

The Baring Foundation

CREATIVELY MINDED AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE

Increasing creative opportunities for people with mental health problems from ethnically diverse backgrounds

Compiled by the Baring Foundation



Creatively minded and ethnically diverse: Increasing creative opportunities for people with mental health problems from ethnically diverse backgrounds

About the Baring Foundation

We are an independent foundation which protects and advances human rights and promotes inclusion. More about us can be found in *A History of the Baring Foundation in 50 Grants*, available on our website. The Baring Foundation has always funded the arts and in 2020 we moved, after a ten-year focus on creative ageing, to start a new programme focused on creativity with and by people living with mental health problems.

This report was commissioned by the Baring Foundation in advance of a new focus on racial justice, including in our Arts programme which will seek to direct more funding towards increasing opportunities for people from ethnically diverse communities with mental health problems to engage in creative and cultural activity.

Credits/acknowledgements

Vicki Amedume, Daniel Regan, Dolly Sen, Louise Donoghue (Art in Healthcare), Alex Summers and Samina Beckford (Birmingham Rep), Kat Evans (British Ceramics Biennial), Geoff Norris (Centrepieces), Dr Errol Francis (Culture&), Joy Hart (Hive), Christina Lake (Key Changes), Olivia Ware (Many Minds), John Speyer (Music In Detention), Matt Steinberg (Outside Edge Theatre Company), Esther Omotola Ayoola, Jabeer Butt, Leandra Box and George Bell (Race Equality Foundation), Rachel Nelken (Raw Material), Sandra Griffiths and Nick Schlittner (The Red Earth Collective), Sabra Khan (Sampad South Asian Arts and Bedlam Festival) and Joy Francis (Words of Colour).

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About the language used in this report

We recognise and respect that there are different views about the use of language describing people who experience racism. Sometimes we are advised to use the term that is used as the consensual one – but we don't see a consensus. Indeed we have called it *Creatively Minded and Ethnically Diverse* in acknowledgement

of recent discussions (for example: incarts.uk/%23bameover-the-statement). Please don't look for consistency over the use of language in this report. Different authors were free to use the language that they were comfortable with and we have not edited their choice.

Foreword

BY VICKI AMEDUME

As a human rights funder, The Baring Foundation's focus on Arts and Mental Health has emerged from our belief that everyone has a right to a creative life. Our goal is to strengthen the creative opportunities available for people with mental health problems in the UK.

Though this last year has seemed to be a time like no other, the events we have seen have simply highlighted the long-term structural problems in our society and how far we are from a world where access to resources and opportunities is not influenced by race and ethnicity.

Though people from all parts of the population can be affected by mental health problems, the differential impact on the diagnosis and access to treatment for racialised communities is stark. Our original research, *Creatively Minded*, was intended as an initial mapping study of participatory arts and mental health activity in the UK. It highlighted how few diverse-led organisations were specifically devoted to arts and health work and that ethnically diverse people were not well represented, either as service users or within the workforce of the arts and health organisations.

In this report we have attempted to deepen our enquiry, commissioning a series of thought pieces from artists and practitioners, with professional and/or personal experience of the field, who share reflections on the challenges and barriers faced by service users, workers and arts organisations in the sector. We would like to thank all of them for their contributions.

The report is not an exhaustive research of all the work that is supporting and engaging racialised communities. Instead it provides a valuable collection of thinking and insights to the broader sector, that also reaffirms our commitment to listen, learn and then take meaningful action to tackle racial justice and inequality in the work we support.

About the author

Vicki is a trustee and Chair of the Baring Foundation's Arts Committee, and Founder and Director of circus arts charity Upswing.

Introduction

BY DANIEL REGAN

This report brings together a number of opinion pieces from individuals and organisations reflecting on best practices in ethnic and cultural diversity related to arts and mental health projects. The breadth of experiences shared is vast, both from personal and organisational experience. In this introduction I have attempted to synergise and draw out some of the key themes that run across these valuable contributions.

You may have come to this report because you are keen to hear about how other organisations are tackling diversity. You may be acknowledging that your own organisation has work to do to become more inclusive. Perhaps you are at the very beginning of this journey and it feels like a daunting task to address issues of diversity and inclusivity within your practices. There are key foundational and essential themes that come to mind before the actual participatory engagement even begins, many of which are mentioned in the following opinion pieces.

The issue of diversity is fraught with tensions and complexity, highlighted again with the powerful Black Lives Matter movement across the world in 2020. We – people of all backgrounds – need to enter into conversations and spaces with a willingness to be taught by those with lived experience from the communities that we aim to support. When all of us (whether we are from a minority or in the majority) put our privilege to the side and acknowledge our capacity to learn, great insight and change can begin to happen. The most powerful thing that we can do for others is to be a true ally – by actively listening, understanding, and supporting structural changes and their real-life impacts on participants.

Many of the organisations and projects mentioned in this report span the arts sector, working collaboratively with health organisations, including the NHS. Working with clinical partners may aid in identifying the clinical needs of participants, but it is the language of the arts and humanities that takes these activities outside of the medical and into the personal. Partnership working – particularly with social prescribing schemes – provides an opportunity for participants to take agency over their experiences, outside of traditional clinical practices. These impacts on participants provide the opportunity for clinicians to understand the benefits of these arts activities and endorse them. This is particularly important given the cultural status that many clinicians hold. Sabra Khan cites social prescribing as an opportunity for clinicians to validate alternative ways of thinking about mental health and its treatment, particularly when working with South Asian communities. A clinician's validation and direct referrals to arts and mental health projects are likely to affect levels of engagement in communities that hold the opinion of medical professionals in the highest regard. As the arts come under increasing pressure to pick up the slack of statutory services, the need for collaborative working relationships is paramount in servicing the clinical and cultural needs of those that we support.

Contrastingly, we mustn't overlook the oppression and inequalities that take place within the mental health system. Dr Errol Francis poignantly highlights the overrepresentation of black people diagnosed with serious mental illness, sectioned under the Mental Health Act and given higher doses of antipsychotic medication. It is therefore highly understandable that the mental health system

may feel hostile, unwelcoming and designed through the lens of the white western world. How do we continue to challenge the inherit racism within a system that persecutes people simply for the colour of their skin?

The work of embracing diversity – and making it sustainable – is not just short term. Just as with any participatory arts approach it takes time and effort to build trust and connections with different communities. Ethnic minority communities are often described as ‘hard to reach’, which I believe is a falsehood. I would argue that they are not hard to reach but that we are not doing the right work to reach them. It will come as no surprise that our approaches to the white, middle classes (who face fewer barriers to the arts in general) are not transferrable to those from culturally diverse communities for a multitude of reasons. It is our duty as commissioners, funders, board members, organisation leads and participatory artists to take stock of what these barriers are and do the work to actively be more inclusive. When time and authenticity is lacking, the exposure of tokenism and its damaging effects on both individuals and their communities becomes abundantly apparent.

As Dr Francis highlights, much of the work being done to challenge racial inequality is often spearheaded by passionate individuals within organisations. Promoting and ensuring that equality exists as a priority within organisations is in everyone’s best interests. We urgently need a charter of best practice that becomes the norm, not the exception.

