I work.”

**Trainee practitioner**

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The programme has also provided opportunities for the delivery team to develop working at the intersection of singing, mental health and diversity. They found working with the practitioners from diverse backgrounds to be rewarding and enjoyable, whilst also requiring sensitivity and inclusivity.

## WHAT NEXT?

We received a second grant from the Baring Foundation, which we used to develop the Singing for Our Minds online resource for anyone who leads singing in a choir, school or other setting, containing tools and techniques to promote positive wellbeing and inclusive singing communities.

Released in 2025, *Singing for Our Minds*<sup>15</sup> is a set of eight podcasts providing a practical source of advice for anyone seeking to ensure that their singing groups or activities are inclusive, artistic spaces where everyone can sing, create and thrive. They include feature interviews with internationally renowned conductors, academics, choir facilitators and trauma experts.

The next phase of this work will offer bespoke training for choir leaders in positive mental health leadership.



[www.togetherproductions.co.uk](http://www.togetherproductions.co.uk)  
[www.singingforourminds.co.uk](http://www.singingforourminds.co.uk)

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# Yaram Arts

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**BY NAMVULA RENNIE AND LAUREN STEWART**

**Namvula is a freelance musician and Artistic Lead for this project.**

**Lauren is Professor in Psychology at Roehampton University.**

## ABOUT US

Yaram is a London based arts organisation that promotes and tours African and World music in the UK, including introducing medieval West African masquerades to London to enrich the carnival arts scene in the UK. In addition, Yaram has toured with hundreds of renowned world music artists in venues and festivals around the country. Yaram holds an annual masquerade festival in East London and participates in many UK national carnivals as well as undertaking school workshops and drumming sessions in Hackney, Islington and Newham and other outreach work in the wider London area.

## OUR GRANT

With this funding, Yaram Arts (led by Malik Jeng) partnered with the CHIME team (led by Prof Lauren Stewart, Roehampton University) to develop a music-based intervention for perinatal mental health, drawing on work that was first initiated in West Africa. Freelance musician, Namvula Rennie, was engaged to lead on the delivery based on her expertise in delivering music workshops for antenatal and postnatal women. Additional contributions came from: Lewisham Maternity Voice Partnership, specifically Toyin Adeyinka, MIND (specifically Mindful Mums, Diversity Matters, service lead Belinda Graham, staff member Katie Marin), Dr Katie Rose Sanfilippo (Centre for Health Innovation and Research, City University) and Kate Valentine (Singing Mamas). Early career researchers Juliet Firth and Lottie Anstee provided research assistance and administrative support. An advisory

group was convened with participation from a broad range of research and practitioner based experts.

We were introduced to Lewisham Maternity Voice Partnership, a coalition of NHS maternity and neonatal health professionals and service users. Through them, we partnered with Diversity Matters, a service run by Mindful Mums (South East London MIND) that provides a space for new global majority mums from the local community (the London borough of Lewisham) to talk about the issues relating to culture, upbringing and heritage in the context of some of the common challenges of early motherhood.

We ran a series of focus groups to better understand the lived experience of global majority women in relation to the perinatal period and a series of participatory theory of change workshops as a foundation on which to build our intervention.

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“It was all in my mind throughout the week... like songs that we sang or things that we discussed or even like advice from other people would stay in my mind for the rest of the week and kind of keep your spirits high for that week until the next session.”

**Participant**

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We worked with the Mindful Mums/Diversity Matters staff to codevelop an adaptation of their provision to include music activities. The inclusion of music activities was motivated by an emerging evidence that the inclusion of music can provide additional effects on wellbeing, in ways that can be culturally respectful.

Between Jan 2024 and July 2024, pilot sessions were run to determine the most effective way to include music into the existing provision. Between September 2024 and March 2025, three cohorts were run, comprising delivery of the programme to a total of 18 women. Data was collected before and after the programme to evaluate its impact, including use of a quantitative measure, the REQUOL, plus open ended questions to allow for qualitative feedback.

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“ Music is so regulating for me... I remember describing it as: we don't play until we feel safe, and so music is a great way to hack that. ”

**Participant**

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## WHAT WE LEARNED

A key lesson was the importance of co-development from the bottom up with end users, as opposed to adaption of pre-existing 'generic' programmes, developed without the voices or preferences of the target community.

