

# The Baring Foundation

# COUNTERPOINTS.

## CREATIVELY MINDED AND REFUGEES

Arts, refugees and mental health

By Counterpoints Arts



## CREATIVELY MINDED AND REFUGEES: ARTS, REFUGEES AND MENTAL HEALTH

### About Counterpoints Arts

Counterpoints Arts is a leading organisation in the field of arts, refugees, migration and cultural change. Our mission is to support and produce the arts by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their contributions are recognised and welcomed within our arts, history and culture.

Founded in 2012, we were the first arts organisation in the UK to engage strategically with displacement and migration at the national level. Since then, we have supported and collaborated with hundreds of artists and organisations. We are based in London, working nationally and internationally.

Our work is based around a set of core values and beliefs which guide our work and decision making. This includes our belief that art can open spaces for people to talk across differences, inspire community participation, and foster a more humane and compassionate society. Other values guiding our work can be found here: [counterpointsarts.org.uk/about/core-beliefs](https://counterpointsarts.org.uk/about/core-beliefs).

Our focus on displacement and migration is intersectional and often contains explorations of other connected experiences and wider issues. We are especially committed to expanding our work and collaborations at the intersection of displacement, racial and climate justice and mental health.

### 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. There is more about us in *A History of the Baring Foundation in 50 Grants* available on our website. Since 2020, the Foundation has focused its Arts programme on creative opportunities for people with mental health problems. The programme funds across the UK and it is intended to be long term. This report forms part of an ongoing series of publications (see page 57).

### Acknowledgements

The Baring Foundation and Counterpoints Arts would like to thank everyone who generously contributed their time and energy to providing their case study for this report. We would also like to extend our gratitude to all the participants and staff members at the different projects and organisations who make this work possible. This publication was designed by Alex Valy and edited by Harriet Lowe at the Baring Foundation.

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# Foreword

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## HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS, CREATIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

BY DAVID CUTLER

Since 2020, the Baring Foundation has been awarding grants for creative activity which engages people with mental health problems. We have combined this with our *Creatively Minded* series of reports. The decision to commission one about work with refugees seemed obvious. Mental health problems are more likely if someone has experienced trauma and how can a refugee not have experienced trauma? Indeed, arriving in the UK in what was once officially described as a 'hostile environment' (having already fled another hostile environment) may well compound that trauma. On top of this a number of our grantees are working with refugees.

The choice to commission Counterpoints Arts to write the report was just as obvious. We have had a happy and productive relationship with the charity since before it was born and was just a gleam in Almir Koldzic's eye. This dates back to the period 2004-2009 when the theme for our arts programme was working with refugees. I would like to thank them for their dedicated work on this report which we think is the first to combine arts, refugees and mental health in the UK as a focus.

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“Hostile environments aren't conducive to good mental health. Supportive, caring artists and creativity are.”

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The case studies in this report are varied. They stretch across Britain. They use many art forms. Some are refugee charities that use the arts. Some are arts organisation that include work with refugees. Some are arts organisations that specialise in working with refugees. Some are quite new and others have been working for over twenty years. Almost all are small or very small and this they share with the great majority of arts organisations working with people with mental health problems. Many include other types of practical and pastoral support to refugees. They all offer friendship, community, self-expression and purpose.

Counterpoints Arts identifies a number of characteristic ways of working in these case studies, many of which they share with other participatory arts organisations, such as co-production. Their work is trauma-informed which needs to include the mental health experiences of participants. Creative activities often mitigate difficulties using English as a new language and offer expression without words, for instance through dance.

This report showcases work of the first importance. Recognising the mental health problems of some refugees while working with them creatively takes skill and knowledge. There needs to be a lot more of this work. As ever, funding is the key constraint and more could be done by larger arts venues, such as museums, theatres and art centres to support this work.

Hostile environments aren't conducive to good mental health. Supportive, caring artists and creativity are.





Participants of the Museum  
of Things Art Group, Maryhill  
Integration Network.  
Photo © Rose Filippi.



# Introduction

## CONTEXT

The mental health of refugees is a critical public health issue. Research shows that refugees often experience high levels of stress, trauma, and mental health issues related to their displacement and resettlement experiences.

In 2023, the number of forcibly displaced or stateless individuals across the world is estimated to have risen to 117.2 million,<sup>1</sup> which marks a sharp increase from the 84 million that were displaced in 2021. The first half of 2022 alone saw more than 11.9 million people having to leave their homes due to the war in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> The psychological impact of displacement has been widely documented, and the case studies featured in this report (pages 11-45) provide further evidence of this, particularly within the British context.

According to the UNHCR statistics, as of November 2022 there were 231,597 refugees, 127,421 pending asylum cases and 5,483 stateless persons in the UK (which is 0.54% of the UK's total population)<sup>3</sup>. In 2022, the UK received applications for asylum from 89,398 people (including dependants)<sup>4</sup>. This is approximately three times less than the number of applications received by Germany (243,835), and considerably less than France (156,455) and Spain (117,945)<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that these figures may not capture all refugees and asylum-seekers living in the UK, as some may not be registered with the UNHCR or may have arrived after the data was collected.

“61% of asylum seekers experience serious mental illness and they are five times more likely to have mental health needs than the UK population.”

A guide published by the UK Government Home Office claimed that refugees in the UK are more likely to experience poor mental health compared to the general population.<sup>6</sup> According to the Refugee Council in England, 61% of asylum seekers experience serious mental illness and they are five times more likely to have mental health needs than the UK population.<sup>7</sup>

There are a range of factors that can contribute to mental health challenges among refugees. Initially, there may be the stress, loss, and grief associated with the experience of displacement, including the traumatic reasons people may have fled their home countries (such as war, violence, conflict, human rights abuses, torture, persecution, sexual violence, environmental disasters, and more). Uncertainty about the future can compound these challenges and directly result in the development of long-term psychological effects and complex mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, paranoia, PTSD, survivor's guilt, self-harm, and suicidal ideation, among others.

<sup>1</sup> According to UNHCR's estimations available at [reporting.unhcr.org/globalappeal2023](https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalappeal2023), 19 March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ukraine Emergency, UNHCR [www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html](https://www.unhcr.org/ukraine-emergency.html), 13 June 2022.

<sup>3</sup> See: [www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees](https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/about/facts-about-refugees).

<sup>4</sup> [www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/find-out-about-refugees](https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/find-out-about-refugees)

<sup>5</sup> [www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/find-out-about-refugees](https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/find-out-about-refugees)

<sup>6</sup> *Migrant health guide: for health professionals*, UK Home Office, 2020. Retrieved from [www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide).

<sup>7</sup> Refugee Council. (n.d.). Mental health. Retrieved May 9, 2023, from [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/our-work/mental-health-support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/our-work/mental-health-support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers).

“Uncertainty about the future can ... directly result in the development of long-term psychological effects and complex mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, paranoia, PTSD, survivor's guilt, self-harm, and suicidal ideation...”

Refugees and asylum seekers face a multitude of challenges before and after they arrive in their host country. In the UK, these challenges may include inadequate and unsuitable housing such as detention centres<sup>8</sup> and asylum hotels.<sup>9</sup> The prolonged period of waiting and uncertainty for the outcome of their status, which can take up to 20 years in some cases, adds to the difficulties they face. Dispersal and deportation policies that force people to move to unfamiliar locations with little or no notice cause additional stress and uncertainty. Language barriers also hinder access to services and support. These obstacles can lead to a sense of frustration, a lack of self-belief, lower self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety, and paranoia, among other negative feelings.

The day-to-day challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers navigating the British asylum process are further intensified by the hostile environment and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.<sup>10</sup> The current immigration policies in the UK are creating hostile conditions for refugees and asylum seekers. These policies, including NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds)<sup>11</sup> and the Work Ban,<sup>12</sup> are exacerbating the exhaustion and anxiety experienced by these vulnerable communities. The ever-changing policy landscape, with the proposed 2023 Illegal Migration Bill and the Rwanda deportation plan, is creating further uncertainty and fear. Additionally, the use of

hostile rhetoric and inflammatory language by the central government and media contributes towards a sense of loss of dignity for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK which can exacerbate exhaustion and anxiety. Recent targeted attacks by far-right groups on asylum seeker hotels and immigration centres only add to this sense of insecurity. Even after status is granted, many refugees and asylum seekers may continue to struggle with longer-term challenges such as experiences of racism and discrimination, as well as other social barriers they may face in their host communities.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Creatively Minded and Refugees examines the role of art in promoting mental health and wellbeing among refugees by drawing on a range of organisations and projects that have utilised art as a means of generating therapeutic benefits to people from refugee backgrounds, including theatre, painting, sculpture, writing and other creative activities all across the UK and in some international contexts, too.

This report is part of the ‘Creatively Minded’ series of reports commissioned by Baring Foundation. For a full list of these, see page 57.

In developing this report our intention has been to:

- share models of practice
- demonstrate the use of different art forms
- increase the profile of this work
- better understand the value of these activities
- better understand what change might be happening because of this work
- understand what the possible longer term impact might be

<sup>8</sup> In the UK, there are currently seven IRC's (Immigration Removal Centres). According to Government data, 21,365 people entered immigration detention in the year ending September 2021, 24% higher than the previous year.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Government's own data, there has been a jump in contingency accommodation, which is largely hotels, from 2,577 people in March 2020 to 37,142 in September 2022.

<sup>10</sup> In response to the steep rise in cost of living, the government has raised asylum support from just £39.63 to £40.85 a week – a difference of just £1.22.

<sup>11</sup> 'No recourse to public funds' (NRPF) is a policy in the UK that restricts access to certain public funds, including welfare benefits and social housing, for some migrants who are subject to immigration control. This can have a significant impact on people's ability to access basic necessities, such as food, housing, and healthcare.

<sup>12</sup> The work ban refers to a policy that restricts asylum seekers' ability to work while they wait for their asylum claim to be processed, or if they have been granted refugee status but have not yet secured settled status or British citizenship. Under the current policy, refugees and asylum seekers who are awaiting a decision on their claim are not allowed to work in the UK until they have been waiting for at least 12 months, and even then, they are only allowed to work in jobs that are on the Government's 'Shortage Occupation List'.

- highlight challenges faced by organisations and where further investment and research might be beneficial.

This report builds upon a considerable body of research on the mental health of refugees both globally and in the UK. This includes research studies, reports and guidebooks with a range of different contexts, findings and recommendations. Some of the findings include for example, the higher risk of mental health problems for refugees due to their experiences before, during and after migration;<sup>13</sup> the challenges faced by displaced people, including social isolation, language barriers, and limited access to mental health services;<sup>14</sup> and the potential of arts-based interventions in promoting mental wellbeing among displaced people, as well as the need for further research and the scaling up of such interventions.<sup>15</sup>

Additional resources and studies on the mental health challenges faced by refugees in the UK and strategies to address these issues are listed at the end of this report (see page 55) and are recommended for further reading.

## METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The organisations and projects included in this report were identified by Counterpoints Arts and by the Baring Foundation through a variety of methods, including desk research, word of mouth and through existing relationships and collaborations. While Counterpoints Arts does not have a specialist mental health focus, our work engages with the subject in many ways and we have sought to bring the breadth of our experience to creating and editing this report.

The featured organisations were invited to respond to a series of questions about their projects and organisations, their practices and lessons learned, and their reflections on impact and change. Additionally, we hosted an online meeting attended by the majority

of the contributing case studies, providing an opportunity for knowledge exchange, relationship-building, and future collaboration.

It is difficult to provide an exact number of arts organisations in the UK that work with refugees as there is no comprehensive database or registry of such organisations. However, there are many arts organisations across the UK that work with refugees in various ways, such as by providing creative workshops, exhibitions, performances, and other cultural activities. We estimate there are approximately 350 organisations in our network working in this field in the UK.

The case studies selected are intended to be representative of a broad range of geographical locations and highlight organisations working across different art forms, age groups and community settings. In making our selection, we also recognise that there are countless other organisations in the refugee and arts sectors who are not featured in this report but who nevertheless are doing vital and meaningful work.

We know this report cannot tell the whole story of mental health in an increasingly complex and hostile environment for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. But we hope it has created space to let different organisations speak on their own terms about who they are, their practice, lessons learned, challenges and the impact of their work.

The case studies highlighted in this report employ diverse strategies for delivering trauma-sensitive arts-based interventions. Some of these initiatives are overseen or assisted by mental health professionals, while others depend on committed professionals with little or no formal training in mental health. While some programmes prioritise mental health and wellbeing, others see these outcomes as an added benefit of a more comprehensive artistic programme.

**13** *Mental health: migrant health guide: Advice and guidance on the health needs of migrant patients for healthcare practitioners*, UK Home Office (last updated 2022). Available at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide).