It does not mean that we will get it right the very first time, that we will not fall at the first hurdle or make inappropriate assumptions. However, if we enter into these experiences with a capacity and willingness to learn and understand our mistakes, to listen to those that can lead us, the results – as you will see from this report – can be quite extraordinary.

There is much work to be done for many organisations to become more inclusive and diverse, both internally and with the communities that they support. It may feel overwhelming thinking of how many changes that you want to implement, and just how huge they feel.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Lao Tzu

I hope that in the coming years we can look at what we can do within ourselves, our organisations and the teams that we support. We can start by looking at the small, realistic changes we can make to our practices – starting with an open heart and a willingness to learn and be taught. It is a long journey ahead but we owe it to ourselves and those that we support to take the first step now.

THEMES OF BEST PRACTICE

The themes of best practice mentioned in this report cover both the practical and personal, taking into account successes and their counterpart challenges. These are by no means an exhaustive list, but the starting point in considering how we can genuinely consider and implement inclusivity when it comes to the communities we want to support and deserve our support.

Co-production and participant led

Many of the projects in this report speak of the importance of being led by participants and encouraging them to take ownership over the direction of a project. This deeply prioritises the need for participants to inform delivery partners of what their experiences are and what they truly want and need. This highlights an often unintentional downfall that participatory projects are at risk of falling into: assuming

what it is that a particular group (outside of our own culture and experiences) may want to engage in.

By actively consulting with a target group and community stakeholders by asking questions, we can receive the answers that will help us to design and deliver a successful project. Even when designing a project based on consultation, we need to remain flexible in our approach, understanding that the arts and its complexities and stigmas can feel alien to many communities. Whilst we may think we know what a group wants, or even their level of ability, the reality is better served from those that we seek to help. Sabra Khan, Executive Director of Sampad South Asian Arts, speaks of holding 'a series of taster workshops to allow the participants to try art forms they may not have come across before'. This provides the opportunity for participants to steer activities in the direction they truly want.

Organisations such as Many Minds have highlighted the importance of seeking not just individual stakeholders but existing organisations that can advise on project delivery. Many Minds approached Borderlands, a refugee and asylum seeker charity in Bristol, asking their experience staff and volunteers for advice on how to access and support particular participants.

Cultural sensitivities

If we want to be more inclusive of other cultures we need to show that we have considered their culturally specific access needs sensitively. This could be considering the time of sessions (for example not coinciding with the Muslim call to prayer), the venue in which an activity takes place, or whether particular groups of people usually and can comfortably congregate together. There may be gender divides or childcare difficulties that could prohibit people from taking part.

Locality

Some of the following op-eds highlight the importance of place and the work that goes into making places and venues accessible. Raw Sounds, based in Brixton (London), comment on being primed to work with the local black population due to the location's demographic. It is not only their location

that makes it easier to work with the black community, but they consider the way in which they work. By operating outside of the traditional music therapy model and incorporating the types of music that their participants listen to (soul, rap, R&B etc), they address cultural accessibility with a twofold approach.

Employing artists with lived experience

Many of the pieces have mentioned the importance of mirroring in the people that deliver projects. When you grow up in a minority your default experience is seeing fewer people, or none at all, who look like you. If we are to build trust, engagement and true understanding of others' experiences, it starts with those communities being involved in the work from the beginning: from bringing participants into the development of the work, hiring artists that represent that particular community (and understand its complexities), and considering the cultural barriers to participation.

I think many of us are acutely aware of the lack of racial diversity in the arts across the board. We need to look at how to provide more training and opportunities to artists from different cultural backgrounds to address the imbalance. Many of our culturally diverse communities are at the highest risk of health inequalities, something that Covid-19 has highlighted most recently. Yet those that are key in supporting effective projects — those from these communities — are under-represented and shut out from supporting their own cultures. The organisation Music In Detention note that employing artists of colour 'often with their own experience of forced migration narrows the gap between leader and group, helping people to relax and feel accepted'. Also that pairing artists in cultural mixes 'helps show that a session is for people from all backgrounds'.

Artist Dolly Sen highlights how a multiplicity of challenges for artists can impact on their ability to be represented in the arts and health sector. 'Being part of a racialised community is usually being part of a poor working-class community. Being more likely to be poor, how can you pay for materials, studio space, equipment, how

can you take on an unpaid internship if there is no money to pay the rent? Throw in other things like disability, gender and sexuality, and the road becomes even harder.’ How can we challenge these inequalities to create meaningful and sustained opportunities that broaden the representation of artists? Dolly’s calls to action featured in her piece (see page 10) are a good starting point.

Safe spaces

Not all spaces are naturally welcoming and inviting spaces. In the same way that spaces can become gendered, they can feel unwelcoming or uninviting for particular communities. From the food that is on the menu to the décor, we need to carefully consider the venues we use, and the reasonable adjustments that can be made, when working with particular groups.

Sandra Griffiths from The Red Earth Collective talks of the importance of creating safe spaces, noting that in her experience that ‘black people do not access mainstream arts venues as they feel that they do not belong there’. How do we sensitively consider which environments communities consider as their own? Sandra continues to specify that ‘in each setting we consult with the group to define what makes the space safe beyond the physical environment. By doing this we co-create a space together where there is a mutual exchange of creative ideas’.

Working with refugees

A number of the pieces in this report focus on supporting refugees and the complexities and challenges that this poses – from the practical necessities such as employing translators to familiarising refugees to their new local area. Hive, based in Bradford, have identified themes of journeys in their projects, ‘focused on the journeys that BAMER communities have made and their hopes for the future – looking at feet as the metaphor for their travels. We have looked at the journeys refugees have made and the landscapes from their home countries’.

Where language and cultural barriers have felt overwhelming, organisations such as Many Minds have relied on non-verbal techniques, ‘building stories through drawing pictures and acting them out in small groups’.

Challenges to hierarchies

Some of the suggestions mentioned in this report require not only lateral but hierarchical changes that challenge existing structures in place. There is no doubt that there is scope for friction in implementing these changes, as those who hold power are challenged to acknowledge and address their biases, and potentially even step back from particular roles. Too often it is already those in positions of privilege who have access to governing roles. We need to create diversity audits in our boards and teams and provide regular training for those in management positions on the essential importance of diversity and inclusion. As Raw Sounds point out: ‘Going forward we want to get participants more involved in our organisational and governance processes so they have a say in our direction of travel, are more visible to others, and gain experience in different realms of personal and professional development.’ This key work is what breaks down the division between us and them, participant and leader. We are all but people after all, and all of our experiences are valid and valuable.

In order to make arts and mental health projects truly inclusive we need to champion the voices of those with lived experience, from culturally diverse communities, and elevate those voices into positions of power. This means changing the structures of working — from CEOs and boards of trustees, right down to those working on the ground with community groups.

This could include:

- trustees recognising their privilege and at times actively recruiting more diverse voices, including those with lived experience and from a variety of cultures;
- commissioners taking a more active role in completing diversity audits in their recruitment of artists, and questioning their common practices;
- creating an environment where it feels safe to question and call out bad practices (whether intentional or not) in order to truly highlight diversity deficits.