Our theory of change work and our focus groups elucidated the complex reasons that global majority women may fail to engage with health services or services held in formal health settings. We also noted that global majority women were more likely to report faith-based or cultural stereotype based reasons for not engaging with existing support services.

Compared with women who attend the non-music Diversity Matters programme, those opting to attend the music-based programme were: from higher level of socioeconomic deprivation and had a significantly higher proportion of clinical mental health symptoms. This suggests that the inclusion of music was more appealing to women who were experiencing greater mental health struggles.

Compared with women who attended the non-music Diversity Matters programme, a significantly greater level of improvement in mental health symptoms was seen.

We aim to publish two papers from the work (intervention co-development; evaluation).

## WHAT NEXT?

We are actively seeking funds to continue delivery of the programme. An NIHR Research for Patient Benefit grant may be useful to extend the research (submitted in partnership with NHS partners).

The work has resulted in some knowledge exchange with colleagues in South Africa who are co-developing a music-based group intervention as part of Lauren Stewart's NIHR Global Health Research Group grant (CHIME: community health intervention through music engagement).





Photo courtesy of Artcore, see page 15.

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# Reflections

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BY DANIEL REGAN

Daniel is an adviser to the Baring Foundation's Arts programme  
(for a full biography, see page 2).

The first report by the Baring Foundation on this theme (*Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse*<sup>16</sup>), published in 2021, highlighted why the Foundation has had a particular focus on funding arts participatory work with global majority communities. This section won't therefore go into the details of how this funding commitment came about – the systematic inequalities in society that highlight how global majority communities are more likely to be impacted by mental ill-health is well documented. We would encourage you to seek out that initial report as it includes work being undertaken in this area by a number of other organisations not featured in this publication.

The breadth of the work funded and shown within the case studies included in this report represents just a snapshot of the types of work that arts organisations are doing to work with ethnically diverse artists and communities, and the environments in which this work is taking place.

The awarded organisations used their respective funding to reach out to and support new communities, provide training programmes for participatory artists and to try out new approaches that led to significant organisational development and learning. The resulting work took place across child, adolescent and adult mental health units in hospitals, across primary care, and within a range of community settings across the UK.

Each case study touches on the unique positionality of that organisation, the challenges faced in delivering this work, alongside their

successes and generous insights which we hope will be of interest to the wider creative health sector.

From these case studies and a subsequent focus group with some of the grantees, we have pulled out what has struck us to be interesting and/or significant from their experience and reflections.

## REACHING NEW COMMUNITIES

For a number of organisations these grants funded entirely new strands of work, affording them the time and resources to deliver creative activities with communities that they previously had no connection with. In many of these case studies – and within our focus group with a number of grantees – the importance of partnership working is cited as being paramount in what has led to these projects coming to fruition. In order for ideas to translate into tangible activities, organisations were required to clearly identify and work alongside expert organisations with existing track records, and connections to these communities with a greater understanding of the unique challenges faced.

A part of this also involved building allyship and kinship with individuals representative of those communities, bringing in familiar and friendly faces that are already embedded into the community, including: community and faith leaders, translators and outreach workers. Camden Creative Health (formerly Free Space Project) shared how difficult they found it to make connections with their local

<sup>16</sup> *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse*, Baring Foundation, 2021. [baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-ethnically-diverse](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/resource/creatively-minded-and-ethnically-diverse).

target Bangladeshi community and that they found the best way in was through employing an Outreach Worker from that community (see page 32). This worker had experience of using local services and of the barriers that their community faced. *“I don’t think we realised quite what we were up against when we embarked on this, but...we persisted, and it has started to work...it’s better than we’d anticipated”*, Li Williams told us. Camden Creative Health have continued to run – after this project has completed – both their Social Shapla group and an annual family day which opens out their engagement to the wider community. They also run sessions on other health issues for example menopause, with the creative health project giving participants the confidence to engage with a wider programme. The importance of this outreach worker and the creative practitioner having the trust of the participants was key.