**14** *Art of Recovery: Displacement, Mental Health, and Wellbeing*, Emma Rose, Amanda Bingley, Macarena Rioseco and Kirsten Lamb, 2018. Available at: [pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4683/d2b7857544eacc34d43855758b8b12f45459.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4683/d2b7857544eacc34d43855758b8b12f45459.pdf)

**15** *Arts and health: Supporting the mental well-being of forcibly displaced people*, World Health Organization, 2018. Available at: [www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people](https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people).



The UK has several training providers that offer trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive training for working with refugees, including Amna Healing (previously named Refugee Trauma Initiative), Freedom from Torture, Kazzum Arts, Art Refuge (featured as case studies here) and the Refugee Council among others.

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### Arts

The Baring Foundation is primarily interested in participatory arts rather than creative arts therapies, though they recognise there will be overlap. By participatory arts, it means where a creative practitioner (in any art form) uses their skills to facilitate the creativity of people without that training or experience. Arts are defined very broadly to include a wide range of art forms and to embrace all types of creative activity, including popular culture.

### Trauma-informed practice (or trauma-sensitive practice)

Trauma-informed practice is an approach to providing care and support to individuals who have experienced trauma. Based on the understanding that trauma can have a profound impact on a person's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, and that the effects of trauma can be long-lasting, trauma-informed practice is about creating a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing and recovery. There are six key principles of trauma-informed practice:

- 1. Safety:** The physical, psychological and emotional safety of service users and staff is prioritised.
- 2. Trustworthiness:** Building trust and transparency in all interactions with the individual, including through clear communication and consistency.
- 3. Choice:** Recognising and respecting the individual's right to make choices and have control over their own recovery.
- 4. Collaboration:** Working collaboratively with the individual to identify their needs and goals and to develop a plan for recovery that is tailored to their unique situation.
- 5. Empowerment:** Promoting the individual's sense of self-worth and agency in their own recovery process.

- 6. Cultural sensitivity:** Recognising and respecting the individual's cultural background, beliefs, and values.

### Hostile Environment

The Hostile Environment policy, introduced by the UK Government in 2012, aimed to create a 'hostile environment' for those living in the UK 'illegally'. This policy and approach has been heavily criticised for its negative impact on migrants and refugees. The term 'hostile environment' has come to represent the current UK Government's policies and practices towards these groups in recent years, creating a climate of fear, distrust, and discrimination. Some examples of this include: limited access to healthcare and other public services; immigration detention and deportation, particularly for those who have lived in the country for many years or have families here; separating families through their immigration policies, including separating children from parents and preventing parents from reuniting with their children in the UK; landlords, employers, and banks being required to check the immigration status of individuals before providing services; minimum income requirements in 2012 for non-European partners and spouses and more.

### Mental health problems

The term 'mental health problem' is a common and widely understood term that has been used for many years in medical and mental health settings (for example by mental health charity, Mind). However, we recognise that this terminology can imply that there is something inherently wrong or 'broken' and contribute to the stigmatising perception of individuals who experience mental health issues as somehow flawed. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, we have accommodated the language that feels most comfortable to each of the contributing authors and not edited anyone's personal choice.

### Refugee

At Counterpoints Arts, we use the word 'refugee' because of its legal and historical significance, and because we believe it is important to reclaim it from negative uses. At the same time, we recognise the danger of labels and respect people's right to decide how they define themselves.



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## Case studies

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Music Action International.  
Photo © Seb Matthes.



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# Artcore

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BY RUCHITA SHAIKH

## WHO WE ARE

Artcore is an international centre for contemporary art and creativity based in Derby, UK and home to Artcore Gallery. A vibrant hub for commissioning, production, presentation and debate, we offer opportunities for diverse audiences to engage directly with creative practices through participation and discussion. We believe that contemporary art and creativity are central to the development of people and places. Each year we welcome people from all sections of the diverse communities of Derby and beyond to experience inspiring, innovative and high-quality exhibitions and events. Artcore uses art as a vehicle to strengthen community cohesion and provides platforms for development. Our activities aim to bring positive change into the lives of people of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds.

At Artcore, we have developed an engaging program of workshops and projects for our local community at our Community Hub. Every week we host a diverse range of arts that are free to access and offer an opportunity for people to create new social connections and improve their wellbeing. Workshops are led by professional artists, supporting the learning of new skills and therapeutic practices.

## OUR PRACTICE

Our workshops are for all ages and we regularly offer classes for adults, young people and children. We are proud to see our arts engagement programme benefiting the community and increasing confidence, self-esteem, teaching transferable life skills, relieving loneliness and improving people's mental health and wellbeing. All our projects and workshops aim to bring different groups of participants together to break down barriers

and develop shared understanding; this enables people to explore their creative side which helps to create a society that is fairer, more caring and more inclusive.

The Silent Library was an arts project devised in partnership with Migrant Help. The project included workshops that were held at Migrant Help/Urban Housing's premises and a permanent exhibition located at Artcore.

Over the course of ten weeks, Artcore artists and volunteers worked with refugees and asylum seekers at their accommodation to welcome them to the UK and engage them with art. The sessions were a resounding success, with many participants returning. Our artists explored a number of creative activities with the participants which helped them express themselves and their culture whilst understanding more about Britain and especially our language.

Activities included making flags, collages, self-portraits, word art and maps. The collage was interesting to them as the questions made them think about themselves and the things they like, and the word art especially helped the participants and artist understand each other's languages better. Although the language barrier was sometimes a problem in the sessions, the participants engaged well with the activities and some beautiful pieces of art were created. Many became friends and took photos to remind them of their time and to send to family back home.

At Artcore, we are very aware of the needs of our community at this difficult economic time. We offer hot drinks, various types of food and snacks, including breakfast at some of our morning sessions. For many people this is a reassurance that they won't be left hungry for the rest of the day. At the same time, they are



able to socialise, meet new people and express their thoughts and emotions through a creative activity. This is a proven formula to boost people's confidence and wellbeing.

We create networks with other community groups, and can we signpost participants towards support needed. We operate with a small but highly skilled team. Our employees come from a diverse range of artistic backgrounds and this provides multiple opportunities to draw upon a deep understanding of how to reach audiences at all levels of creative experience. Within the team, we have a specific individual responsible for Community Liaison, which helps to promote the work of the charity, extending the reach of Artcore both locally and on a wider scale. Our connections are wide and we work with multiple partners to deliver engaging projects that meet the needs of our communities, addressing the core aspects of our delivery strands: Arts in Education, Arts in Health and Wellbeing, Arts in Culture and Arts in Community. We listen to our communities and work hard to address issues that matter most, using creativity as our catalyst for change.

As part of our Untold Stories Project, we are working with recent immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and members of Derby's Bosnian and South Asian communities, delivering a programme of workshops which invite local communities to share their stories alongside those from diverse communities around Derby, through engagement with creative art activities. We are working with them to produce creative outcomes to celebrate their individual and communities' stories.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Participants in the Silent Library Project were seeking asylum owing to well-founded fears of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. They also faced cultural barriers and community cohesion problems when living in Derby and were unable to enter employment or education when applying for asylum. Over the course of the project, participants became more and more comfortable and by the end were sharing music and dance moves. The project improved the health and wellbeing of the beneficiaries by enabling them to express their experiences, identities, skills and hopes, including the consequences of migration-related trauma, and to become socially active and included.

At Artcore, we are constantly learning and evaluating. We value the creative process that gives our participants and communities a voice. We are passionate about raising awareness of the power of creativity and how it can bring joy, fulfilment and empower individuals, especially through challenging times. We work with our artists to deliver creative activities that are exciting and relevant in response to the needs of our communities. We are open and responsive to change and we are committed to the development of the charity. We are constantly addressing the way we communicate with our audiences. We are keen to address barriers to participation and this is a core strand evidenced in our community engagement plan.

Successful bid writing and secured funding have helped to extend the creative offer and we are able to deliver more workshops, employ more artists and work in multiple centres in order to benefit our communities. Our partners recognise the impact we can make, particularly where we are able to help reduce the impacts on our public services, for example through support for the NHS/Social Prescribing.

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# Art Refuge

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BY BOBBY LLOYD, WITH OTHER MEMBERS  
OF THE ART REFUGE TEAM



Boat to the UK, The Community Table, Kent, Art Refuge 2021.

## WHO WE ARE

Art Refuge uses socially engaged art and art therapy to support the mental health and wellbeing of people displaced due to conflict, persecution and poverty, both in the UK and internationally. We deliver long-term programmes and short-term projects, exhibitions and research; as well as tailor-made training for frontline workers. Our work is led by an experienced freelance team of art therapists and artists, including artists with lived experience of displacement.

Working in close partnership with other organisations based in the local context, our longitudinal psychosocial group programmes take place: on either side of the English Channel

in Calais and Folkestone; in Paris and Bristol; and internationally online. In France, our main partners are Secours Catholique and Médecins du Monde. In the UK we work with a wide range of organisations and institutions, while much of our ongoing work takes place in Home Office contingency accommodation. Most of the people we work with come from the Middle East and North Africa, while over 2,000 direct contacts have been made across our sites since 2021.

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“I’m kind of a hope for the future.”

**Aida Silvestri: artist, originally from Eritrea**

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## OUR PRACTICE

We have developed responsive, arts-based trauma-informed approaches, at the heart of which is The Community Table. This is an innovative model of open access, group-based, mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers who are often isolated, marginalised and living in hostile, precarious situations.

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“Until I joined The Community Table my mind was completely different. Building a house was beautiful, my mind completely changed, I relaxed. I forgot everything happening, all the stress. Why? Because I was busy with something, and I feel happy not just for me but for everyone else.”

**Participant**

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“The Community Table is like when you go to your grandmother’s house, an atmosphere like that – all people young and old; when I need time for myself I go there.”

**Participant from Afghanistan, in Calais**

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We use art as a way of connecting people in the here-and-now to help build resilience, increase agency, and support creative thinking. Art materials and other resources are adapted for each setting, responding to the culture, language, experience, skills, potential and richness of people attending. These include: world and local maps; engineered miniature clay bricks; typewriters, natural materials; spices; photography; film; animation; postcards; drawing; and plasticine. We continue connection beyond our sessions by sharing anonymised images on social media<sup>16</sup> where our broad following includes current and former participants, developing a lively, online community.

We also use grounding techniques to support regulation and stabilisation, alongside signposting to further support where needed.

We listen, observe, and respond carefully to the feedback we are given; and have learnt the importance of being responsive and imaginative, adapting to the needs of those we are working with. Because people in the asylum system can be moved to new accommodation at short notice, The Community Table model can accommodate those who only join once. Inviting other frontline staff, local artists and visitors to participate at the table makes way for a different kind of dialogue, sharing of knowledge, skills and capacity that is open and convivial. Our work offers a unique opportunity to strengthen connections through intersections of differences and similarities, further increasing and strengthening links with other services.

We are regularly contacted by artists, mental health and other professionals across disciplines for advice, ideas, support, training, short-term projects, art materials, and participation in research. The training requests include arts-based psychosocial tools, Psychological First Aid (PFA), trauma informed practice and self-care.

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“People feel the urgency of communicating something, to the world, to a person, to the system, or to speak to their own experience about what is happening to them, or to what has happened.”

**Josie Carter, poet**

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Those in the asylum system have significant barriers to accessing relevant mental health support within already stretched local, statutory and community mental health services. Asylum seekers face discrimination and inequality, their lives often on hold while they wait for their claims to be processed. The inevitable impact on mental health is further exacerbated by the ongoing hostile environment, inflammatory language and changes in Government policy. Core funding for this type of much needed frontline work delivered by small NGOs and charities

<sup>16</sup> See our Instagram [@artrefuge\\_](https://www.instagram.com/artrefuge_)



such as ours, is an ongoing challenge, and urgently needed to support such longitudinal programmes.

Lived experience of displacement plays a crucial role within our work as a frontline project that directly supports people in the asylum system. Along with core artists in our team with lived experience of displacement, diversity of age, experience, culture, gender are central to The Community Table model and allow for cross-fertilisation of ideas and learning. Regular meetings of the freelance team through The Community Table Collective further enable peer support, innovation and development of best practice.

### IMPACT AND CHANGE

We undertake ongoing research on the impact of our work and have accrued direct feedback from refugees and asylum seekers who tell us they feel valued, less isolated, more hopeful, and better able to cope and access other services, including mental health support.

Our work helps reduce isolation and increases self-esteem through nurturing connection, community and curiosity. It also supports a shared endeavour with our partners in contingency asylum accommodation and day centre spaces, thus improving resilience within the local communities where our projects take place. There is interest in The Community Table model from a wide range of individuals and organisations, from the NHS to art colleges, local theatre projects, journalists, and universities.

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“ Sometimes we are thought of as mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts; a familiarity. ”

**Miriam Usiskin: art therapist**

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The Art Refuge team shares a core ethos based upon participatory and collaborative practice. Each person brings experience and skills from across the visual arts, art therapy, trauma work and psychosocial approaches. Our use of social media is valued by the team, people who use our groups as well as artists and other agencies and allows for further sharing of ideas and dialogue.