The StereoHype Festival, photo courtesy of The Red Earth Collective (see page 25).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality must not be forgotten when we consider arts and mental health, as no one person is simply one thing. My personal difficulty with umbrella terms such as BAME is that they simply create one singular category for non-white people, yet fail to acknowledge the cultural and individual complexities that go beyond a single ethnicity. People are not simply Asian – they are men, women, disabled, LGBTQIA+, rich, financially content, poor, and far more. We must go beyond solely ethnicity and consider the multi-faceted dimensions of people's identity, considering the ways in which this can encourage or prohibit engagement.

The Race Equality Foundation pulls out the importance of considering 'that intersections between ethnicity, social class and disability exert an impact on

representation and engagement'. Noting that the overrepresentation of non-white ethnic communities with mental health difficulties is 'combined with being more likely to be socio-economically deprived, which serves as a compounding barrier to engaging with the arts as a result of cultural and financial exclusion'. These compounding factors of health inequalities, poverty, poor housing (and many more) are all contributing factors that affect engagement in arts and mental health projects.

We must also consider that many people, particular those of mixed heritage, often sit in limbo spaces between multiple cultures. As a queer man of both British and Caribbean heritage I sit between multiple identities that have posed lifelong difficulties. Growing up I found myself too brown to fit in with my white peers, but too white to be accepted

by my black peers. As a queer man I have been exoticised in white spaces or felt uninvited in black spaces. Intersectionality poses countless questions – some which we may never have answers to – but that must be considered.

The language that we use

In my role at Free Space Project (an arts and health charity based within primary care in London) I have delivered a number of arts and mental health projects without specifically referring to the phrase ‘mental health’ at all. As Sabra Khan mentions in her op-ed piece ‘there is no word for depression in Urdu or Hindi I am told. Possibly the closest word is ‘dukh’ which means pain, but also sadness or suffering’. The way in which we speak about mental health and distress is unique to the times in which we were raised, where we were raised, our culture, and our individual and familial experiences. For some people a diagnosis is a lifeline, an explanation of why they feel the way that they feel and, hopefully, a gateway to access treatment. For others a diagnosis is a label, a stigma heaped on them by society that becomes a dark cloud of shame.

In medicine we pathologise people and their experiences to understand their symptoms so that a diagnosis can be ascertained, followed by treatment or intervention. In the arts we have the freedom to be more liberal in the way that we define a process and a desired outcome. We have the flexibility in our language to encompass people who may identify as

having a mental health difficulty and diagnosis, and those that find themselves in pain or lonely, plus all of those in between.

As a young person with clear mental health difficulties I did not have the emotional vocabulary to understand my struggles, but I did understand that I was living in mental pain. When people – both clinicians and non-medics – engaged with me first as a person, rather than a clinical checklist, I began to slowly discover my own path to understanding and becoming well. The language that we use in how we describe people and the activities that we provide can make or break the engagement of participants.

The arts and health sectors are clearly two distinctly different worlds, yet across these projects we strive for the same outcome: improving the lives of those that we support. In order for the two sectors to work together successfully we must find a way to respect our different ways of working whilst developing a common, collaborative language that champions the positive impacts of the arts on mental health.

An organisation may receive referrals from a clinical pathway that identifies participants as living with a personality disorder, but how do we transform the language that we use in the arts to destigmatise this. How can we proactively change the language that we use to empower those to engage with the arts to reap the benefits on their own terms?

About the author

Daniel Regan is a photographic artist and Artistic Director working across multiple leadership roles in the arts & health sector. His artistic practice focuses on the transformational impact of arts on mental health, building on his own lived experience. Daniel is the Artistic Director of the Free Space Project, a pioneering arts

and wellbeing social prescribing charity embedded into primary care in the NHS in north London. He is also the Founder of the Arts & Health Hub, a supportive and non-competitive national network for practising artists working in the arts and health sector. Daniel is also an Adviser to the Baring Foundation’s Arts programme.

Op-eds



Yalla Walk, Bristol, 2019. Photo © Jack Offord, courtesy of Many Minds (See page 56).

Racism, the arts world & me

BY DOLLY SEN

It was a spring morning, approaching Easter. The sun was out, and the air bright but cool. I was about four years old. We had just moved into a new house but we weren't allowed to go into the garden because of previous wet or cold weather. My mum went into the garden to set up a washing line and took me and my sister with her. My sister and I slide down the washing line pole as if we were firefighters and then made siren noises as we ran around the garden. Suddenly I felt something wet on me. I looked up to see a man with a moustache, who lived next door, leaning over the fence. "Shut up, you dirty brown mongrels!" And he spat on me again.

This was my first experience of racism, although I didn't really understand it as such at the time. I just thought I was a thing to be disgusted by, and as I was already having that message from my abusive father, I took it on as truth. Move forward a year or two, I am at school. Most kids are ok. One or two call me 'Paki' and tell me to go back to where I come from. No teacher tells them off. This thing called racism is a hard thing to understand as a child, but what you do understand is that you are the other, the alien, there is something about you that people hate when all you wanted to do was play with some toys. Aged about ten, I am visiting Brick Lane in the East End with my dad. He and the friend he was visiting sat down for a drink. His friend ushered his kids out the house and told them to take me with them. His son and daughter showed me around their neighbourhood and as we turned a corner we were confronted by a gang of white children and teenagers. The daughter dragged me by the arm and shouted "Run!" I did what she said as the gang of white kids began to chase after us, threatening to "kick our paki heads in". We managed to jump into a tower block lift and watch the doors slide dramatically closed as

they got to a few inches of the lift. Why did they hate us, what did I do? What was wrong with me?

One night in 1981 the whole family were travelling on an old routemaster bus coming back to Streatham from an Easter party organised by social services for Deaf people and their families. The bus did not take its usual route home. It went a very displaced route; instead of going through Brixton, it went around the town. My dad asked the bus conductor what was going on. "There's some trouble in Brixton." Once home, we put the news on. There were images of Brixton burning, parts that I walked with my mum when we went shopping. People on TV talked about criminal elements and poor moral attitudes of the rioters. But living near Brixton I also heard the other side, of people fed up of police harassment and being badly treated by authorities, and being spat at because of their colour. My dad had his own racism, calling the rioting looters 'black thieving bastards' even though he went to Brixton shops the next day to see if there was anything else worth nicking. All this is confusing for a child. My dad made me scared of Black people as a child. But from our 3rd floor flat overlooking the main road, I also saw police stop Black people for no reason, and use physical violence on young Black men who were not physically threatening, just vocal in their anger. Who to believe about the safety of the world? Who could offer it to me? No one at that point.

These were overt examples of racism, but there were covert examples too. At school we learnt that the British Empire and Christian missionaries civilised the 'primitive' worlds of Africa and Asia because white people were superior and more 'advanced'. When cowboys and Indians were discussed, the cowboys were the heroes, even though they were invaders to

the land and partly responsible for the genocide of the Native Americans. We had to cheer on the cowboys.

My mum was Scots-Irish and my dad was Indian. My dad was also largely an absent parent due to his alcoholism, so I learnt about the world through my white mother. She was also profoundly Deaf so could not hear the name-calling I was the recipient of. But one thing she did do, probably very unconsciously, was assimilate us into British culture. We spoke only English; we wore western clothes; our favourite books, TV and music were western. Apart from hearing my dad speak Urdu to his friends or having a lot of Indian dishes for meals, we acted like white British children. This made our lives a bit easier than those who wore Indian clothes, had darker skin, and whose first language wasn't English. But even then, I felt we were not entirely accepted. I didn't fit in anywhere. I was the jigsaw piece that didn't fit into the picture of the world around me.