### WORKING SLOWLY

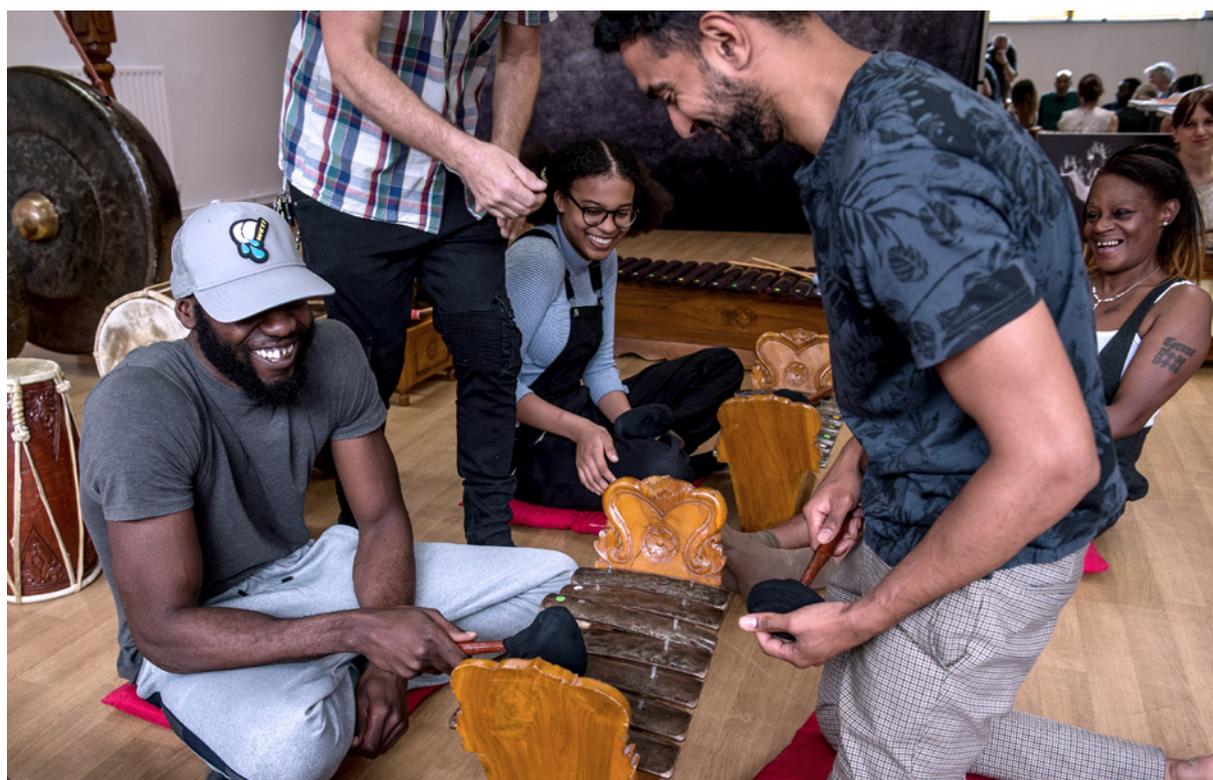
Many of us are no stranger to the idea that building trust with communities – and the individuals within them – takes time and patience. By the very nature of describing some communities as marginalised, we must

appreciate and respect that an invitation to participate in a programme with a new organisation and new people can sometimes feel uncomfortable or daunting. When approaching organisations to partner with, or new communities to engage with, we should prioritise making that approach with care and capaciousness.

Many of the organisations funded through this round acknowledged the unwavering importance of time and slowness when building these new partnerships. Establishing trust with diverse communities took significantly longer than they had anticipated, meaning that project timelines were required to shift and be agile. Working slowly was brought up by a number of the case studies – Camden Creative Health above were surprised it took them over a year to make inroads into the local community.

And Sampad’s experience was similar – building the confidence and trust of their participants has taken a while (see page 72) Over three years, they have reflected upon and changed their delivery model to better meet the needs of their participants. At the heart of their project was a desire to build relationships with their participants in order to deliver

Photo courtesy of Good Vibrations, see page 38.



an authentic co-creation experience. Their project *Create & Change* has a Producer who holds the relationships with the participants, slowly getting to know them, working with the lead artist to co-create and then adapt the workshops for different access needs. This slow development of these key relationships has resulted over three years in participant numbers increasing from 4 to 20 on a weekly basis with a waiting list to join the sessions.