We look forward to contributing to well-funded, safe and imaginative art-based spaces across the UK that support the mental health and wellbeing of people in the asylum system. There must also be an end to the hostile environment, with government policy change to include safe routes, and a more compassionate environment overall for asylum seekers and refugees.

# Compass Collective

BY EBRAHIM ESMAIL, LEAH GAYER  
AND MHAIRI GAYER

## WHO WE ARE

Compass Collective is an award-winning charity that assists unaccompanied minor refugees and young people seeking asylum to build resilience and integrate into the UK. We achieve this through engaging young people in a range of arts-based programmes, including theatre, music, and film projects; creative language lessons; and arts-led professional development programmes. These projects help vulnerable young people to improve their communication skills, build their confidence, and move towards future opportunities in education, training or employment. As importantly, our work offers a community and a crucial source of support for young people who would otherwise be at risk of social isolation or exclusion.

We work with young people at a critical transitional moment in their lives when they most need support. We support approximately 250 young people aged 14-26 per year, in over 28 locations in the UK. The majority of them are at their initial stage of immigration. 70 per cent are unaccompanied minors; 38 per cent are female.

We find creative, dynamic ways to empower voices. Our young people's work has reached a live audience of 1,650 and a digital audience of 17,650. They have performed Shakespeare's Globe, Leeds Playhouse, and at conferences attended by delegates from the Government and Home Office. Their films have been shown at the Tate and Somerset House, and been nominated for awards.

We work with our beneficiaries over extended periods of time. Our progression route takes young people from the moment of their arrival

in the UK, right through to their next steps, aiming to create meaningful pathways into the arts industry.

## OUR PRACTICE

Our projects involve capacity building: equipping young people to communicate with more confidence and fluency in the English language, building leadership and teamwork skills and helping them to assimilate into a new country and culture. Drama and storytelling is a powerful tool to connect young people. It builds empathy across a diverse group of people, and helps young people feel 'seen' and 'heard'. This new-found confidence, together with the provision of a safe space, enables young people to speak up about their needs, and we support them to take the steps to address the challenges, both creatively and practically through the provision of welfare/casework support.

We are truly youth-led, with lived-experience leadership and a leadership development programme. Our Compass Ambassador programme equips young people with leadership and facilitations skills, and all graduates are involved as project assistants, or assistant directors on our work. We are piloting a Youth Board this year, where young people will be able to inform the strategic planning, development and vision of Compass and interact with our trustee board.

We provide welfare support alongside all our programmes, offering one-to-one pastoral support, advice, signposting and casework. In 2022, 87 young people received casework/welfare support. We made 94 referrals to relevant organisations/opportunities. This

enables us to be able to do the creative work, as young people's immediate needs are being met. The needs of the young person are identified by our lead Young Persons Coordinator, who interviews and assesses each young person when they join Compass. They 'check in' with the young people, and refer them to the case work team when needed. The welfare team is a pillar of Compass, and we cannot express enough the importance of what they do.

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“ My confidence has increased, and I understand more about arts creativity than I did before. Next steps filled the gap when I did not know what to do next. Now I know that I am capable of acting; I've got more exposure and become more equipped with employability and education tools for example CV writing as a result of participating in different projects and volunteer work through Next steps. ”

**Participant**

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We strongly adhere to a trauma-informed and person-centred approach to engage with and involve people with lived experience. A key learning point has been recognising that our young people identify their own needs best; we have learnt to listen and act. An example of this is our English language programme which was born out of a request from our young people. We've identified existing gaps in support services and co-designed programmes with our young people to meet their needs.

Our biggest challenge has been keeping up with the demand for our work and securing on-going funding for our programmes. Demand triples every year. We are oversubscribed and have had to start operating a waiting list. This is causing a strain on the staff. Another challenge is the ever changing and hostile immigration policies that put so much stress on our young people. An example of this would be Rwanda asylum plan, where we saw levels of anxiety dramatically increase. This directly affects the young people's mental and physical health and puts more strain on our welfare team. Additionally, post-pandemic, our partner

organisations are also under strain and often do not have an outreach and participation staff member who can work more closely with us.

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“ I've been having fun every Friday. Even if I'm stressed I just know everything will end on Friday. I feel grateful because I've learnt a lot like writing CV and getting many chances to volunteer. At least I know where I'm going to go, where I'm taking the next steps and I'm sure where I am going. ”

**Participant**

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## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Through a trauma-informed approach, our work offers stability within structured programmes, a sense of belonging within the group, a place to be seen and heard in a non-judgmental capacity. Our arts-led participatory projects equip our young people with transferable life skills and help them learn to express themselves with self-assurance and positivity.

We offer platforms for the young people to speak for themselves, to challenge the established 'refugee narrative'. We invite a wide audience including policy makers such as MPs, local councillors, and home office officials, presenting young people's stories and ideas to those who are in a real position to effect change. Young people have been able to speak up on big platforms such as at the Greater London Authority's 'More than a Care Leavers' event at West Ham Stadium, performing speeches written on behalf of the refugee experience in front of policy makers and other young people. They have featured on the BBC, VICE media, blogs, podcasts. They have gone on to access paid work with Shakespeare's Globe, Coram Young Citizens and CNN.

Looking into the future, we hope to roll out more of our projects and programmes to regional areas across the UK, to engage with more isolated young people, for example setting up a hub in Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow, Portsmouth and Kent. We envisage that we will expand our team, grow to meet the



increasing demand, and increase the number of audiences we engage with. We hope to build bigger partnerships with leading arts organisations to put our young people's voices on the world stage.

We aim to be even more youth-led, training, and recruiting more young people to be employed as staff members on the team.

We aim to create an open dialogue through our work, where we can address problems and find creative solutions. We want to use art as a form of activism and get it in front of the changemakers. We are researching how we can best work with academics and partner organisations to have real impact and change policies, in order to create meaningful systemic change.

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# Displace Yourself Theatre

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BY MIKE AUGER

## WHO WE ARE

Displace Yourself Theatre (DYT) is a touring company based on John Street in Bradford, co-creating contemporary theatre with displaced people using a multi-disciplinary, therapeutic process. We are leading providers of professional trauma-informed theatre programmes for refugees, asylum seekers and people at risk of social isolation in Bradford. We address systemic inequalities by co-creating live performance and use creativity to support post-trauma recovery. Our exciting, accessible and original performances break traditional theatrical conventions and motivate audiences to be active in promoting equality for every member of society, without exception.

Through workshops, training and performances, we ensure the most vulnerable in our society have their voices heard. Our creative process builds compassionate, lasting relationships with c.300 people living in areas of the UK that see low engagement in culture – currently regularly in Bradford and Tees Valley – on their own terms, elevating their stories by touring work nationally and internationally. DYT have years of expertise working with sanctuary seekers and people in post-trauma recovery to create world-class performance. Our specialist facilitators build confidence and support healing through creative activities. DYT's unique, trauma conscious process enables people to stay well, deal with the challenges of their current situation, fight for their rights and build a life here in Bradford.

## OUR PRACTICE

Our unique trauma-informed process enables people to heal, thrive, speak their truth, and create strategies and set goals for a fulfilled life. Using theatre, voice, music, and therapeutic movement techniques our regular sessions see:

- improved mental health and wellbeing;
- reduced isolation and a sense of community;
- increased self confidence;
- better English speaking and communications skills;
- a safe space for self-expression.

Sanctuary seekers experience multiple and complex barriers in accessing the most basic services many of us take for granted. We have developed a robust process of needs assessment, which leads to individual support plans that include travel planning and bursaries, regular reminders, liaison with other services, childcare options and personalised goal setting.

Our experience has shown that with the right introduction to our work and appropriate support given, many people stay with us for the full project, and it becomes a vital part of staying well.

Funding from the Baring Foundation led to our trauma-informed facilitator training programme for 30 ethnically diverse artists, five of whom DYT now employ. We share best practice with leading cultural providers (e.g. Bradford Producing Hub) on equality, inclusion and diversity.

“Inclusion is at the core of DYT. We are impressed at the way they successfully engage with and enable meaningful participation from asylum seekers and refugees. DYT are characterised by energy, creativity and the ability to recognise and respond to the needs of those with whom they work.”

**Will Sutcliffe, Chair, City of Sanctuary Bradford**

Our recent work includes:

- **Creating Together** (2016-22)  
Regular creative engagement with 3,000 displaced people in eight UK cities, continuing today in Bradford and Stockton-on-Tees.
- **Who Cares** (2021)  
Co-created performance with people experiencing homelessness in Deptford with The Albany Theatre.
- **Pandemic response** (2020-22)  
We rapidly adapted and delivered digital creative wellbeing sessions, reaching 6,000 people around the world in partnership with City of Sanctuary UK and Bradford Council.

As a small organisation without core funding, the success and reach of our work is due to the partnerships we cultivate with arts venues, funding bodies and grassroots organisations including the Refugee Council, City of Sanctuary UK, Arts Council England and ARC Stockton Arts Centre. Every partner, staff and community member is equally valued, each integral to achieving our shared vision of better access to creativity for all.

The incredible skills and diverse talents of the people we work with inspired us to pilot new ways of including their voices in the heart of the company. We met Aghileh in Barnsley, where she found support in DYT's sessions while recovering from trauma and waiting for her asylum claim. Aghileh brought a wealth of experience and once granted refugee status, became a DYT trustee. Aghileh is an invaluable member and now as a Care Manager, advises us on healthcare, asylum issues and contributes to the vision of DYT. We want to continue

providing meaningful opportunities for people like Aghileh to access and influence the UK arts sector.

From early in the pandemic we worked closely with Mears Housing, who manage temporary accommodation for over 140 asylum seekers in a hotel in Bradford city centre – we delivered remote online sessions, creative videos, worksheets and WhatsApp challenges for people in the hotel along with other sanctuary seekers in Bradford.

At the height of the pandemic, Mamoud Nyelenkeh walked over to us in the foyer of the Hotel that he was housed at, delighted to see the creative activities we were offering. A teacher and trainee social worker, Mamoud is seeking asylum from Sierra Leone. Mamoud shared with us how difficult his current situation was and how his circumstances were impacting his mental health. Thanks to our established supportive global community, Mamoud was welcomed into our regular online creative wellbeing sessions with open arms. We provided internet data for him to join our sessions supporting his wellbeing through writing poetry, therapeutic movement and telling stories. Mamoud has spoken about these Zoom sessions as being “a true lifeline of hope”, during this challenging time of living in a hotel with over 130 other sanctuary seekers. We worked together throughout the year and over time saw his confidence grow. Mamoud was suddenly moved to Hartlepool and required some immediate support with finding local services and provisions. DYT continued to support Mamoud through practical and emotional support. Within a few months he had not only settled into this new town, but also established ‘Hartlepool Refugee Football Club’, supporting other young men in a similar situation. He was asked to speak at the City of Sanctuary's National Conference in June 2021 and began volunteering at DYT's regular ‘Creating Together’ sessions in Stockton-on-Tees and Bradford. DYT have supported Mamoud with his application for universities and are creating a role for him within the charity, while he awaits his refugee status.





Creating Together collaborators in Stockton and Bradford. Photo by Karol Wyszynski.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Over the past two years we have seen a significant improvement in the mental health and wellbeing of the sanctuary seekers we support, which in turn has created opportunities, progression, change and development in their lives: in work, family and relationships, training, and social integration. We believe the reason for this change and growth is in our approach to holding space.

We are extremely excited to soon be starting R&D for a daring, intercultural touring theatre performance, 'A World Without Death', a large-scale performance project devised by professional artists and displaced people living in Bradford. The piece will be set on a moving HGV, which is the method of transport many displaced people are forced to use when travelling to the UK when fleeing their own country. Our vision is that, with further development, it will tour around the UK and potentially Europe.

The R&D will lay the vital foundations for high quality and ambitious work that seeks to showcase the talent of displaced people living in the city. Displaced people will grow skills in creating live performance and build confidence to access their inner artist. Excluded and marginalised people will be artistic collaborators, experts and co-authors in making A World Without Death.

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# Freedom from Torture: Write to Life

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BY SHEILA HAYMAN



Nalougo and Tanya from Write to Life perform at Kings Place with Kuljit Bhamra MBE of NWLive Arts.  
Photo © Hugh Schulte.

## WHO WE ARE

Write to Life is a long-running writing and performing group for survivors of torture from around the world who are or have been asylum-seeking clients of Freedom from Torture in Finsbury Park in London. I and my volunteer mentors run group workshops every two weeks, and each group member also is paired up with a writing mentor, with whom they have one-to-one sessions.

All the group members are current or former clients of Freedom from Torture. They come from many countries, but for some reason the majority are currently from sub-Saharan Africa. They are referred by their therapist or counsellor, sometimes with a pre-existing interest in creative writing, but more often for

other reasons: because they feel a need to tell their story, they feel survivor guilt to be alive when others are not, or are in danger because of them, and want to bear witness – or just to improve their written and spoken English. We talk and mostly write in English, but there's some give and take with Francophone African clients to get the exact translation from French to English.