“On the hospital ward it was Black people who were controlled and restrained more than everyone else.”

I did not have only one form of trauma growing up. What I learned from my abusive father was that I was worthless, that there was something wrong with me. When I experienced auditory hallucinations from the age of 14, most of the content of my voices was derogatory and brutal, telling me I should kill myself because I shouldn't be around, that nobody liked me. The voices echoed my abusers' words, so whenever I experienced racism, I had that sense of being unaccepted, hated, demonised, and defective, all this giving fuel to the voices. Racism is part of the 'shitty committee' that holds conversations in my head and breaks my heart continually. Not only that, it fed the thinking that I was an alien from out of space which led me to being hospitalised for the first time on a psychiatric ward. On the hospital ward it was Black people who were controlled and restrained more than everyone else. It seemed like they were being punished purely for the colour of their skin, which to me was insanity. How crazy-making it is when the institution that professes to be the figurehead of sanity is acting in such a delusional and unsound way.

While I was lost in my psychotic world, I had no friends. When my mental health improved, I wanted friends. The mental health arts world is how I entered the world in general. I went to creative activity groups and then became part of a few mental health arts organisations. I made friends, but not many deep friendships. What you realise when you are different from the people around you, is that no one has your back. When someone makes a joke about your ethnicity and most of the people around you laugh, the hurt is so deep and the silence you must keep harrowing and tortuous. You can't have rage about all this though, lest you get labelled a troublemaker or mentally ill.

It is hard to live or fit into a world that doesn't love you, that wants to erase you, sometimes wants to hurt you, wants to spit on you. That kind of loneliness is devastating, it kills you slowly. We need to feel connected to people around us, constant rejection is agonising. No wonder people can't live in their own head with that world around them. Be of the understanding if that a person has experienced racism, this is an injury to their mental health.

“Be of the understanding if that a person has experienced racism, this is an injury to their mental health.”

I remember one time I was part of an arts steering group and also the only person of colour. They were discussing what to do for a music gig for that year's Black History Month. I couldn't believe it when one person suggested a whole host of white acts. I looked at the people around me, and they were nodding their heads in agreement. I couldn't keep my silence any longer and blurted out, "But they are white! We need Black acts". An awkward silence followed before the subject was quickly changed. I was not invited back to the next steering meeting. I can list many similar examples. Nothing changes because defensiveness builds a wall, another wall to go with the countless walls around us. I think one thing we need is to accept we can get upset discussing racism but that we should also have the space and time to have difficult and challenging conversations about it for the greater good of everybody.

When I first got interested in art, I began going to art events, especially exhibitions. Places like the National Gallery and Tate Modern had lots of visitors of different ethnicities but most of the work on the wall featured only one shade of human being, or were mostly made by that one shade of the world. That is not to say the work wasn't beautiful, it was, but the right to beauty belongs to us all. The right to art and making art belongs to us all. Diversity does seem a meaninglessly confusing word sometimes. I think it is better to think about representation. Any public-funded arts should reflect the world around them. Racist trolls on social media moan when there is a person of colour, or LGBT+ person, or disabled person on their favourite TV soap or drama, as if these people are not in the world around them. They want to take an eraser and remove human souls that have the absolute right to be visible.

“Do you know how hard it is to step through the doors into a room when everyone does not look like you, especially if when you do, you get ignored or looked down at. Or when the people in charge are mostly white and people of colour are incorrectly assumed to be the catering staff?”

I also went to local smaller exhibitions or private views. Do you know how hard it is to step through the doors into a room when everyone does not look like you, especially if when you do, you get ignored or looked down at. Or when the people in charge are mostly white and people of colour are incorrectly assumed to be the catering staff?

I want to be part of the arts world that doesn't break my heart. Sometimes I don't go to exhibitions because I am not strong enough to go. I admit I have to laugh bitterly when organisations complain that some racialised communities don't engage with them. You are heartbreakers, that's why...

It is only until recently that the high rates of Black people being pathologised, sectioned, and controlled and restrained in the mental

health system have been attributed to the inherent racism in psychiatry and psychology, and that racism contributes to the high levels of distress racialised communities experience. Suman Fernando's book *Institutional Racism in Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology*¹ is a useful text to inform how this came to be. Definitely a recommended read. But the subject is not academic when the area I used to live in South London has dead Black men with mental health issues in the ground, like Sean Rigg² and Seni Lewis.³ We have our own homegrown versions of 'I can't breathe'.

We are living in a world where the game is rigged to suit a certain kind of person, namely white, male, heterosexual, non-disabled, middle or upper class. Those people who are not in this elite group are expected not to complain if the pack of cards they are given holds no aces, and not to get angry or upset if they are told they are not winning due to their own defects and not because of the cards they are given.

Intersectionality can't be ignored either. Being part of a racialised community is usually being part of a poor working class community. Being more likely to be poor, how can you pay for materials, studio space, equipment, how can you take on an unpaid internship if there is no money to pay the rent? Throw in other things like disability, gender and sexuality, and the road becomes even harder.

I stopped working full time for creative organisations many years ago. I now work freelance and that power allows me to challenge inequality when I see it, knowing I won't be with that organisation for long.

Racism used to hurt me, but aged 50 I am angered by it or bored by it. Nothing changes except expressions of tokenism, or fashions in mental health that always skirt around the issue of racism and other forms of oppression. The Recovery Model was one of the last big things in mental health. The expectation of recovery was for the individual, but where is the expectation of recovery for the sickness of racism in mental health systems and organisations?

¹ www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783319627274.

² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Seán_Rigg.

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Olaseni_Lewis.

I think the first thing any arts organisation can do is say: 'No More. Racism can't happen anymore within our organisation. We can't be part of the world that hurts people. We can't add any weight to the shoulders that lean on the necks and steal the breaths of human beings'.

This is what I would like to see happen in the creative sector:

- Grassroots support/networking/mutual aid/skill sharing/peer support/mentoring/solidarity systems for people of colour, funded properly.
- Black & Brown-run spaces where people can meet to talk/create work together/conduct research.
- A resource library that hosts materials about history/politics/critical studies/people's stories/non-white art/self-help, etc.
- Exploration and research into where the cultural blockages are in your organisation. Are you able to look at yourself critically? Can you hold uncomfortable conversations?
- More People of Colour as trustees.
- Funding for a major exhibition exploring racism.
- Organisations having stringent racism policies.

- Education for people working for arts organisations on how systems are built toward maintaining white supremacy and what they can do to dismantle 'the master's house'.
- The arts being used to challenge and change institutional racism.
- More People of Colour in senior and leadership roles in the arts sector.
- Funded scholarships/placements for People of Colour to go to arts school or take on internships.

Since the death of George Floyd, it has become a necessary subject to discuss. Some arts organisations are beginning to, but already I am seeing tokenism. Only a couple of arts organisations that I know have immediately abdicated some power to Black and Brown people. There is no point putting a 'Black Lives Matter' poster on a wall of a structure built on white supremacy and racism.

“How much harder do I have to argue that the arts world needs more colour?”

I have seen racism turn a town into an inferno, have seen it kill mentally distressed black people, I have seen it break my heart time after time, I have seen it whitewash the arts world. How much harder do I have to argue that the arts world needs more colour?