## CULTURALLY COMPETENT TRAINING

In the participatory arts sector there is no set training or qualification that guarantees that someone has the 'right' interpersonal or creative skills to be delivering arts and mental health work. Access to training, particularly for freelance artists, is often sporadic and comes with a multiplicity of barriers that prevent many artists from undertaking such training. Alongside practical skills training and development, artists working in this specific field may want to access (or be asked to complete) forms of mental health training to better understand the challenges that participants with mental health difficulties face.

However, poignantly highlighted by East London Dance's case study (see page 35), there is a lack of mental health training that is culturally sensitive and appropriate to the experiences of those from the global majority. This strikes us as gravely important to improve on. Firstly, for those working in this field to have a baseline understanding of how mental health difficulties manifest, are understood and are acknowledged (or sometimes unacknowledged) within the diverse cultures of the global majority. Secondly, in order to support the workforce of global majority artists in this sector, and to sustain their own wellbeing, we must acknowledge that the challenges they may face themselves in doing this work may be different from peers and colleagues. East London Dance's Nzinga Mascal and Maren Ellerman eloquently described to us how they addressed this issue, extensively researching organisations that could provide culturally appropriate training. Nzinga Mascal decided to 'transform' the Youth Mental Health Training she had attended so that it was relevant to the audience and artists they were targeting through their *Brainwaves* project. Nzinga explained it was important that the training was culturally competent because "...we were

Photo courtesy of Liverpool Lighthouse, see page 55.



trying to create a space for our artists to want to learn more about mental health, but also be the providers of this training within their community as well". They have since delivered this training to other arts organisations – Sadlers Wells, English National Ballet and Breakin' Convention.

In Manchester, the Myriad project (see page 41) – developed by NHS Greater Manchester, GMCA, Company Chameleon and Afrocats – has developed its own Core Competency Framework. This training supports global majority practitioners to identify the "skills, knowledge and abilities needed by creative health practitioners, working in a mental health context, with global majority communities", through their eight Core Competency components. These include cultural competency, working with others, and resilience and self-care.

### QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Capitalism does a great job of instilling within us the notion that more is always better and that growth is the only logical step forward. The arts and cultural sectors are guilty of over-promising on outputs and

participant numbers, often due to the very real and challenging reasons of a tumultuous landscape unfolding ahead of us in the sector and ever dwindling and competitive funding. In this context it can be tempting to prioritise outputs and figures over the quality of a person's experience.

A number of the projects funded had a lower participant uptake than expected – acknowledging that this work is complex and comes with no guarantees. Organisations are working with humans – not machines – and many of these people live with a myriad of intersecting and overlapping complications in their lives that fluctuate across the duration of a project timeline.

Organisations cannot guarantee that what they propose will be received by participants with no qualms or feedback; that partnerships will build and come to form within the timeline proposed; that projects will be delivered 'on time' at all, and that the specified number of participants will be present every week. As a funder we feel that the Baring Foundation is understanding of this and sympathetic to the unavoidable shifts that occur between proposal and realisation, leaving space for learning and insight.

Kwaku of The Unknowns performs at Union Chapel. Photo © Akil Wilson/Hear Me Out. See page 46.





The Myriad project, see page 41. Photo © Richard Tymon.



Photo courtesy of London Arts and Health, see page 58.

In speaking to a number of organisations in our focus group for this report it felt important to explore what success looks like in relation to this funding. There was a shared understanding that this work takes time and in order for things to grow – including participant numbers – it's essential that things start small. To interpret low participation as a failure could lead to walking away from this important work. Yet to see low participation as part of the learning, with ideas of what to change, or provide time and space to let something grow organically, acknowledges that all good things must start somewhere. That sustainability, commitment and investment create the conditions for something to bloom. As Antonia Attwood, Artistic Director of Creative Health Camden, reflected in our focus group session:

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“I think perhaps [what] gets overlooked by how many numbers you've got sometimes....[is] the fact that we manage to change people's perceptions within that community of what the health centre is and is now a community space for them, that they have their artwork shown in, that they have their family days and that they invite their community to has been a massive success of the project.... if we'd have had a really high intakes right at the beginning, without having built that trust and just hit numbers straight away, we wouldn't have had the impact that we've had on the community.”