## OUR PRACTICE

We believe Write to Life is unique in the world: as a group for people whose existence has been almost obliterated by torture, not just physically reaching the brink of death but psychologically being made to feel they have no value. But also, because it's been in continuous existence for nearly 25 years, in which time

dozens of group members have come and gone, but one or two are still with us, still writing and still benefiting.

Our members have widely varying levels of English when they join, and come from a huge range of educational, cultural and social backgrounds, but they all share the horrors of a traumatic past. This gives them, over time, a powerful bond: often they can't trust others from their own country, either because they may be government agents or because they're from the 'other side' in a conflict there. So, they may be very lonely and isolated, and over time the group becomes like a second family. For this reason – and because some members travel huge distances to come to us, we start each session with a basic meal, which is also an opportunity to catch up.

The theme of the workshop varies: sometimes it supports a communications or fundraising objective of the organisation, but as these are closely aligned with members' concerns, that works fine. Sometimes we write about common experiences: journeys, belonging. Sometimes we choose a more technical approach: metaphor, beginning and ending a story. And occasionally, it's practical, anything from performance technique to how to write an 'alternative CV' or face an interview.

We ask everybody to write: this is important, so we all feel committed. But people don't have to read their work out, if they feel it's unfinished, or they find themselves having written something too personal. But people usually do want to share, to be heard, and the affirmation they get from each other is a powerful incentive to continue and finish their work after the workshop is over.

But the true and major benefit of what we do is often seen in the work produced in the one-to-one sessions. We never ask them to write about their trauma in the group, and when on occasion a group member writes, and shares, something that could potentially trigger others, we have been known to intervene and ask them to stop reading. But in the private sessions with their mentor, they can explore whatever feels most urgent; and very often, this turns out to be their own personal history.

Writing about it has many benefits: it takes the experience out of their head, where it destroys their calm and often their ability to sleep, and

puts it outside, on a page, where they are in control and can retell and shape it. In doing so they learn about themselves and their own responses, and learn what they need to do to move forward. And seeing where the narrative is disordered, or has gaps, enables them to see what they may be suppressing, or fearing most. The more they write, and rewrite, the more distance they can put between themselves and the experience.

And, of course, there is the power of writing as art. The emotion, the raw experience they bring, is like the rocket fuel that powers their stories and keeps them writing. The beauty of the form and the words, whether as a poem or a prose narrative, sheaths the story, deflects the resistance of an audience to yet more bad news, and slips behind their defences by hooking them in and absorbing their attention.

One of the biggest challenges both for myself and for the volunteers who mentor our writers is that wider support from the organisation is time-limited. Often mentors develop a very close bond with their writers – which is good and perhaps necessary, for the writer to entrust their most private feelings and experiences to the mentor. But it can also lay a heavy burden on the mentor, who is not trained for this and whom we cannot materially support to help the writers.

We are lucky at the moment in that my Deputy Coordinator happens to work as an asylum support officer in her other job, so she has an expertise in signposting, but that's incidental.

A key struggle for us is that Write to Life engages with members who are no longer able to access clinical treatment, legal and welfare support after three years. This loss of official support leaves us in a difficult position, supporting individuals with complex needs in spite of lack of qualifications, training, resources and support.

The other major challenge at the moment is the difficulty of recruiting and retaining mentors as volunteers. Fewer and fewer people in the arts, with the backgrounds we need, can afford to do this work for free.



“It has helped me: by writing I released my soul, took out my pain that has been stored inside. By writing down, it's like sharing this pain. I've been in Write to Life for two years, since 2019. Writing helps me to express myself and relieves the sorrow inside me. It's helped me to write in a new language, as I was a French and Senoufo speaker before. But above all, it's revealed a poetic gift that I didn't know I had. I never liked to read or write before, I didn't know about poetry, it has shown me what I can do if I push myself. I think everybody should join Write to Life! ”

Nalougo

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

As well as the bi-weekly workshops and one-to-one sessions, we produce occasional or Zines of our work, in which everybody participates, and also do more public single projects in which people can choose, or not, to participate. The publication is important to motivate members to write, and feel there's a point to their writing, and an audience for it, beyond the group itself.

The extra projects are a step up into a different league of both writing and performance for participants. We began with appearances at literary festivals, but then progressed to developing and performing original works in partnership with a variety of arts organisations and venues, including the Roundhouse, Tate Britain, Southbank and the V&A. Most recently we've done two collaborations with a local arts and music charity, 'NWLive', culminating at sold out performances and standing ovations at Kings Place and the Bloomsbury Festival.

The benefit to Freedom from Torture is obvious: we take their work to audiences who'd never otherwise be interested and provide an uplifting and inspiring counterpoint to the campaigning work they do.

For the participants, the benefits can be even greater. Nothing beats that feeling of holding an audience's rapt attention, unless it's holding it with something you've written yourself, often in your fourth or fifth language. More than once I've been told that this experience, of performing, and seeing and hearing that attention in front of them, is like having a mirror held up: realising they still exist, despite every attempt to destroy them.

So, as a result of our work, Freedom from Torture has gained audiences and supporters, and our members have gained the confidence to go back into the world and start, and lead, successful new lives in a new country. Their trauma may never leave them, but they learn to live with it, and even see surviving it as something gained, something to remind them of their own strength.

At the moment, as mentioned above, we're trying to rebuild the group after the pandemic by returning to in-person workshops and recruiting new mentors. We're planning another collaboration with NWLive and Kings Place, and contemplating a new excursion into performance poetry, which we haven't done before, and which will provide an opportunity to collaborate with Young OutSpoken Survivors, the group for under-25s recently started at Freedom From Torture.

What we'd love is to spread our work both within the organisation – Freedom From Torture has centres in Newcastle, Manchester and Glasgow whose clients currently don't have access to the project), and by sharing our practice more widely with others in the refugee writing community (all ideas welcomed!).

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# Hear Me Out

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BY NATASHA PAVEY AND GINI SIMPSON



The Unknowns at The Amersham Arms, January 2023. Photographer: David McCairley.

## WHO WE ARE

Hear Me Out takes music into immigration detention centres across the UK. We have been doing this for 16 years. Initially we were set up in response to accounts of how music was a tool of resilience and empowerment in concentration camps in Chile during the Pinochet regime. There are seven Immigration Detention Centres currently operating in the UK, and we try to work in as many of them as possible. Circa 24,000 people are locked up in immigration detention centres every year. We also work in contingency asylum accommodation, which includes barracks and asylum hotels, for people who have recently arrived in the UK. There are over 30,000 people living in contingency accommodation in the UK at the time of writing. We are a small core

team, who work with large networks of artists, including artists who have lived experience of detention and contingency accommodation.

## OUR PRACTICE

We work with artists who co-create original soundtracks with people who are held in detention. We then record these tracks in the detention centres and share them with the world in different ways. We hold concerts in immigration detention centres, where bands formed in the centres perform to other people who are held in the centres and staff. We also work with community groups who live close to detention centres; this could include schools, care homes, hospitals and youth groups. These groups make soundtracks with groups in immigration detention. They never meet in

real life but instead communicate with each other through music, which is taken in and out of both settings by Hear Me Out artists. Final tracks are performed at parallel concerts in detention centres and for example, in schools, hospitals and care homes. Attached communities and sometime the general public are invited to the concerts held in the community. We have also worked with dance and movement in these ways, and have run dance events and raves in a locked psychiatric hospital and Tinsley House Immigration Detention Centre. Creative outcomes of this work include fascinating fusions of music and movement traditions from all over the world.

Outside detention centres, we work with young people, who make music videos to accompany tracks written in detention, which are screened at festivals and events nationally. We produce and promote musicians released from immigration detention to perform tracks written inside detention centres on public stages and we run a touring band, The Hear Me Out Band, comprised of musicians who initially met in immigration detention centres.<sup>17</sup>

Members of the band are from Nigeria, Gambia, Iran and Italy and their musical styles include fusions of raga, hip hop, Iranian jazz and gospel. We hope they will be welcomed at upcoming City of Culture events across the UK. More recently, we have been making original soundtracks and holding concerts in barracks in south England and working with children (aged 2 - 16) who are living in hotels. We hold concerts and family events in the hotels and are planning a bespoke children's strand of work to support these activities in response to current unprecedented need. We also support The Unknowns, a band of asylum seekers who met in a London hotel.

We run 120 workshops a year across the country and have worked with over 26,000 people since our inception. All of our workshops in detention and contingency accommodation are open; people can come and go as they need. Many people are suffering from high levels of anxiety and find it challenging to stay still. We usually run our workshops in the afternoon and evenings, as people are frequently too depressed to get out of bed in the mornings. Workshops can be very different each week, as no one in the centres knows how long they

will be there, it could vary from one day to five years. In these spaces we always work with musicians and non-musicians; sometimes we meet musicians who are incredibly talented, experienced and well known in the countries they were born in. We also work with staff in all spaces, upskilling them musically, and inspiring them to continue music making when we're not there. Many of the tracks relate to people's personal stories, but we are careful not to 'harvest' stories and encourage people to make tracks about whatever they want, which has included cups of tea! Concerts are held across centres and other institutions; we repurpose corridors, sports halls, gyms and exercise spaces as concert venues.

All of our music workshops are co-created and the facilitators we work with are skilled and experienced in methods of effective co-creation, which is supported through training, skill sharing and mentoring. As an organisation which works with the outcomes of racism and colonialism, with people who are highly stigmatised, we are clear that the voices of people in detention and asylum seekers need to be centre stage. Following the incredible musical outcomes from this work, we have taken a decision as an organisation that we want to be genuinely co-created, co-created with the people we exist to serve. The process is led by our artistic practice and although we are in the early stages of this work we have already noticed an increase in confidence, agency and relevance across the organisation, including at some of our board meetings.

In detention centres, internal reviews show that up to 95 per cent of people there are suffering from depression and anxiety. They don't know how long they will be held in the centre and where they will be released to. On the outside, we estimate similar levels of depression and anxiety are experienced by people who have recently arrived in the UK. They are often held in cramped, unsafe accommodation, where they may be moved at any time to anywhere in the UK. Asylum seekers in the community are not allowed to work or be educated. They live on £35 per week, often in vouchers and some wait as long as 20 years before they get settled status. It is not possible to separate these experiences from our creative activities. Hear Me Out provides 1:1 pastoral support

<sup>17</sup> See: [www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/58019/1/how-music-is-helping-people-detained-in-immigration-centres](http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/58019/1/how-music-is-helping-people-detained-in-immigration-centres).



and employs an experienced worker to support these aspects of their lives. We also sign-post to legal and welfare support.

Another aspect of our work is supporting all of our musicians with artist professional development to support their careers. This includes mentoring across all levels of the artistic team, skills support and support to work in studios, record and create videos. We support our artists to develop creative industry skills, such as marketing, production and programming, leading to future employment in the arts and also with skills needed to support being a sole trader or setting up companies.

Working with people in immigration detention and living in contingency accommodation brings many emotional and practical challenges. One of the biggest areas of concern is 'the unknown'; people don't know how long they will be anywhere, detention, a hotel, an immigration bail hostel, in London, in Birmingham, in the UK. Immigration Detention is indefinite in the UK; we've met people who have spent five years in detention, where their next destination might include deportation. Alongside the psychological impacts, this means Hear Me Out need to run workshops and bands which cater for constant and unexpected change. People are sometimes released from detention in the middle of a music workshop. One of the lead singers in the Hear Me Out band was deported four weeks before a major gig in London.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Hear Me Out undertakes focus groups, alongside other evaluation mechanisms, in detention centres and contingency accommodation. According to this data, 90 per cent of participants have reported 'feeling better' after attending workshops and concerts. People have told us these workshops are a 'lifesaver' for them.

Throughout our work, we are constantly getting feedback on how life changing and transformative music can be and how the power of agency and platforming are crucial. Music making is also a language and a way to connect with people beyond spoken language, creating solidarity inside and outside the immigration system. Our events are usually celebratory and have been described as 'little pockets of joy'. Alongside this, events serve to raise awareness about the UK's immigration system and importantly about the people who are in it.

Our future would be one where we are working in as many detention and other contingency accommodation centres as possible, raising awareness and changing attitudes toward immigration, changing perceptions about the need for detention centres to exist and disrupting negative narratives around who asylum seekers and refugees are.

# Inini Initiative

BY LAST MAFUBA

## WHO WE ARE

Inini Initiative Ltd. supports people from Black and Asian backgrounds, refugees and those seeking asylum with links to Coventry to tackle issues around integration. We work with accredited counsellors to offer our clients six free 50-minute sessions of therapy. On Tuesdays, we run a weekly peer support group at the Friends Meeting Hall (the Quakers) where we serve meals from our culture. We run a range of group activities including arts activities, a book club etc. We also advocate for our clients to ensure that they have a good standard of housing and healthcare.