About the author

As a child, Dolly Sen was an alien in *Empire Strikes Back*. She knew then she would never know normal life. She is a writer, filmmaker, artist, performer and activist. She has exhibited as an artist and performed internationally, and her films have been shown worldwide, including at the Barbican in London. Her journey as a creative has taken her up a tree in Regent's Park, to California's Death Row, to Tower Bridge and the Royal Academy, Trafalgar

Square, and up a ladder to screw a lightbulb into the sky. More recently she has been working on her Section 136 project. Section 136 is a radical mental health art-action programme where madness is questioned, and institutional monsters are confronted using art, love, rage and sheep.

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Racial inequality, mental health and the arts

BY DR ERROL FRANCIS

Introduction

This report aims to critically explore the current state of engagement of BAME people in the UK with mental health problems in organised creative opportunities. The topic involves the intersection of a complex set of inequalities experienced in many dimensions and existing in different health, social care and cultural sectors. Notwithstanding this, insofar it is possible within the available the scope of this piece, I will try to identify the barriers and challenges faced by service users and providers alike in some examples of what could be considered to be good practice.

In considering how BAME people with mental health problems are engaged in organised creative opportunities, one encounters two sectors that are in a sense in collision: the social/health care system and another range of services and practices that I will refer to as 'arts and health'. This is because we need to understand the specific ways in which inequality and discrimination operate within these sectors and the consequences that result in terms of access, social benefit or wellbeing of individuals.

Structural inequality in the mental health system

People from BAME communities have a markedly different experience of mental health services than their white counterparts.⁴ Rates of diagnosis of serious mental illness such as

schizophrenia are many times higher for Black African Caribbean people, who are more likely to be admitted into mental health services compulsorily under the Mental Health Act with the involvement of the criminal justice system such as the courts or police and detained in secure hospital conditions.⁵ Black people are given higher doses of anti-psychotic medication and are more likely to be physically restrained in hospital resulting in injury or death.⁶

Contrastingly, neuroses such as depression are underdiagnosed in people from BAME communities and they are less likely to be admitted to hospital voluntarily, via primary care services such as GPs, or receive services such as counselling or psychotherapy. There is some indication that this is even worse for people of mixed heritage LGBTQIA people.⁷

This state of affairs has profound implications for the involvement of BAME communities in organised creative opportunities because it means that they are structurally excluded from such non-coercive activities simply by virtue of how the system is working and how they access treatment. In other words, racism and discrimination in the social and health care system is creating a situation where people simply are not offered the alternative of creative activity or cannot access it because they are trapped in another institutional system. This, of course, invokes a series of human rights

⁴ Fernando, Suman (1991). *Mental health, race and culture*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁵ Cabinet Office (2018). Race Disparity Audit Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures website, October 2017 (revised March 2018).

⁶ Taylor, Diane (2020). 'Met police restraint contributed to death of mentally ill man, jury finds'. *The Guardian*, 9 October. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/09/met-police-restraint-contributed-death-mentally-ill-man-kevin-clarke-jury-finds. Accessed 10 December.

⁷ Hudson-Sharp, Nathan and Metcalf, Hilary (2016). *Inequality among lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender groups in the UK: a review of evidence*. National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

questions that have been reflected in a number of high-profile cases such as the deaths of Sean Rigg⁸ and Kevin Clarke.⁹

Inequality in the arts and health

The other side of the collision to which I refer in addressing the engagement of BAME people with mental health problems in organised creative opportunities is the question of creativity as a human right and the inequalities existing within the arts and health sectors. To define what I mean by arts and health sectors, I am referring to what the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance and the London Arts and Health Forum state in their definitions of arts and health:

‘Arts and health are the generic terms that embrace a range of arts practices occurring primarily in healthcare settings, which bring together the skills and priorities of both arts and health professionals.’¹⁰

‘The link between creativity and wellbeing is long established. Hippocrates wrote “art is long, life is short”. The Ancient Greeks pursued the notion of wellbeing stemming from a well lived life and the arts and creativity were essential elements in that. The founding principle of the World Health Organization is that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity ... the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being”. The arts can contribute to our complete wellbeing.’¹¹

The very definition of Arts and Health, relying as it does on somewhat elite definitions of ‘art’, and as a specific domain of theory and practice around wellbeing means that we are now connecting with another field of inequalities to add to those already described in relation

to the mental health system. Less than five per cent of those who work in the arts and heritage sectors in the UK are from BAME communities¹² and levels of participation are markedly different for people of colour compared with white British people.¹³ Indeed, the very emphasis upon ‘arts’, in relation to a practice around health, with its suggestion of that other privileged field of art therapy is, in my view, a reference to a socially exclusive category.

“I have a vivid recollection of delivering a keynote address to a national arts and health conference whose 300 delegates did not include a single person of colour.”

I have a vivid recollection of delivering a keynote address to a national arts and health conference whose 300 delegates did not include a single person of colour. It is as if the inequalities in the health sector have become compounded by those in the arts. I say the ‘privileged’ field of arts and health not only because one might think that inequality would be a priority for the arts and health sectors simply by virtue of the fact that arts and creative activity can benefit a whole range of health conditions in which BAME people are overrepresented. It is also because, ‘arts and health’ refers to a range of services to which BAME people are less likely to be referred. It is also because it is a sector which I think has traditionally responded poorly to health inequalities, as noted by Clive Parkinson and Mike White.¹⁴

The combined effect of these two areas of structural inequality, what is happening in in the mental health, social care and criminal justice sectors and those inequalities present in the arts, mean that there are few Black led organisations specifically devoted to arts and health work and, it would appear, a lack of

⁸ Gayle, Damian (2019). ‘Sean Rigg: five officers cleared of misconduct over death in custody’. *The Guardian*, 1 March.

⁹ Taylor, Diane (2020). ‘Met police restraint contributed to death of mentally ill man, jury finds’. *The Guardian*, 9 October. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/09/met-police-restraint-contributed-death-mentally-ill-man-kevin-clarke-jury-finds. Accessed 12 January 2021.

¹⁰ Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, www.artsandhealth.ie/about/what-is-arts-and-health/#:~:text=Arts%20and%20health%20is%20the,both%20arts%20and%20health%20professionals. Accessed 10 December.

¹¹ London Arts and Health Forum, www.lahf.org.uk/getting-started/what-arts-health. Accessed 10 December.

¹² Brook, Orian, O’Brien, David, and Taylor, Mark (2018). *Panic! Social class, taste and inequalities in the creative industries*. London: Create London and Arts Emergency.

¹³ Warwick Commission (2015). *Enriching Britain: culture, creativity and growth. The 2015 report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

¹⁴ Parkinson, Clive and White, Mike (2013). ‘Inequalities, the arts and public health: towards an international conversation.’ *Arts & Health* 5(3): 177-189. doi:10.1080/17533015.2013.826260.

diversity in those using such services. This is not to say, however, that there is no arts and health work taking place that tackles diversity, social justice and inequality. It is just that such work tends to be led by charismatic individuals who champion the value of lived experience or by organisations whose main area of work lies elsewhere. However, I will give some examples below of innovative projects and programmes led by diverse individuals but which I do not see as in the mainstream of what is considered arts and health.