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## ACCESSIBILITY

In our initial *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse* report we noted the importance of cultural sensitivities in relation to activity delivery, and its impact on access to activities, such as appropriate venues and times of days. A number of these most recent projects also highlight the importance of considering other accessibility arrangements to facilitate people participating. Liverpool Lighthouse (page 55) offered additional support including travel reimbursements, an on-site crèche (explaining that many asylum-seeking mothers did not have access to childcare), served hot meals and additional take home meals alongside support in accessing other services. They believe this contributed to having a strong cohort of participants regularly attending.

## ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Each opportunity of programme delivery is a valuable opportunity for organisational development and learning, something the Baring Foundation is always keen to encourage as well as exploring opportunities to share this practice and development.

Some examples of how these projects have had a longer term impact on the organisations include Liverpool Lighthouse. Co-creation was always a really important element of their work: “*Sharing power is the first value of any project we run*”, Helen Brown told us in the focus group session. However, one of the purposes of their project was to support a number of participants to become ‘creative influencers’ to be able to

have the confidence in their own experience to be on the same platforms as other experts, they themselves “*experts by experience, but also experts in creative health*”. These women are now leading projects in health and for Liverpool Lighthouse this work in: “*...levelling of the playing field between patient and professional... has become one of our major focuses because it was so successful. It is not something we had done before....but it is basically a big chunk of our model!*”

Other organisations have shared how their projects have impacted their approach, particularly in relation to artist development. Arts for Health Milton Keynes introduced a ‘Shadowing Artist’ role, to support emerging artists to develop further experience in creative health. Raw Material, after completing their Baring funded project, have continued to offer the bursaries to their artists for their own personal development – the artists decide what they would like to use that fund.

### WHAT WAS UNEXPECTED

As highlighted earlier, projects don’t always go to plan and sometimes there are surprises that may be useful learning for the field of creative health.

Yaram Arts, for example, shared their experience. Although being confident in their approach in delivering music interventions for perinatal women, they were surprised by the analysis of their colleague Dr Lauren Stewart from Roehampton University showing that music-based components of the project they ran with Diversity Matters attracted women with the highest levels of deprivation and mental health symptoms. This group of participants showed particularly strong improvements when compared with the group that had had ‘discussion based’ interventions. The team hadn’t anticipated that including music would make the programme so much more appealing and impactful for the most vulnerable participants. Dr Stewart told us:

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“ So that was really interesting and unexpected, in a way, because ... the inclusion of music was probably making things a) more appealing and b) more inclusive. ”

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East London Dance were surprised by the large interest and uptake when offering mental health training for dance artists from global majority communities. The response was so great that they could only accept a small group, highlighting an unforeseen demand for this training. Reflecting on this, they said that critical to this was paying artists to undertake the training:

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“ It’s not enough sometimes to just invite people in...but really value their time. [...] we were overwhelmed by the amount of people actually signed up for the programme. ”

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### CONCLUSION

The case studies pull together a diversity of experience from a range of organisations working in the field of arts and mental health, in and with global majority communities. Whilst highlighting the transformative power of participant centred creative health interventions, they show again and again the importance of co-production, representation and flexibility in co-designing these programmes. Many highlight the need for sustained long term planning and engagement and intensive resource required to deliver wrap-around support required to overcome some of the barriers that participants face. Additionally, many case studies highlight the critical role of training practitioners to be able to effectively deliver in these spaces – whilst also looking after their own mental health; and as we have outlined above, organisations have shared how this work has the potential for long term organisational growth or change.



Photo courtesy of Artcore, see page 15.