As well as being the Founding Director and CEO of Inini Initiative, I am also the Founding Director of Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG) Social Housing. I coordinate Coventry Refugee Week, sit on the Healthwatch Coventry Steering Group Committee as well as two management boards: The Night Shelter – a place that has been offering shelter to asylum seekers with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) in Coventry and Voluntary Action Coventry. I am passionate about social justice and equity and am committed to working towards making mental health services accessible to all. I am an Acumen Fellow and am also conducting PhD study at Nottingham Trent University investigating the beliefs and perceptions towards uptake of mental health services among Black sub-Saharan African communities in the West Midlands. I hold a BSc. Honours degree in Psychology and an LLM in International Development Law and Human Rights, both from the University of Warwick.

I support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants overcome the challenges of integration. My role involves designing, fundraising, delivering, managing, evaluating and reporting on projects that offer culturally sensitive strategies to minimise barriers of integration for this group. I also represent Inini at various meetings and engagements pertaining to asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants.

## OUR PRACTICE

At Inini, we use art as a tool to adapt to migration and acculturation challenges. Migration has significant effects on health. Evidence suggests that asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have higher rates of physical and mental illness compared to their host communities; racism, discrimination, and social barriers are among some of the difficulties they face. Considering this, it is safe to say the acculturation process is stressful and cause reductions in the mental health and wellbeing of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Their resettlement and migration experiences, often combined with social isolation, are detrimental to good mental health and quality of life in general. Hence, it is crucial they support one another to build resilience.

At Inini, resilience is conceptualised as the ability to overcome life challenges and transform them into growth. Communalism is central to our ethos. Despite being from different countries and cultures, being an asylum seeker, refugee or migrant is a communal bond. We become brothers and sisters and co-operate on everything. “I am because we are” and “since we are, therefore,

I am” (Mbiti, 1970). This West African axiom illustrates the essence of communalism. It indicates interdependence and that the individual is responsibly linked to others on the social milieu. And creating art together is special to us; particularly because it speaks all languages.

At Inini, we provide a safe space for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant communities to meet and connect while engaging in conversation on issues they find challenging in a therapeutic reflective group. In these meetings we create awareness of mental health, and services available, and how they can be accessed. We also provide one-to-one counselling and use creative activities such as, making food, arts, drumming, music, and spoken word to build resilience. Referral into the service is through word of mouth, partner organisations and self-referral.

I have learned that the challenges faced by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants do not come from a lack of solutions, but a lack of power to implement the solutions.

Lack of resources is our biggest challenge. There are several activities our service users would like to engage in, such as playing football and going on day trips, but lack of resources mean it is not possible. One of the challenges is not being able to reimburse transport costs. Most of the people we work with have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and cannot afford travel costs to activities and yet they are the ones who need them most.

Firstly, Inini was born out of lived experience; it was the experiences of challenges I faced trying to integrate into my community when I first arrived in the UK that gave me the idea to establish Inini. I was made aware through my journey of the impact of these challenges on mental health and the lack of adequate mental health support for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. Also, everyone who works at Inini has lived experience of migration.

Below are quotes from our members after performing at the St Mary’s Guildhall for Black History Month celebrations.

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“The organisation is growing and what it has done is, it is allowing us to engage with the community and reach into spaces that we were unable to before, like the St Mary’s Guildhall. Inini is allowing itself to be recognised.”

**Elis, member**

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“I enjoyed the co-operation between the members of Inini. At the same time, I think we also improved our co-ordination. We have improved. Members of Inini have become much more confident. Another good thing is that we have helped grow Inini in terms of becoming visible and I think it could be improved, if there are more members that take part in the project as it will reflect how multicultural the group is.”

**Chiko, member**

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## IMPACT AND CHANGE

What has changed because of the work we do is, most importantly, our beneficiaries’ confidence and self-esteem. Some have re-engaged with mental health services, while others have gained enough confidence to gather the evidence required by the Home Office and resubmitted their asylum applications with positive outcomes.

The main thing that made this change possible was co-production with service users, allowing people to design their own interventions and guiding them accordingly: for example facilitating an exhibition for their paintings at The Herbert when they choose that route over one-to-one counselling therapy.

What does the future look like for us? I imagine a hub accommodating different service providers such as, mental health, housing, GP, pre-school, and immigration solicitors whom asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can easily access, particularly those who do not normally fit into government programmes.



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## Kazzum Arts

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BY KITTY HARRIS



Photo © Becky Bailey for Kazzum Arts.

### WHO WE ARE

Kazzum Arts uses creativity to enable children and young people who have been impacted by trauma and adversity to feel seen, heard and valued. We do this by providing opportunities to explore creative expression and agency through multidisciplinary arts activities. With over 30 years' experience of working in migrant community settings, hospital wards, pupil referral units and schools, our workshops provide spaces for creativity, reflection, connection and self-regulation.

We work with young people who have experienced high levels of adverse childhood experiences which have resulted in social, emotional and mental health issues, communication needs, disabilities, exclusion

and displacement. Our trauma-informed programmes use creative activities as a means of building confidence, communication skills, creativity and engagement in learning, whilst also helping children and young people to develop healthy relationships with others and the world around them.

Our programmes have been developed in consultation with young people and are delivered by a diverse team of skilled artist facilitators in partnership with a range of spaces including schools, hospitals, and community settings.

## OUR PRACTICE

Kazzum Arts utilises a multidisciplinary creative approach, which offers our participants opportunities to experience environments enriched with music, movement, art and games. We contribute to an increased sense of wellbeing and positive mental health through shared imagination and self-expression.

Our projects provide the structure and emotional containment which can enable children and young people to connect to the world around them. Fundamental to our work is a commitment to a collaborative process which involves children and young people in every stage of the project.

Our **Pathways programme** works with young migrants and refugees in community youth group settings. This activity was developed as a direct response to needs expressed by participants and partner organisations.

From our experience on our Pathways programme, we have supported young people to be active in raising awareness of their lived experiences. This has culminated in co-produced resource guides, animations and workshops offered to schools to educate children and help them to understand and empathise with the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers.

Working with refugee community groups has been a key impetus for developing our unique trauma-informed approach which uses the creative arts, embodies relationships, understands the impact of traumatic stress on health and ill-health and raises awareness about the systems and structures which create and recreate trauma.

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“I started writing poems, reading, and doing a lot drawing. Even though I didn't know how to start, I used my imagination and included it in my day-to-day work. Kazzum Arts at the time was the best thing that's ever happened to me in my entire life because I lost hope in myself.”

**Isatu, Brighter Futures**

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Placing children and young people at the centre of every interaction has taught us the value of offering an asset-based approach. We have learnt that the creative process encourages and supports active engagement over outcome-driven working. Taking the time to build trusting relationships can't be rushed, and requires patience, collaboration and care.

Ethical considerations have evolved for our organisation over time with knowledge and understanding. Throughout our work we consider the six principles of trauma-informed care: safety, trust, empowerment, choice, collaboration and cultural awareness. We recognise that all six are needed to operate in an accessible and inclusive way for all our participants.

Challenges to our work have often been down to systemic barriers and an increasing need up against a lack of access to other services. For the young migrants and refugees that we support there is a hostile and ever-changing immigration system to navigate, which impacts mental health issues, fuels disconnection and exacerbates deprivation.

As a small charity our capacity is limited, and we will always be challenged by an ever-changing funding landscape which prioritises outcome-driven projects for children and young people under the age of 18. Access to unrestricted multi-year funding for our organisation would provide greater opportunity for consistent and impactful programme delivery, as well as enabling us to develop greater resilience and strengthen our existing networks.

The integration of lived experience into our work has been a critical part of our creative and organisational development. Our advocacy work includes multiple animations and resources created with young people across our Pathways programme which use poetry and filmmaking to convey their lived experience.

Our organisational approach has recently influenced our Amplify Youth Voice strategy, which offers theoretical and practical approaches to co-production, facilitation and trauma-informed principles of care. This developmental work provides guidance and insight to ensure that young people are integral to all processes within Kazzum.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Some of the most transformational changes that we have witnessed have been in the young people that we support. Strong partner relationships with community groups and other charities have meant that some young people have been connected to Kazzum for several years; the impact of this kind of long-term consistent contact cannot be overstated.

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“I first started working with Kazzum Arts around 2018 at the time we were working on a project called Words Apart. I was very suicidal at the time however, I managed to cover my emotions and thoughts that were running through my head. I had no clue of how creative I was, until I was told by Alex, the Artistic Director of Kazzum, that “you are a visual learner”. I took those words and grabbed them with both hands and legs, because those words motivated me to do more. I had just been diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and anxiety. I was afraid to face the world. As my mental health wasn’t at its best at the time, I had so many trust issues, but when I started getting involved with being creative, this helped me to overcome my fears and gave me time to heal. I became more resilient and began fighting for change.”

**Participant**

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We have also made changes to our structure and approach. Utilising a trauma-informed practice has meant our recent projects with refugee groups have benefitted from a more holistic style of delivery.

Our research and development have enabled the creation of our current training offer, which introduces trauma-informed practice for practitioners working with children and young people. Through this we have supported a wide variety of organisations and reached international audiences and networks.

Spending time with children and young people in consistent, supportive environments and listening to their needs and interests gives us the tools to structure programmes that can have the most impact.

Strong partner relationships with organisations that are aligned with our values and mission has strengthened our ability to reach children and young people outside of our network.

We believe that all children and young people have a right to experience a sense of hope through their creativity, particularly those most impacted by trauma and adversity. We are working towards a future of culturally appropriate and robust mental health support for those who are displaced. Our organisation will continue to deliver creative wellbeing opportunities in collaboration with migrant communities and support them to advocate for their needs, so that we can enable all children to feel seen, heard and valued.



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# Maryhill Integration Network

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BY ANASTASIA TARIQ AND ROSE FILIPPI

## WHO WE ARE

Maryhill Integration Network (MIN) is a community development organisation in Glasgow. We aim to nurture connections between people from different backgrounds in the local community, through participatory arts projects, wellbeing activities, and campaigning. Since 2001, MIN has been developing projects which support positive social change, by investing in communities and providing a welcoming, safe and inclusive space with opportunities for collaboration and connection. MIN's mission is to create a unique and creative environment in which communities can come together to share experiences and demonstrate the value of cultural diversity in Scotland.

## OUR PRACTICE

MIN has a long history of taking a creative approach to community work. We have led projects which include dance, theatre, poetry and song. In 2021 we began our first fully visual arts project, The Museum of Things. The original idea for the art group came through conversations with MIN participants who were seeking new and creative ways to express themselves; tell their stories and share their skills. The activities that the group coordinates also help to process the stresses of the asylum system; to find ways in which our communities can celebrate their strengths and talents; and in creative ways to counter the exhaustion created by resisting the hostile environment.

MIN's other activities include social groups for men and women, a family group, an all-female choir, and a community garden. We also have a peer-support and advocacy group and run outreach projects with local schools. MIN contributes to campaigns, nationally and locally, such as Lift the Ban, and a new campaign

for fairer access to education, Our Grades Not Visas. MIN is well connected across the voluntary sector and with health professionals. Our main referrals come through community links workers, psychiatric nurses and social workers. We work closely with partners to develop our work in a supportive environment which places the needs of our participants at the heart of our work. We identify need through consultations and conversations with our community.

For MIN, community is everything. We aim to create conditions which allow people to seek out and play an active role in their community. The pandemic only further illustrated to us that, as a society, we cannot survive in isolation, disconnected from one another. For people who have lost friends, family and support networks, it is essential for them to be able to find ways to rebuild these. All our groups are extremely diverse and reflective of Glasgow's social mix. Our participants often comment on how being part of this mix feels special; it's a unique and empowering experience to be connected with many people from different cultures, speaking different languages, with a shared goal to improve the life of their community.

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“It's a way to be more expressive, to discuss, to learn, and to begin wonderful friendships. This allows us to be open to other cultures and discover new things. Despite the differences between our cultures, beliefs and origins, respect reigns.”

Participant

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Participants of the Museum of Things Art Group, Maryhill Integration Network. Photo © Rose Filippi.

The hostile environment continues to have a negative impact on participants' ability to connect with others. Not only does it leave people in poverty, stripping them of their dignity, it creates feelings of anxiety and paranoia around accessing even the most basic services. It is a challenge to overcome the barriers created by these tactics. Our work is a resistance, and an alternative, to the ways in which inhumane immigration policies impact our communities.

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“ We came to this country as refugees. When you are a refugee, it's like you have lost your identity. By doing something collectively and making art together that will be shared with other people in Scotland, it's given us back our sense of identity. I feel like we have found ourselves. ”

**Participant**

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MIN's staff team, including freelancers and also our strong cohort of volunteers (including our trustees), is diverse and multilingual, reflecting the communities we work with. It's important for us to continue this; however, it is not something we find challenging to maintain as we meet so many skilled individuals through our work who continue to contribute to MIN's development and the delivery of our work.