Examples of innovative practice

As the Bristol-based Black South West Network has noted: 'since the killing of George Floyd the urgency and need to challenge and act against racism has never been more present in our global consciousness. It is intersecting with the frustration, fear and pain generated by the inordinate impact of Covid-19 on people of colour and the stark evidence of increasing inequality'.

Black South West Network has been involved with setting up *Positive Futures*,¹⁵ a collaboration with Hampshire Cultural Trust and Southampton Art in Health Forum, which showcases work from a wide range of organisations working with young people, mental health and creativity. This is an example of an organisation which does not define its work as arts and health or feel it is part of that sector, yet nevertheless is engaged in valuable work that links creativity with wellbeing.

Another example is Angela Awuah who describes herself as a social entrepreneur whose interest in mental health started from caring for a family member diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. She founded **Mental Health The Arts** in 2016¹⁶ as a way of supporting other young people facing similar challenges. Her stated desire is to ensure that young people are well equipped to take care of their mental health. She recently won the Deutsche Bank Award for Creative Entrepreneurs.

Awuah says: 'Mental Health The Arts is an early intervention creative arts academy for young people between the ages of 13-25 years old with direct and indirect experience of mental health. We seek to educate, equip and empower young people to cultivate create coping mechanisms'. They deliver this mission through storytelling, events, workshops and programmes.

Rest for Resistance¹⁷ is a grassroots, trans-led organisation uplifting LGBTQIA+ individuals, namely trans and queer people of colour. As a platform, it fosters a safe online space that promotes meditation as an act of resistance, and features art, writing, and a directory of intersectional mental health resources.

Though not a mental health organisation, London-based **Words of Colour**,¹⁸ led by Joy Francis who has also contributed to this report (see page 19), clearly addresses the areas of creativity and diversity. Words of Colour facilitates inspiring writers and creatives of colour to fully express their authentic selves, and develop new, inclusive models of creativity, entrepreneurship and wellbeing to allow their voices and ideas to shine and be heard.

Joy Francis is also co-director, with psychiatrist Professor Kamaldeep Bhui, of the **Synergi Collaborative Centre**¹⁹ at Queen Mary University of London, an initiative funded by Lankelly Chase to reframe, rethink and transform the realities of ethnic inequalities in severe mental illness and multiple disadvantage. Taking a collaborative approach, the centre aims to use the principles of co-production of knowledge and a creative mix of robust research methods. The centre will work closely with commissioners, policymakers and politicians, as well as public service providers, citizens and those experiencing mental distress, to create and deliver a vision to help to address ethnic inequalities in severe mental illness and their fundamental causes.

London-based **Culture&** where I work delivered **Memory Archives**,²⁰ an innovative approach to working with people living with dementia, particularly those from BAME communities.

¹⁵ [youtube.com/watch?v=W7UfBq0MPT0&t=2073s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7UfBq0MPT0&t=2073s).

¹⁶ www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/news/day-life/day-life-angela-awuah.

¹⁷ restforresistance.com.

¹⁸ www.wordsofcolour.co.uk.

¹⁹ synergicollaborativecentre.co.uk/about-us.

²⁰ www.cultureand.org/events/the-memory-archives.

Launched on Windrush Day 22 June 2019, *Memory Archives* was a partnership with the London Metropolitan Archives and Friends of the Huntley Archives (FHALMA) and supported by the City of London Corporation and the Home Office.

Memory Archives was a multi-sensory programme drawing on material from two collections of significance to the African-Caribbean community; the Culture& music archive, holding 30 years of global cultural music and the Huntley Archives, the first major collection from the African-Caribbean community to be deposited with the London Metropolitan Archives. Drawing on these collections Culture& Artistic Director and New Museum trainee Kirsty Kerr curated a dementia accessible and culturally specific event that gave those living with dementia the chance to connect and relive aspects of their African-Caribbean heritage. Activities were delivered within BAME care homes by diverse artists and facilitators and included:

- the West Indian Front Room, installation by artist Michael McMillan, a recreation of a typical Caribbean family's front room of the 1960s, drawing on memories of the domestic setting and acting as a point of welcome and hospitality;
- Caribbean folk music workshops and sing-a-longs led by musician Keith Waithe and storyteller Sandra Agard;
- interactive archival and handling materials, including a curated display of traditional Caribbean fruits and vegetables for guests to touch and smell;
- a curated event soundscape celebrating the history of Black British music and listening stations for guests to play vinyl records and cassettes from the archives;
- a selection of homemade Caribbean refreshments made from traditional ingredients with distinctive flavours to evoke memory;
- interactive music and reminiscence talks by Michael McMillan, creator of The West Indian Front Room, and Eric Huntley, co-founder of Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, one of the first Black book publishers in the UK.

Over 80 participants attended the launch event in 2019 and further events were planned around Windrush Day 2020 but Covid-19 has made the organisation re-think how to deliver Memory Archives in the context of the pandemic. Rising to this challenge, it is now digitising material to be delivered through 'Sensory Boxes'. Decorated boxes will each contain multi-sensory material, a pre-loaded tablet, physical games, facsimile documents and art works drawn from London Metropolitan Archives, British Library, Guildhall Art Gallery, the Barbican Library and the British Film Institute.

Conclusions

There appears to be a definition of the services and practices that address wellbeing in relation to 'the arts' as preferred terms that operates exclusively and perhaps the term 'culture' might be more inclusive. This appears to be the result of structural inequalities operating in both the mental health and arts and culture sectors. These factors, along with the traditionally poor attention that the arts and health sectors have paid to questions of inequality, mean that BAME people are poorly represented as users of services, as workers in the sector and their lived experience is not prioritised in the objectives of mostly white-run arts and health organisations. Yet notwithstanding this, there is a rich tapestry of innovative and dynamic practice led by highly motivated individuals and organisations whose main function is not seen by themselves or others as concerned with arts and health.

This absence of concern about diversity by the mainstream arts and health agenda means that the sector does not recognise and challenge racial injustice nor does it address intersectionality and diversity within BAME communities and their lived experiences. This also means that debates such as arts on prescription or social prescribing are not effectively informed by diversity.

It may well be that there is opposition from BAME communities to the idea of health being so closely linked to arts and creativity because it is seen as a bureaucratic system linked to other oppressive agencies like criminal justice. Yet arts and health coming from hospital, medical or public health-based work could be a valuable means of tackling individual and

community wellbeing. I am in conversation with the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance to explore how it can use its position as an Arts Council England funded sector support organisation to place diversity and inclusion as a higher priority in its agenda and to engage more BAME led organisations with its membership and work.

I believe funding organisations should also play a vital role in setting up support programmes that specifically address health inequality and diversity work led by Black people with lived experience and programmes devised by organisations whose main objective is

not necessarily arts and health. Some useful research could be conducted in how BAME communities engage with the concept of wellbeing and the deployment of terms like 'arts' in contrast to 'culture'. Above all, workforce programmes that aim to promote more diversity in the workforce would appear to be a priority in order to address the lack of representation in key roles that deliver arts and health programmes. As we live through the unprecedented global pandemic, in a year in which a bright light was shone upon the lack of equality in sectors from criminal justice to arts and heritage, this would seem to be an ideal time to address these concerns.

