

COUNTERPOINTS.

Roundtable December 2023
Anti-Racist Action in Arts & Wellbeing

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www.counterpoints.org.uk

What we will cover

- Introduction to Counterpoints Arts
- A new report: *Creatively Minded & Refugees*
- UK Context: A Hostile Environment
- Stress, Trauma & Trauma-informed Practice
- Break
- Guest Speakers: Last Mafuba, Ali Ghaderi & Mhairi Gayer
- Discussion & Reflections

Who We Are

Counterpoints Arts was set up in 2012 and is a leading national organisation in the field of arts, migration and cultural change.

We work across all art forms and collaborate with a range of people and partners, including artists, arts/cultural and educational organizations and civil society activists.

We are based in Hoxton, London working nationally and internationally.

We are a charity/non-profit and funded by mostly philanthropic funders and some other income from events and marketing

COUNTERPOINTS.

Our Vision

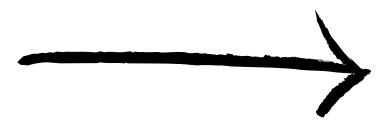
is of a just and equal society that values and supports artists and communities from displaced and migrant backgrounds.

Our Mission

is to support and produce the arts by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their contributions are recognized and welcomed within British arts, history and culture.

We believe arts can inspire social change.

Principles to center



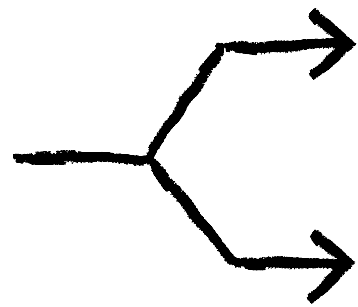
Choosing comfort



Lived experience



Power & Privilege

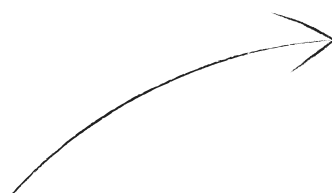


Non-judgement

Safety



Intersectionality



Disability Justice



Compassion, Sand In Your Eye, Halifax, 2023 © Charlotte Graham

Creatively Minded and Refugees

Our new report on Arts, Displacement & Mental Health



Art Refuge

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.

“I'm kind of a hope for the future.”

Aida Silvestri: artist, originally from Eritrea

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

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.

UK Context: A Hostile Environment

Forced displacement

Hard borders

Hostile Environment

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

Refugee Council

Stress, Trauma & Trauma-informed Practice

What is Stress?

Stress is our body's response to pressure. Any type of challenge, such as performance at work or school, a significant life change can be stressful.



What is Trauma?

Trauma results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.



What are Trauma-informed practices?

Trauma-informed practices recognize the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledge the role trauma may play in an individual's life.







Guest Speakers

Last Mafuba

Ali Ghaderi

Mhairi Gayer

Thank you!

Please get in touch if you are interested to collaborate & stay involved
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