MIN's first visual arts project, the Museum of Things, began in 2021 in the middle of the first COVID-19 lockdown, using weekly online sessions to engage with participants through a variety of different artistic methods and techniques. The project's lead artists, Paria Goodarzi and Mousa AlNana, continue to facilitate weekly sessions with a diverse group of participants, not only in terms of cultural background, but also ages – our youngest participant is 19 and oldest is in their 60s – and artistic abilities.

Some participants are graduates of art schools in their home countries and have trained as architects, designers, animators, photographers and tattoo artists; other participants had only picked up a paint brush for the very first time in 2021.

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“Being part of the [art] activities made me realise my potential. I never knew that art would be the kind of thing I could do, but it showed me that there are other ways to see the world, and that as an individual, there is no limit to what you can do.”

**Participant**

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Both artists share MIN's understanding that communities who collectively engage in creative thinking are more connected and better equipped to tackle social adversities and mental health issues. By working together, Paria and Mousa use their complementary skills and specialisms to successfully engage this very unique group. The results have been outstanding and the group continues to go from strength to strength through the positive and nurturing environment created.

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“My psychiatrist suggested I go to the art group. I had a strong trauma, I was an introverted person, but once I found this group I was able to get out of the closed state I was suffering from, this group created an opportunity for me to recover.”

**Participant**

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## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Due to the three overlapping themes that MIN works within – Human Rights, Wellbeing and Creativity – we are able to have a direct and positive impact on our participants' mental health, confidence and resilience. We are also a community development organisation which means that our participants' needs are at the heart of how we develop our work. We encourage involvement and support participants to reach their full potential.

Together, we have seen that even small creative actions can have an enormous positive impact not only on the wellbeing of participants, but also wider representation. Now more than ever, we appreciate the value of art to tell stories, authentically, to create dialogue and understanding across our communities.

MIN is thankful to funders who are supportive of our innovative ways of working, and who understand the value of a needs-led approach.

In the future we plan to build roles for participants to gain experience and lead creative sessions and facilitate outreach workshops. We hope to continue to enhance partnerships in order to engage with the wider community and arts and cultural institutions. We want to curate exhibitions alongside participants to share our work with others and enhance awareness about the group. We also wish to be able to deliver more outreach with more remote communities across Scotland to offer support and share skills around using arts with diverse groups.



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# Music Action International

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BY LIS MURPHY



Photo © Seb Matthes.

## WHO WE ARE

Music Action International transforms lives destroyed by war, torture and persecution. We design and deliver innovative psychosocial music and skill-sharing programmes with survivors to overcome the effects of trauma and isolation through creative expression in emotionally safe environments.

Since 2010 we have worked with 9,000+ participants and 500+ partners in the British Isles, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ireland, Sierra Leone, Sweden, Belgium, Estonia, Georgia (Caucasus) and Palestine.

Our ongoing work currently includes bespoke creative programmes with refugees, asylum seekers and Roma people of all ages in

North-West and South-East England and a skill-sharing programme in a psychiatric hospital and prisons in Freetown, Sierra Leone, initiated and led by local music facilitators affected by the war.

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“For me music is very important. I forget my troubles. I forget my headaches. Music is a happy time.”

**Aliya, Survivor**

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Our specialised, multi-lingual facilitators – most with lived experience – facilitate survivors to produce high-quality, thought-provoking

and inspiring work for performance or music video, with and for other local people in the community and on national stages, creating empathy and understanding. Most participants we work with have never made music before but develop to create their own songs, in their own language, and consistently report improved emotional, mental and physical wellbeing.

## OUR PRACTICE

Traumatic experiences are common among refugee and asylum seekers, who can suffer extremely high levels of ill-health with complex mental and physical health problems. Our participants have faced horrific human rights abuses (imprisonment, conflict, persecution, torture) in their home countries. Symptoms include: PTSD, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation. Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most marginalised in our society facing multiple disadvantages. Our programmes offer a unique alternative to talking therapies, key for survivors who engage less readily with Western mental health services due to language and cultural barriers. Studies evidence music's physiological benefits: reducing blood pressure; stabilising heart and breathing rates; reducing stress hormone (cortisol) levels in the body, helping to alleviate the symptoms of trauma.

“ Music accesses emotional responses in a way that can be more effective than verbal therapies. Music has a more direct access to feelings of creativity, joy and liberation. It can then be more transformative than the more complex process of verbal intervention. ”

**Christine Adcock, Clinical Psychologist**

Our structured music programmes are a collaboration between facilitators and participants, with shared learning of music, languages and cultures throughout the process. The methodology was initially inspired by music programmes created in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina and has developed with

input from refugees, asylum seekers, clinical therapists, teachers and multilingual creative facilitators. Participant-led, collaborative creativity with a psycho-social approach is at the heart, delivered by people with lived experience of conflict from around the world.

“ Wellbeing improved for 100 per cent of the individuals observed in the sessions, helping them to become joyful and uplifted. It reduced stress, helping them to relax and feel free. The sessions impacted most strongly on those who arrived with the lowest wellbeing. ”

**Sally Fort, External evaluator**

Feedback consistently shows our performances reduce stigma and discrimination experienced by refugees and asylum seekers, increasing empathy and understanding among local communities.

“ It was the first time I put myself in their shoes. I felt very emotional. ”

**Audience member, Stone Flowers**

We also provide training, skill-sharing, employment, mentoring and volunteer opportunities, particularly with people with refugee heritage, those from the Global Majority and young people. We work with partner organisations to provide sign-posting to other services, training and employment opportunities to participants, trainees and facilitators. We have an online resource promoted by BBC Get Singing for use in the classroom and with refugee groups. We are developing CPD for teachers and packaging our informal training, advice and consultation offers within the Arts, Education and Refugee Sector.

We identify need by approaching organisations supporting newly-arrived asylum seekers, delivering taster sessions leading to a longer-term programme. Our teams are based in areas with the highest dispersal of asylum seekers.

Our biggest lessons have come through collaborating with clinical therapists and psychologists in our torture survivor programme: around trauma awareness, how we can create a programme to deliver the most effective sessions, as well as protecting staff and participants from re-traumatisation and what to do if this occurs.

Equally important is the lived experience of people from around the world who can analyse situations and reactions with an important perspective to influence micro and macro decisions within the organisational structures.

The biggest challenges are sustainable funding and the staff time it takes to get this versus the demand for our services. Funders do not always appreciate or value the unique approach we take (although this seems to be changing), which is developed with therapists but not therapy, and places collaboration with people with lived experience at the heart of all programmes, as well as meaningful connection through music with local communities who otherwise would not meet. The levels of trauma we work with requires time, care, expertise and wellbeing support.

Linked to this is burn-out within the core staff team who are managing many issues round administration and demands of charities, competing with large charity businesses in the sector.

We have developed a creative and wellbeing methodology that has been described as 'revolutionary' in the sector which combines high-quality creative facilitation with a cutting-edge therapeutic wellbeing policy for staff and facilitators, including compulsory refugee and trauma awareness training, one-to-one clinical supervision and compulsory group supervision for teams working with high levels of trauma, particularly for those with lived experience who might be triggered in sessions. This level of training and support for facilitators and core team has been difficult for us to fund consistently as there are many ways of using music that do not require this level of investment but that would not deliver the level of impact that our programmes consistently deliver.

Since our inception in 2010, co-creation with people with lived experience has been at the heart of all creative programmes – every

creative team has always had at least one professionally paid, specialised person with lived experience. Our core staff team has also employed at least one person with refugee heritage and our Board has always had at least one person with refugee heritage. Our approach has always included progression routes for participants to become paid trainees and facilitators. 80 per cent of our creative facilitation team are from the Global Majority and/or have lived experience.

Lived experience is incredibly important for authentic music-making using genres, languages and styles close to participants' cultural heritage, for language interpretation, for a deeper understanding of how participants might feel, and for creating as safe a space as possible, achieving the greatest wellbeing impact, as well as creating role models that participants could take some hope from for their own future life in this country.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

When we started in 2010, trauma awareness/trauma-informed practice was not common; however we developed an innovative, cutting edge approach, combining expertise of non-refugee and refugee facilitators designing programmes together with clinical psychologists in order to support the team with clinical supervision, training and self-care techniques.

We also placed importance from the start on culturally appropriate music-making by drawing ideas from participants of what kinds of music they wanted to make, rather than imposing our music. We facilitated creative ideas in participants' own languages to create new pieces collaboratively, with important messages that gave people a voice for themselves and on behalf of others who are in similar situations. This has had a positive impact on the participants and facilitators we work with.

Our vision is to increase our impact nationally and internationally with survivors of war, torture and persecution. Over the next three years, we aim to develop ongoing programmes in a new region, Yorkshire & Humber. We aim to re-engage with our partners in Palestine and Bosnia-Herzegovina and to fund a specialised training and skill-sharing programme for cross-region learning. We



also have a documentary film currently being shown at national and international festivals, documenting our torture survivor group Stone Flowers over the last eight years. We aim to have screenings nationally and internationally, Q&As with participants and an education resource alongside.

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# Oasis

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BY TOMOS OWEN AND JESS WATSON

## WHO WE ARE

Oasis is a charity that supports refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into their communities across Cardiff and South Wales. We provide a warm Welsh welcome to 90-200 visitors each day and during 2022 we welcomed over 4,500 people into our centre. Our focus is to provide holistic support so that our clients can integrate and contribute to Welsh society, building a life that they can enjoy and be proud of. An essential aspect of helping clients to integrate is providing activities, such as participatory arts sessions that are empowering and provide a creative outlet for refugees and asylum seekers.

## OUR PRACTICE

Oasis has worked on a number of participatory arts projects and there were different approaches each time. In April 2022, we worked alongside the National Museum of Wales, Sain Ffagan, to create designs with refugees and asylum seekers that were inspired by their home countries' traditional food. These designs were transferred using fabric carbon transfer and the images were developed using a combination of machine and hand stitching, and appliqué. These were stitched onto a large vintage tablecloth that is now a part of the Museum's heritage collection.

Our clients also embarked on two pieces of participatory art with a visiting artist-in-residence, working with an NHS arts project that focused specifically on refugee integration in Wales. The first of these included a stitch project using paper and fabric and displaying embroidered welcome messages in many different languages. This piece is on display at the Royal Infirmary Cardiff. The second piece of art resulted from a number

of workshops designed to help refugees and asylum seekers familiarise themselves with their local areas in Cardiff. Participants were invited to use photography and digital art to transfer onto fabric to produce individual maps of the surrounding areas. Clients worked with a photographer/digital content creator with lived experience of the asylum system to produce a series of stills and moving imagery that were incorporated into the quilt, as well as 3D imagery. There was also an online version created by a Fine Art photographer in which you can access each section of the 2D work, giving you further information regarding the area of Cardiff that the client studied visually. It also displayed poems, quotes and artwork reflective of the area created by the project participants.

Art has proven to transcend language, race and religion amongst our clients and has provided a creative outlet to allow refugees and asylum seekers to express emotions that they may not have been able to do verbally. Participation numbers have been strong and it has engaged a wide range of clients of different ages, genders and backgrounds. Art has also brought our clients together and has provided a relaxed atmosphere, where there is no pressure of being misunderstood due to language barriers.

There have been several learnings from the arts sessions, but most notably it was clear that these sessions were acting as holistic mental health support and provided a forum for participants to feel at ease when talking about things that were troubling them. Questions surrounding these topics were never asked during the sessions, but the act of engaging with creative and practical activities sparked these conversations and allowed individuals to work through their trauma together. It was



Photo © Oasis, Cardiff.

also clear that a number of the refugees and asylum seekers who engaged with the sessions did not believe themselves to be creative, so engaging them with these projects created an empowering effect and many were keen to continue and suggest creative ideas of their own.

There were challenges along the way, particularly with engaging some clients initially. To address this, the sessions were run in our main communal space which has an open and relaxed atmosphere. This allowed some individuals to watch from the side while they considered engaging and this counteracted the fear of the unknown. We found that this built trust and broke down the barriers to engagement and many who were initially sceptical got involved. The end of these projects presented a final challenge, as many clients wanted them to continue but a lack of funding meant that they were time limited and couldn't be sustained.

Despite some challenges, the outcome was overwhelmingly positive and successful. Interestingly, these sessions focused on activities that may traditionally be associated with women, such as sewing and embroidery, but the majority of those that engaged were men. Many told us that they had skills with practical sewing and traditional embroidery from their home countries and were now rediscovering them on these projects. This creative outlet, along with a strong social



element, provided an appealing atmosphere for all, with one client saying that the sessions themselves felt like therapy.

## IMPACT AND CHANGE

The success of participatory arts sessions at Oasis has left us more open-minded and given us a true sense of perspective on the holistic value of art. The mental health benefits have been clear and the sense of accomplishment that our clients demonstrated having completed the sessions was incredibly positive. It has been exciting to see our clients come up with ideas for their own arts sessions and we hope to make client-led arts sessions a staple of our provision. This change has been possible because of funding that allowed us to work with professional artists and gave us the resources for sessions to be run.