About the author

Dr Errol Francis was appointed Artistic Director and CEO of Culture& in 2016. Errol was awarded his PhD from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, where his research focused on postcolonial artistic responses to museums. Errol has substantial experience of community engagement around mental health and the arts with minority groups.

He was Head of Arts at the Mental Health Foundation and Artistic Director of the highly acclaimed Anxiety Arts Festival London 2014 as well as the Acting Out Nottingham 2015 and Hysteria 2017-2018 public engagement programmes. He is currently Visiting Professor at the University of West London School of Biomedical Sciences.

Colonially-imprinted spaces and the creative wellbeing of artists of colour

BY JOY FRANCIS

In *The Guardian* on the 10th February 2018, award-winning Black British actor Daniel Kaluuya (*Get Out*, *Black Panther*) revealed: “I’m not reading so many essays [about race] for fun; I’m reading them because I need to know how to articulate myself in certain situations, and I feel very alone in certain spaces. And I feel weird, and I have to have a word map, and the armour. I know about race for armour. I don’t know about race to make myself feel good.”

Daniel’s words and experience painfully encapsulate why **Words of Colour Productions**,²¹ a creative development agency that facilitates and develops writers of colour, of all genres, has been developing inclusive models of creative wellbeing (which incorporate artists of colour’s individual experience of engaging with colonised, white and middle class institutions), and creative entrepreneurship (to bridge the knowledge and experiential gap between the arts, culture and enterprise).

The ‘spaces’ Daniel refers to are creative spaces. In theatres. On film sets. In rehearsal rooms. Spaces where the last thing he needs to be concerned with, as a successful artist, is race and racism. Instead, to shore up his sense of self, safety and mental wellbeing, he has to. Sadly, he is not alone.

This reality begs several questions. How can the arts be truly participatory when the sector struggles to tackle its colonial-imprint to be truly inclusive amid accusations and evidence of systemic racism? Can creative institutions

be entrusted with the mental wellbeing of the artists of colour they commission within this reality? How are they proactively engaging artists of colour with lived experience of mental health? And are they ready to accept how this predicament can, and does, make people of colour ill?

These assertions are not rooted in fiction. In 2018, the **Synergi Collaborative Centre**,²² a partnership between the University of Manchester, the University of Oxford and Words of Colour Productions, produced a well-received briefing paper entitled *The impact of racism on mental health*.²³

The paper reveals a ‘growing body of robust evidence demonstrating that racism leads to mental illnesses, especially depression and prolonged periods of adjustment’, such as extended grief. It also states that ‘there is evidence that racism also has an effect on physical health, for example, high blood pressure’.

“Compelling evidence [...] shows that racism is a form of stressor, both in its more overt forms and as micro-aggressions.”

With regards to interpersonal racism, the paper draws attention to ‘compelling evidence which shows that racism is a form of stressor, both in its more overt forms and as micro-aggressions’. This includes situations where there is an awareness of ‘being treated and responded

²¹ www.wordsofcolour.co.uk.

²² www.synergicollaborativecentre.co.uk.

²³ synergicollaborativecentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-impact-of-racism-on-mental-health-briefing-paper-1.pdf.

Joy Francis and Frank Lowe at Bush Theatre / Creative Wellbeing Talks launch, photo courtesy of Words of Colour.



to in a less than fair way on the basis of race; perhaps even being feared, avoided or especially disadvantaged’.

This is framed sharply against the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on people of colour, based on a ‘triple whammy of threats’²⁴ to their mental health, incomes and life expectancy, the traumatic public murder of George Floyd and the global Black Lives Matter movement. All of which inspired a number of industry-focused campaigns, including *#PublishingPaidMe*,²⁵ which highlights the stark disparities in how black and white writers are paid, and the creation of the **Black Writers’ Guild**,²⁶ calling on all major publishing houses in the UK to introduce sweeping reforms to make the overwhelmingly white industry more inclusive – at all levels.

In June 2020, we co-curated the four day digital launch of *Rethinking ‘Diversity’ in Publishing*,²⁷ the first in-depth study in the UK on diversity in trade fiction, authored by Dr Anamik Saha and Dr Sandra van Lente, in partnership with Spread the Word and *The Bookseller*. The report found that assumptions about audiences being white and middle-class still prevail; that publishers continue to see writers of colour as a ‘commercial risk’; and that Black, Asian and minority ethnic and working-class audiences are undervalued by publishers, economically and culturally, impacting on the acquisition, promotion and selling of writers of colour.

“Many of the challenges facing writers of colour are structural, but have been exacerbated by the pandemic.”

Professor Sunny Singh

The ramifications of these findings are not lost on award winning author, literary academic, activist and co-founder of the **Jhalak Prize**²⁸ Professor Sunny Singh, who says: “Many of

the challenges facing writers of colour are structural, but have been exacerbated by the pandemic”, as highlighted by the *Pop-Up September 2020 author survey*.²⁹

She explains that the Jhalak Prize exists “specifically in response to these marginalisations, diminishments and exclusions which impact on the overall wellbeing and mental health of writers of colour. Writers of colour are typically paid significantly less in advances and royalties, even by major publishing houses, leading to greater precarity of income and personal life than our white peers”.

Singh’s own mental health and physical wellbeing has been impacted by running the Jhalak Prize for writers of colour, now in its fifth year. She explains: “The initial announcement to establish the prize was greeted by multiple literary figures with snide remarks and racialised attacks in person, and in the press, about how the prize was to compensate for a lack of literary merit among writers of colour, despite evidence to the contrary”.

“The stress and strain have adversely impacted my creative output. In setting up an initiative for our community of writers of colour, I fear I have made myself a target of hostility of the industry and that my writing may be penalised for my outspokenness on issues of equality.”

Professor Sunny Singh

In response to the worrying number of black and brown people dying from Covid-19, we were compelled to curate and launch our *Creative Response to Covid-19 for writers and creatives of colour*.³⁰ Unfunded, this rapid response was possible due to us quietly championing inclusive models of creative

²⁴ ‘BAME groups hit by Covid ‘triple whammy’, official UK study finds’, *The Guardian*, 14 December 2020. Accessed 10 February 2021: www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/14/bame-groups-hit-by-covid-triple-whammy-official-uk-study-finds.

²⁵ ‘#Publishingpaidme: authors share advances to expose racial disparities’, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2020. Accessed 10 February 2021: www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/08/publishingpaidme-authors-share-advances-to-expose-racial-disparities.

²⁶ www.theblackwritersguild.com.

²⁷ www.spreadtheword.org.uk/projects/rethinking-diversity.

²⁸ www.jhalakprize.com.

²⁹ pop-up.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Pop-Up-Projects-C-19-Author-Survey-Exec-Sum-17Sept2020.pdf.

³⁰ wordsofcolour.co.uk/covid19-response-for-creatives-of-colour.

wellbeing and creative entrepreneurship for four years with yogi, writer and Creative Wellbeing Coach Patsy Isles and Personal Development Consultant Kenny Mammarella D'Cruz, with input from Executive Coach and Interfaith Minister Jackee Holder, and poet, publisher and educator Jacob Sam-La Rose.

From May, with an extension to September 2020, our culturally diverse and multi-disciplinary team ran a range of free, creative wellbeing and creative entrepreneurship virtual workshops. These included topics such as 'Conscious Isolation' and 'Structural Thinking' and hosting a Finance Surgery for self-employed creatives on legal structures in the new climate, alongside one-to-one sessions and group sessions as part of our 'A Space to Talk and Be' series with our Director of Creative Wellbeing and People Suzanne Lyn-Cook, a qualified Psychosynthesis Practitioner, which was over-subscribed.