# List of grants

## ALL GRANTS UNDER THIS THEME (2021–2024)

### GRANTS GIVEN IN 2021

ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
Akademi	£34,501	For the Feet First project which will provide training to South Asian dancers to deliver a participatory dance programme for young people experiencing mental health challenges.	●
Arts for Health MK	£34,000	To create representative diversity in our professional artist delivery team increasing cultural exchange and capacity in addressing mental health needs.	●
Arts 2 Heal	£29,689	To deliver art workshops to the BAME community with mental health problems through a sensitively structured programme and developing community champions.	●
Bethlem Gallery	£26,625	To commission two ethnically diverse artists to co-produce commissions for a new hospital, alongside current service users, supported by a producer.	●
Birmingham Centre for Arts Therapies	£16,539	To deliver a Creative Hip Hop Academy.	
Brixton House	£40,000	For a multidisciplinary arts project engaging with children and young people from Lambeth of diverse ethnic backgrounds and with mental health issues.	
Creative Future	£32,297	To create access and opportunities for writers from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds with mental health issues through training, mentoring and workshops.	●
Displace Yourself Theatre	£35,489	For a programme of creative mental health activity, professional training for artists and a paid work placement with the company.	
East London Dance	£40,000	To train and support ethnically diverse participatory dance artists experiencing poor mental health and delivering to others who experience the same.	●

ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
Free Space Project (now Camden Creative Health)	£39,500	For a participatory arts and mental health project working with ethnically diverse participants and artists in and from Camden, and for organisational development.	●
Good Vibrations	£15,000	To extend the 'Resonate Glasgow' community music project to reach more ethnically diverse participants, and to train four ethnically diverse music facilitators.	●
Hear Me Out	£38,142	For a 12-month structured pilot programme of artistic and personal support, and pathway development for former immigration detainees.	●
Hospital Rooms	£39,934	To commission eight ethnically diverse artists to create major artworks for a new mental health hospital in collaboration with service users.	●
Inside Out Community	£39,825	For transitioning to an intercultural community connecting people of all backgrounds through arts and creativity.	
Key Changes	£23,940	For Music Studio 'Discovery' Experiences for 150+ plus mental health patients/service users from minority ethnic backgrounds.	
Lewisham Youth Theatre	£25,610	For the 'Progression Programme' which trains and supports ethnically diverse young adults with lived experience of mental health problems in drama facilitation.	
Marlborough Theatre Productions	£40,000	To support a programme of creative development activities for our QTIPoC wellbeing group Radical Rhizomes.	
Outside Edge Theatre Company	£10,000	To further Diversity and Inclusion work across the organisation and workforce to help use values of D&I to reach wider, more diverse participants.	
Protégé DNA	£38,400	To train two BAME artists to deliver creative projects in mental health settings, and to commission two mental health professionals to devise organisational development programme for the Protégé team.	●
Raw Material Music and Media	£20,025	To support a new programme of creative courses for those experiencing mental ill health and professional development for ethnically diverse artists.	●
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra	£37,695	For a year-long programme of training and creative music workshops engaging Brent residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds with mental health challenges.	●

ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
Sampad	£39,980	To help embed a culture of arts improving mental health in Washwood Heath, Birmingham, through professional artists representing the diverse community.	●
The Foundling Museum	£15,000	To part fund Tracing our Tales, an arts-based traineeship working with ethnically diverse care leavers with mental health problems.	
The Red Earth Collective	£40,000	To design and deliver training and events for ethnically diverse creatives and emerging artists with lived experience to work in mental health settings.	
Together Productions	£2,000	To support an independent research evaluation of Singing For Our Minds, a pilot development programme to train artist facilitators.	
Together Productions	£39,974	For a training and advocacy programme for ethnically diverse artists, producers and singers with focus on positive mental health, inclusion and building community.	●

## GRANTS GIVEN IN 2022

ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
Artcore	£50,792	For the Untold Stories project, which supports recent immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and members of Derby's Bosnian and South Asian Communities to access arts.	●
Bernie Grant Arts Centre	£50,000	For a three-year programme of creative workshops led by Global Majority artists for vulnerable young people in collaboration with Haringey Learning Partnership.	●
Company Chameleon	£59,000	For the Movement for Mind project, targeting young people experiencing mental health difficulties across ten schools in Greater Manchester.	
Company of Others	£50,500	For a two-year programme of bespoke movement workshops for women who are Refugee and/or Asylum experienced and/or of the Global Majority in the North East.	
Fresh Arts C.I.C	£60,000	For the Bounce Drama Project, developing a drama and wellbeing project to work with children with mental health issues.	
Keneish Dance	£30,000	To grow partnerships and co-deliver therapeutic provision outside of Birmingham and Solihull.	●