We see participatory arts as a very important part of supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and as an avenue where stigma and misinformation can be tackled through joint working within the community. This will be built into our long-term vision for Oasis and we have already begun bringing staff into the organisation who have a background in arts and are able to work alongside our clients to make this a reality. We are now looking forward to an upcoming workshop where the resulting art will be displayed in an exhibition space in Cardiff, and a scribing session that will be led by a professional illustrator.



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# Together Productions

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BY JEREMY HANEMAN AND HOLLY JONES



Singing Our Lives, Union Chapel. Photo by Rachel Cherry.

## WHO WE ARE

Together Productions delivers creative programmes that address social injustice and support wellbeing by building community, reducing isolation, and creating meaningful connections across social divides. Our mission is to enable people who may never otherwise meet to come together through the arts to learn, create, nurture new communities and inspire change.

We engage with diverse groups including refugees and asylum seekers, those facing mental health challenges, survivors of torture/sexual violence, religious minorities, ethnically diverse communities, the elderly – and enable

individuals and communities to increase confidence, develop skills and build bonds and empathy by creating and collaborating together.

Our programmes include:

- **Sing for Freedom Choir**  
For refugees and asylum seekers who have survived torture, and allies who sing in solidarity with them;
- **Mixed Up Chorus**  
Members from different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds including the elderly and refugees;
- **Singing For Our Minds**  
Development programme embedding positive mental health outcomes in group singing practice, with a focus on leadership, diversity and inclusion;

- **Singing Our Lives**

Bringing refugees, migrants and local communities together to compose and perform new music;

- **Sharing Our Lives**

Uncovering Essex's hidden migration and heritage stories and histories.

## OUR PRACTICE

Our work is based on the principles of participation, collaboration, co-creation, voice and empowerment. We work through a variety of art forms including music, design, film-making, theatre, illustration and storytelling. Our co-creative methodology combines large group, small group and individual opportunities to contribute, incorporating written, visual, verbal and creative communication methods, to allow for individuals' different preferences for learning and self-expression.

We take our time getting to know individuals, building trust and mutual understanding, so that we can identify their specific needs. We work to remove barriers that often prevent marginalised communities such as refugees and asylum seekers from engaging in creative projects, including contributing towards travel and childcare expenses, using communication methods that our members tell us work best for them, using translation, providing one-to-one support, and having dedicated members of staff to support our members to engage and reach their potential, including exploring pathways to volunteering, leadership and employment within or beyond our organisation. Peer support is key, through committees, steering groups, community representatives and champions, as is our network of partners within the mental health and sanctuary sectors, with whom we collaborate on signposting, collective action, specialist support, advice and referrals.

We know how powerful engaging in the arts can be to support positive mental health and build community. Group singing, in particular, has proven benefits such as: lowering cortisol to reduce stress and anxiety, releasing endorphins which boost confidence and joy, improving social connection by creating a strong sense of inclusion, creating



Singing Our Lives workshop. Photo by Jez Ward.

opportunities to express emotions, improving our breathing and immune systems, reducing pain, and much more. Our recent film *Singing Our Hearts Out*<sup>18</sup> advocates for the positive benefits of singing to mental health.

The therapeutic benefits of community story sharing are also central to our approach. Our song writing and other creative participatory projects provide a space for individuals to share their lived experiences and cultures with one another, building bonds of empathy and understanding across difference. These stories inspire powerful creative outcomes, such as songs, films, artworks and theatre pieces, which are shared with audiences at concerts and other large-scale public events, providing a platform for those whose voices are so often unheard or misrepresented to share the stories that they want to tell, on their own terms.

Our monitoring and evaluation tell us that these benefits are especially important for our members with lived experience of seeking sanctuary. Displaced from their homes, families and support networks, our members tell us the choir is like family for them – the first people

<sup>18</sup> Watch at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mroFDpDQsV0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mroFDpDQsV0).

they turn to when they have exciting news to share or are facing a personal struggle. They feel safe, seen and valued as individuals, not defined by labels or circumstances. They gain a sense of pride, confidence and recognition through being part of a group or project which aspires towards the highest quality outcomes.

Working with both professionals and non-professionals, our practice is informed by people with lived experience of the issues we seek to address, including mental health challenges and displacement. Our work is underpinned by a set of principles for inclusive practice that were co-designed by our stakeholders, practitioners and participants with lived experience.<sup>19</sup>

We have learned that we must never make assumptions about people's experiences, needs, wants, interests, backgrounds, or what they may or may not wish to share. Creative work can be triggering and bring up experiences and emotions that are difficult and harrowing, so sensitivity and allowing time, space and support around creative processes is key. Language can create significant barriers, cultural differences are complex and nuanced, and we continue to learn every day. Working in a co-creative way can be scary – as creatives and producers we are not always used to letting go of control, but taking risks and believing in the power of the group has resulted in authentic, high quality creative outcomes that engender a true sense of pride, agency and ownership.

Our sanctuary seeking members face ongoing challenges to their mental health: the stress of being in the asylum system on top of the trauma of displacement, combined with the lack of access to services, financial support, stable and healthy living conditions and opportunities to work and rebuild their lives, discrimination and prejudice, to name just a few. All of these circumstances can make it an uphill battle for people who are already struggling to rebuild their lives to attend regular sessions, engage fully in creative processes, learn music and work towards performances.

Like so many, we are also facing challenges ourselves as an organisation. Demand for our programmes is at an all-time high, as need in

our communities grows and other services are depleted. Yet our lack of ongoing core funding means that we are often not able to meet this increased demand and have to turn people away, which sits uncomfortably alongside our principles of welcome and inclusion.

During lockdown we became acutely aware of the power of our creative communities to provide peer support and a lifeline to one another through challenging times. We held a device appeal to provide laptops, mobile phones and data to those facing digital exclusion, and it was humbling to see the lengths people went to stay connected with the group and how much it meant to them.

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“What would I have done without the warmth, enjoyment and togetherness of Sing for Freedom during these tough times? I think I would have fallen apart, been really isolated and started to feel old. It has been wonderful to see everyone's faces and share our singing together. The joy that we share is amazing. The songs that we sing so uplifting. The effect of our choir lasts and helps me to live through Covid. I look forward to Thursday and to seeing everyone. Gemma our MD exudes energy and emotion even through the confines of Zoom. I can't imagine life now without SFF choir.”

**Kate, singer, Sing for Freedom Choir**

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## IMPACT AND CHANGE

Through our programmes we have seen communities being built, resulting in friendship, solidarity, collective action and changed attitudes. New conversations have been opened up, artists have developed their practice and sense of social responsibility as agents of change. Many people have told us about the impact our work has had on their wellbeing, confidence and feelings of joy. Survivors of torture and forced displacement have told us that the therapeutic benefits of engaging with our projects have helped them

<sup>19</sup> Available at: [vid.cdn-website.com/bed95824/videos/5mOXkuQGQM2088CiCSdu\\_Together+Productions-+Guiding+Principles-v.mp4](https://vid.cdn-website.com/bed95824/videos/5mOXkuQGQM2088CiCSdu_Together+Productions-+Guiding+Principles-v.mp4).



to rebuild their lives. People facing significant mental health challenges have said that they have found safety in our programmes, sharing their experiences of trauma and marginalisation and feeling celebrated for who they are.

The main things that made this change possible have been a person-centred approach, active listening, a strong network of partners and supporters, a commitment to reflective practice and a flexible, responsive and dynamic

approach to ever-changing circumstances. We choose, train and support our team members carefully, and embed strong feedback loops and evaluative practice across all our work. We take risks and are prepared to do things differently. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, we invest in creating a community of kindness and care, which we hope permeates through and beyond all our projects.



I dream of...

anime  
adventurer  
vet.  
fairytale  
acheron

I am good at...

BMX  
english  
art  
anime  
reading  
making friends



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# Reflections

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## THE EVIDENCE FOR THE VITAL ROLE OF THE ARTS IN SUPPORTING REFUGEES FACING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IS COMPELLING

The case studies presented in this report provide insight into the complex and challenging circumstances that refugees and asylum seekers face. Many have experienced trauma, often severe, associated with forced migration from their home country, followed by further challenges during their journey, arrival, and attempts to seek asylum. Even after the asylum process is completed, practical and psychological challenges continue to arise during resettlement. The organisations demonstrate a deep understanding and sensitivity towards refugees' individual experiences. Many of the programmes are trauma-informed, which means that they take into account the multi-dimensional impacts of trauma on individuals, including neurological, biological, psychological, and social.

The evidence for the vital role of the arts in supporting refugees facing mental health issues is compelling; demonstrating how creative activities can be used as a positive tool for engagement with traumatic experiences, as well as a means of distraction from them. There is a clear consensus that engaging in the arts has a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of beneficiaries, providing a way to express emotions and experiences, build social connections, and promote feelings of agency and empowerment, as well as reducing symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and more.

There is a diversity of approaches to delivering arts-based interventions, with some projects led or supported by mental health professionals and others relying on the care, passion and commitment of professionals with little or no formal training in mental health. While some projects are explicitly focused on mental health

and wellbeing, for others these outcomes are a welcome by-product of a broader artistic programme.

We have observed common themes, such as the arts' ability to foster resilience, increase confidence, combat loneliness, and create a greater sense of community and belonging, as well as the importance and value of fun, joy, and sense of collective spirit.

Many case studies also emphasised the significance of lived experience leadership and co-design by individuals with refugee backgrounds.

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“The impact of these projects on beneficiaries can be immediate or felt over a longer period, but they are consistently shown to be life-changing and even life-saving.”

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The impact of these projects on beneficiaries can be immediate or felt over a longer period, but they are consistently shown to be life-changing and even life-saving. This is skilled and considered work, often taking place over long periods of time even whilst many operate under constant uncertainty; many case studies in this report cite challenges around funding, especially in securing core funding.

In terms of challenges identified, these include limited funding, resources and capacity. As well as a need for further research and investment to develop more rigorous and commonly used evaluation methodologies that are able to better demonstrate the effectiveness of art-based interventions and their longer-term



impact at the individual, community, and national level. While still recognising the diversity of approaches and contexts, this could help bridge the gap between arts and health organisations and help funders and policy makers gain a fuller understanding of the work which could aid facilitate connections with commissioned health services such as social prescribing.

Through the process of collating this report, including the online gathering, we have come to realise the exciting area of potential of developing a network to connect and collaborate with individuals and organisations working in this field to share practice. We also see the importance and value of accessing and partnering with venues such as museums, galleries, and cultural centres to support narrative change at a mainstream level.

It is clear that arts organisations can make a significant positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers. It is vitally important that there is continued support for this work to be expanded at the individual, community and national level, not only for the wellbeing of individual refugees and asylum seekers but to strengthen social cohesion at the local community level, shape the cultural sector at a national level and benefit our society as a whole.





## Learning and common themes

THIS SECTION PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS COLLATED UNDER COMMON THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDIES.

### HOW ART BENEFITS REFUGEES' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

#### Bringing people together

The power of communal experiences and the benefits of group support are evident in the case studies. For refugees and asylum seekers who can often face isolation and loneliness, the social element of group activities is especially important. Across age, culture, language, and gender, groups in the case studies demonstrate the development of strong bonds, social connections, and a sense of belonging. The inclusive nature of these group activities helps to overcome barriers and fosters a sense of community among participants.

#### Beyond language

The case studies highlight the power of art to communicate and process experiences beyond the limitations of language. In situations where words fail, art provides a different means of expression and interpretation, allowing individuals to explore and make sense of their past experiences in a unique way. The use of art as a tool for communication and healing is particularly valuable for refugees and asylum seekers who may face language barriers or struggle to articulate their experiences in words.

#### Here and now

The case studies demonstrate the power of art to help refugees connect with the present moment through immersive tasks that align the body and mind. By focusing on the task at hand, participants are able to engage fully in the present moment, fostering a sense of mindfulness and grounding. This experience

is particularly valuable for refugees who may be grappling with trauma and uncertainty about the future, allowing them to find a sense of stability and control in the present.

#### Physiological impact

The impact of art on the body's nervous system, especially for refugees who have experienced trauma, cannot be overstated. The case studies demonstrate the ability of artistic activities, such as group singing, to positively impact physical health. For example, group singing has been shown to reduce blood pressure, stabilise heart and breathing rates, and lower stress hormone (cortisol) levels in the body. These effects can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, while releasing endorphins that boost confidence and bring a sense of joy. By providing a means to positively impact the body's physiological response to stress, artistic activities offer a powerful tool for healing and recovery.

“By providing a means to positively impact the body's physiological response to stress, artistic activities offer a powerful tool for healing and recovery.”

#### Self-expression

Self-expression can be a powerful tool for boosting wellbeing and sense of fulfilment, especially for refugees who may not have other opportunities to have their voices heard in other places. Art projects can provide a safe and supportive space for individuals to express



themselves and process their experiences, leading to a sense of agency, control, and ownership. This, in turn, can help individuals rediscover their identity and potential, leading to transformative experiences.

### **Being seen and heard**

Having a space where one can feel seen and heard is invaluable. Art projects provide such a space, not only for interaction with other participants but also for wider audiences. This contributes to a deep sense of connection, recognition, and accomplishment, ultimately leading to greater self-belief and capacity for imagination. Art projects also have the potential to spark new interests, which can lead to personal and professional development.

### **Joy and celebration through collaboration and making**

Joy and celebration play a significant role in boosting overall wellbeing, by counteracting negative emotions, fostering social connections, creating positive memories, and generating positive emotions. The case studies show that collaborative art-making activities can provide a space for joy and celebration, where participants can connect with one another, share positive experiences, and build a sense

of community. Collaborative art-making can be a powerful tool for generating positive emotions and fostering a sense of accomplishment, which in turn can lead to increased self-esteem and self-worth. Through shared experiences of joy and celebration, participants can create positive memories, which can contribute to overall resilience.

## **GOOD PRACTICE AND WAYS OF WORKING**

### **Trauma-informed structured programmes**

Developing trauma-informed and structured programs is crucial to creating consistency, predictability, and stability for individuals who have experienced trauma. The case studies emphasise the importance of creating a safe space, setting clear goals and expectations, and being flexible and tailored to meet the specific needs of each individual. By incorporating trauma-informed practices, such as safety, choice, collaboration and empowerment, participants can develop a sense of control and safety, which can lead to positive outcomes and increased resilience.



Building at The Community Table, Kent, Art Refuge 2021

## Relationship-centred

By adopting a relationship-centred approach, where sensitivity, care, compassion, and respect are key, safe spaces can be created where strong, long-term bonds can develop. This sense of a two-way relationship built on trust creates a deep sense of belonging for all involved. Many case studies describe the relationships between project leads, staff members, and project participants in familial terms, which highlights the level of trust and care that has been developed over time. This approach ensures that participants feel heard and valued. By prioritising the needs and experiences of the individuals involved, relationship-centred programmes can create a supportive and nurturing environment that fosters healing and growth.

## Co-production and lived experience leadership

Incorporating co-production and lived experience leadership in programme development has been recognised as a crucial aspect of creating impactful initiatives. This approach places individuals with lived experience at the centre of the decision-making process, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are represented and informing the direction of the programme. Co-production also emphasises collaboration and shared responsibility between programme leaders and participants, creating a sense of ownership and investment in the initiative's success. This approach ultimately leads to more authentic, nuanced and effective programmes that are responsive to the diverse needs of the communities they serve.

## Holistic programmes

Many of the case studies emphasise the importance of a holistic approach to their programmes, which includes providing wrap-around care and support to remove barriers to participation and enhance the wellbeing of participants. This approach involves addressing not only the artistic and creative aspects of the programme but also the practical, logistical and welfare needs of the individuals involved. For example, some programmes provide food, childcare, and travel expenses to ensure that participants can attend sessions. Others offer one-to-one support, tailored communication channels, additional support workers, welfare

support, and employment pathways, training, mentorship, etc. Some programmes integrate these aspects into their organisational structure, while others do this in addition to their roles on a voluntary and ad-hoc basis. By taking a holistic approach, programmes can better address the complex needs of individuals.

## Reflective and responsive

Several case studies demonstrate the importance of a reflective and responsive approach in their work practices. They emphasise that they never stop learning and continuously re-evaluate and create feedback loops to ensure they remain responsive to emerging needs. By being reflective, organisations can critically assess the effectiveness of their projects and programmes, and make necessary adjustments to better meet the needs of the people they serve. Being responsive allows them to adapt quickly to changes and address any unforeseen issues or challenges that may arise. This approach promotes a culture of learning and growth, and helps organisations remain agile and effective in their work.

## LONGER TERM IMPACT

### Stronger and healthier communities

Investing in art projects for refugee mental health has a positive spill-over effect, benefiting both refugees and the wider local community. The projects featured in this report serve as a catalyst for social connection and collaboration, with individual bonds leading to the creation of wider group bonds and eventually a sense of community. These relationships are often two-way, and long-lasting (extending beyond the duration of the projects), which promotes social inclusion and reduces feelings of isolation, which fosters a greater sense of community cohesion.

The projects also facilitate connections with the wider local community through the development of local partnerships, e.g. collaboration with various community stakeholders, such as schools, hospitals, venues, arts organisations, and local services, etc. Thus, they create spaces for people to connect across differences which can promote cross-cultural exchange and understanding, helping also to raise awareness and shift

existing negative narratives, which fosters compassion and ultimately reduces stereotypes and misconceptions. These efforts also contribute to building resilience and promoting a sense of belonging and inclusion for refugees and the wider local community, leading to stronger and healthier communities overall.

### **Stronger and more dynamic cultural sector**

Investing in art projects for refugee mental health not only benefits the individual participants and the wider community but also contributes to the positive growth of the arts and culture sector, as demonstrated by the case studies featured in this report. The organisations featured in this report take a holistic approach to their programmes, supporting participants' employment pathways by offering mentorship, training, capacity building, and skill sharing, among other forms of support. By centring lived experience and developing long-term relationships, we see some participants from the case studies go on to take key roles within the organisations (e.g. facilitators, trustees, directors, etc). This demonstrates the value and potential of these two-way relationships to shape organisations

in innovative ways which can in turn contribute to the growth of a stronger, more dynamic, and more inclusive cultural sector.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Gap filling**

Many of the case studies presented in this report demonstrate that the art projects not only provide a creative outlet for refugees, but also offer additional support that may not be available elsewhere. These projects often take on responsibilities that extend beyond their original remit, addressing individual needs and welfare issues where services may be backlogged or unavailable. The sense of community built through these projects serves two important roles: first, as a signpost to further support, and second, as a support network that can act as a buffer for oversubscribed services. However, much of this additional support is invisible labour that is done on goodwill and not funded. While the community provides a supportive and caring space for refugees, it is important to recognise the additional responsibilities that art projects often take on and the need for adequate resources to sustain them.



Together Productions, Sing for Freedom Choir. Photo by Rachel Cherry.



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“Much of this additional support is invisible labour that is done on goodwill and not funded.”

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### **Funding**

Many case studies have reported experiencing a significant demand for their services, often resulting in the unfortunate need to turn away clients or establish lengthy waiting lists. This practice is incongruent with their mission of inclusivity and the desire to serve all those in need. Moreover, numerous case studies face ongoing challenges in accessing adequate funding, particularly long-term core funding. These struggles can hinder their ability to provide quality services and achieve their organisational goals.

### **Lack of common shared language and evaluation tools**

One of the issues we have found in the process of compiling this report is the lack of a common shared language and evaluation tools. It appears that the arts sector might use language that is different from the health sector, which can make it challenging to assess and measure the impact of their work in a way that is recognised by funders and policymakers. Additionally, while these projects can have therapeutic benefits, they are not the same as therapy and may struggle to secure funding as a result. Despite these challenges, many organisations continue to work towards supporting the mental wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers through their own creative practices and own evaluation methodologies, highlighting the importance of finding new ways to communicate and evaluate the positive impact of their work.

### **Networking**

Developing a network for organisations engaged in this work could foster innovation, creativity, and the exchange of ideas, offering opportunities for practical support and shared resources. It could also increase the visibility and reach of this kind of practice, making it easier for smaller organisations to access funding and commissioning opportunities.

### **Mainstream venues**

For organisations working in this field, access to mainstream venues (such as museums, galleries, and cultural centres) can be crucial, bringing increased visibility and audience reach that helps reduce stigma and raises awareness. These venues can also provide opportunities for validation and acceptance by offering opportunities for participants and audiences to connect. Additionally, projects might be able to access resources such as funding, marketing, and promotional support to aid the reach and impact of their work. Finally, by integrating these projects into mainstream programming and commissioning, they become part of the wider cultural narrative, helping break down barriers and promoting a more diverse and accepting community.

## Additional research and resources

### **Mental health: migrant health guide**

UK Home Office (last updated 2022).

This report provides an overview of the current state of mental health and wellbeing among migrants including refugees and asylum seekers in the UK as well as helpful resources and guidance.

[www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-migrant-health-guide)

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CITED IN THIS GUIDE INCLUDE:**

#### ● **A mental health resource pack**

Published by City of Sanctuary.

Specifically aimed at supporting refugees and asylum seekers living in the community.

[health.cityofsanctuary.org/resources](https://health.cityofsanctuary.org/resources)

#### ● **Commissioning mental health services for vulnerable adult migrants**

Published by Mind, 2015.

[www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4398/vulnerable-migrants\\_2015\\_mindweb.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4398/vulnerable-migrants_2015_mindweb.pdf)

#### ● **Resources on mental health**

Available in a range of languages, published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/translations](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/translations)

### **OTHER RESOURCES INCLUDE:**

#### **Arts and health: Supporting the mental well-being of forcibly displaced people**

World Health Organization (2018).

Highlights the potential of arts-based interventions in promoting mental wellbeing among refugees and other displaced people.

[www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people](https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/arts-and-health--supporting-the-mental-well-being-of-forcibly-displaced-people)

#### **Art of Recovery: Displacement, Mental Health, and Wellbeing**

Emma Rose, Amanda Bingley, Macarena Rioseco and Kirsten Lamb (2018).

Explores the potential of arts-based interventions for refugees and asylum seekers' mental health and wellbeing. The report highlights the challenges faced by displaced people, including social isolation, language barriers, and limited access to mental health services. It presents case studies and interviews with organisations that have used arts-based approaches to address mental health issues, such as trauma and depression, among refugees and asylum seekers.

[pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4683/d2b7857544eacc34d43855758b8b12f45459.pdf](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4683/d2b7857544eacc34d43855758b8b12f45459.pdf)

#### **Mental health support for refugees and asylum seekers**

The Refugee Council offers resources and support for refugees and asylum seekers with mental health needs.

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/our-work/mental-health-support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/our-work/mental-health-support-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers)

### **Overcoming barriers to refugees and asylum seekers accessing care**

Published by the British Medical Association.

Provides guidance and resources for healthcare professionals to help refugees and asylum seekers overcome barriers to accessing healthcare.

[www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/overcoming-barriers-to-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-accessing-care](http://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/overcoming-barriers-to-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-accessing-care)

### **Unique health challenges for refugees and asylum seekers**

Published by the British Medical Association

Provides information on the unique health challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers.

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/ethics/refugees-overseas-visitors-and-vulnerable-migrants/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-patient-health-toolkit/unique-health-challenges-for-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

### **The prevalence of mental illness in refugees and asylum seekers**

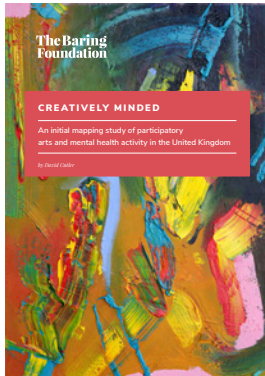
Blackmore et al (2020).

Investigated the mental health status of refugees globally to identify factors contributing to poor mental health. Overall, the study highlights the importance of addressing the mental health needs of refugees and calls for a more coordinated and responsive approach to mental health support.

[journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003337](https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003337)



# Selected Baring Foundation resources



**Creatively Minded**  
David Cutler  
2020



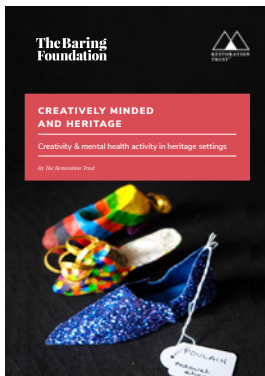
**Creatively Minded and Young**  
Harriet Lowe  
2020



**Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse**  
Compiled by  
The Baring Foundation  
2021



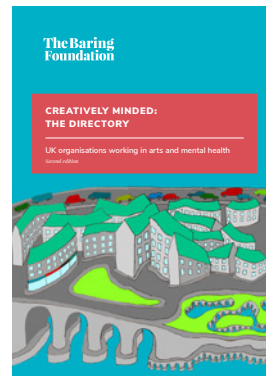
**Creatively Minded and the NHS**  
David Cutler  
2021



**Creatively Minded and Heritage**  
The Restoration Trust  
2021



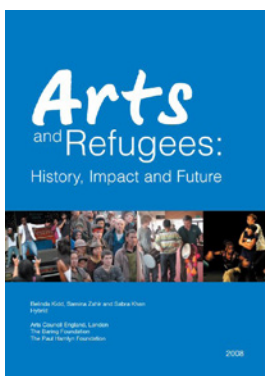
**Creatively Minded at the Museum**  
David Cutler  
2022



**Creatively Minded: the Directory**  
The Baring Foundation  
2022



**Arts and creativity for people with severe mental illness**  
Hannah Zeilig, Corinna Hackmann, Julian West, Melanie Handley and Jasmin Plant  
2022



**Arts and refugees: history, impact and future**  
Belinda Kidd, Samina Zahir and Sabra Khan  
2009

All resources can be found on our website  
[www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)







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