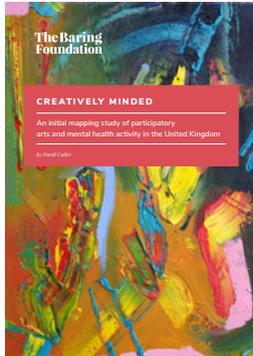
ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
Liverpool Lighthouse	£57,888	To support six participatory artists from Global Majority communities to develop their practice and gain experience as community arts and mental health practitioners.	●
Maya Productions Ltd	£60,000	For a three-year partnership with South Yorkshire Housing Association, working with residents with long-term mental health needs to create their own art.	
Outside Edge Theatre Company	£30,000	To further Diversity and Inclusion work across the organisation and workforce to help use values of D&I to reach wider, more diverse participants.	
Rambert	£55,000	For a new mental health and wellbeing project led by participatory dance artists from global majority communities with multi-agency partners in Greater Manchester.	●
Tamasha Theatre Company	£45,732	To support a programme of training and development for staff and artists, followed by a pilot participatory programme, in partnership with the Free Space Project (now Camden Creative Health).	
The Albany	£59,000	To use musical activities and 1-1 support to improve youth mental health, focused on people from Global Majority/low-income backgrounds.	
Yaram Arts	£50,000	To train Global Majority musicians in the Singing Mamas approach for perinatal wellbeing.	●
Your Next Move	£42,426	For a new approach to Arts on Prescription through Hip Hop arts and culture, designed with and for young people of Global Majority communities in Gloucester.	

## GRANTS GIVEN IN 2023–2024

ORGANISATION	GRANT AMOUNT	PURPOSE OF GRANT	
NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care	£100,000	To develop, network, test and learn from projects for Global Majority creative practitioners engaging people with mental health problems.	●
London Arts and Health Forum	£40,000	Towards the costs of the Artists' Represent Recovery Network.	●

For all grants given under the Baring Foundation's Arts and Mental Health theme from 2020 to date, visit our website: [baringfoundation.org.uk/our-grant-making/funded-projects](https://baringfoundation.org.uk/our-grant-making/funded-projects).

# Selected Baring Foundation resources



Creatively minded  
David Cutler  
2020



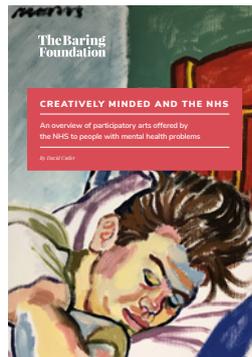
Creatively minded  
and young  
Harriet Lowe  
2020



Creatively minded  
and ethnically diverse  
Compiled by The Baring Foundation  
2021



Creatively minded  
and heritage  
The Restoration Trust  
2021



Creatively minded  
and the NHS  
David Cutler  
2021



Creatively minded  
at the museum  
David Cutler  
2022



Creatively minded:  
the directory  
The Baring Foundation  
2022



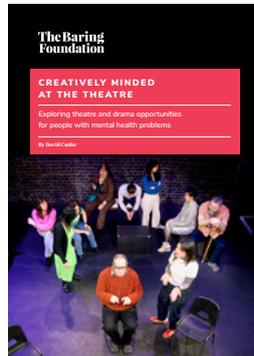
Arts and creativity for people  
with severe mental illness  
H. Zeilig, C. Hackmann,  
J. West, M. Handley & J. Plant  
2022



Creatively minded  
and refugees  
Counterpoints Arts  
2023



Creatively minded men  
David Cutler  
2024



Creatively minded at the theatre  
David Cutler  
2024



Creatively minded and in recovery  
Dr Cathy Sloan  
2024



Creatively minded in the art studio  
David Cutler  
2025





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