The programme attracted practising and aspiring artists of colour and cultural leaders, at all levels. Mental health and wellbeing were consistent themes. The fear of putting their stories, work – and themselves – into all white spaces and/or anticipating racial hostility were among the concerns aired and shared, some based on real experience.

Stories also filtered through of artists of colour, at the intersection of race, disability, gender identity and faith, having R&D money withdrawn or, as arts practitioners, being dismissed, released or repositioned within their organisations as the BLM expert. History was repeating itself under Covid-19.

Manchester-based poet, dramaturg and theatre-maker, Naomi Sumner Chan, is the founder of **Brush Stroke Order**,³¹ which champions new writing. Having spent over 10 years working in participatory theatre and community engagement, she is worried about how artists of colour are being impacted. "Historically they haven't been well supported by mainstream organisations and have had to fight for opportunities and bear the weight of being 'the only one in the room'," she says. "Artists of colour continue to be pitted against

each other for limited opportunities. I fear this competition will be even more fierce post-Covid with money and resources at an all-time low."

“Artists of colour continue to be pitted against each other for limited opportunities. I fear this competition will be even more fierce post-Covid with money and resources at an all-time low.”

Naomi Sumner Chan, Brush Stroke Order

Although some mainstream cultural organisations are finally taking race and representation more seriously, Sumner Chan believes that “the emotional labour is falling on the few people of colour within organisations who are tasked with delivering various initiatives and having difficult conversations on top of their actual job. They get burnt out but feel the pressure to carry on or nothing will change”.

Despite these challenges, it is also a time of great creativity, collaboration and transformation. In June 2020, we partnered with the innovative month-long *Breathe 8.46 campaign*,³² led by **BlkOut_UK**³³ and **Survivors UK**.³⁴ Artists and creative organisations were invited to curate a digital activity for London-based black men to take time out to heal from the impact of racism in memory of George Floyd. Our Creative Wellbeing Associate Patsy Isles produced 'Breathe and Be', an 8 minute 46 second mindfulness exercise.

In this unsettled and often unpredictable climate, Words of Colour is preoccupied with making social impact by disrupting narratives that do not serve the artistic and mental wellbeing of writers, artists and creatives of colour. We are committed to creating alternative spaces, online and offline, to foster counter-experiences and counter-narratives that are nourishing, inspiring and facilitate truth telling in a safe way with room for divergence.

³¹ brushstrokeorder.co.uk/about.

³² wordsofcolour.co.uk/words-of-colour-part-of-breathe-846-campaign.

³³ blkoutuk.com.

³⁴ www.survivorsuk.org.

“An essential part of this work is to co-create a new language and to reframe existing terminology that often guides the commissioning of artists of colour, and the participatory arts, and how we are described (from BME to BAME).”

An essential part of this work is to co-create a new language and to reframe existing terminology that often guides the commissioning of artists of colour, and the participatory arts, and how we are described (from BME to BAME). This is critical as the lens that filters much of this process is based on a language created without us in the room, at a time when many black and brown people were owned, oppressed or othered. A reality that still prevails and is flawed, elitist and problematic.

Award-winning filmmaker Campbell X (*Stud Life*) understands this all too well regarding the mental health of black and of colour trans people, especially the way they are positioned, referred to or ignored in the arts and entertainment industries.

He says: “Trans people are treated in a cavalier way culturally by being excluded from conversations with regard to their genders. We are pigeonholed into ‘trans’ and not seen as the genders we are, either men, women, or non-binary. Until we change our thinking around this centring of cis people as default, we will maintain the structures laid down by white supremacist ways of thinking around gender. This way of thinking has nothing to do with one’s skin colour or ethnicity but is a product of our colonised education.”

Our commitment to reframing the single narrative has inspired us to launch a creative wellbeing and entrepreneurship hub by the summer of 2021. Conceived as an idea in 2016, it was piloted in 2018-2019. This included the launch of our knowledge-exchange space Creative Wellbeing Talks series at Bush Theatre with leading Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist Frank Lowe (Tavistock Centre) as our inaugural guest speaker.

We have explored concepts, practice and packages with a range of committed creative, arts and entrepreneurial organisations and academics, including our longstanding academic partner Dr Angela Martinez Dy (Loughborough University London), Becky Swain, Director of Manchester Poetry Library, award-winning independent publisher Jacaranda Books, Arvon, Jerwood Arts and Kiln Theatre.

We are also collaborating with artists such as Booker Prize winning novelist Bernardine Evaristo (*Girl, Woman, Other*), award-winning novelist and activist Derek Owusu (*That Reminds Me, Safe: On Black British Men Reclaiming Space*) and award-winning novelist and writer Alex Wheatle MBE, Sir Steve McQueen (*Small Axe* (BBC1), *Crongton Knights* series) and psychodynamic therapists.

We are part of a growing ecosystem of black artists who are creating alternative pathways, including in the poetry arena. Poet and theatre-maker Nick Makoha recently launched the **Obsidian Foundation**,³⁵ a one-week retreat for black poets of African descent, for them to self-express, “free from racism” with mentors such as Roger Robinson, winner of the TS Eliot Prize 2019 and Ondaatje Prize 2020 for his collection *A Portable Paradise*.

Robinson has spoken of his experience as a black poet in the literature space and is an advocate for ‘radical vulnerability’, where black artists express their vulnerability and lived experience in a radical way to counter the true self being hidden or hiding for survival. A concept he has given us permission to develop.

He says: “I’ve gone to places and worn glasses to seem less aggressive than they think I am. There is a devaluation of Black British writers. It’s about doing socially engaged work like Linton Kwesi Johnson did in his time. It is important for people, especially black men, to see me practice extreme vulnerability. Writing poetry helps me with empathy. Literature helps me with empathy.”

³⁵ obsidianfoundation.co.uk.

Renaissance One,³⁶ which furthers the art of poetry, literature and the spoken word and is a collaborator, is another black-led organisation that is curating wellbeing programmes for artists of colour, spearheaded by its Director Melanie Abrahams. Most recently its *Care Project*,³⁷ a national initiative connected with artists through mentoring, socials and salons.

Despite the richness of this burgeoning landscape, we need to excavate and expose the casualties of racism from their historic engagement in the arts. Those who had to operate in what acclaimed African American ballet dancer Misty Copeland describes as a 'white atmosphere', which negatively impacted their mental health, leading them to prematurely abandon their calling to preserve their wellbeing.

Cultural Management Consultant and Founder/Director of the **Museum of Colour**,³⁸ Samenua Seshier OBE, advocates for arts funders and organisations to develop an increased understanding that "difference is an advantage". She continues: "They need to ask and listen and pay for coaching and support for staff. Our sector is riddled with insecurity for everyone, but the pressures of a hostile workplace, especially one that does not understand itself to be one, are significant."

We all have a part to play in changing the single narrative that drives much of the arts – and mental health agenda. But the real conversations need to begin within arts and culture institutions, about themselves, their poor progress and their proposed actions for change, with boldness and honesty. This is a journey of collective responsibility which requires collaboration, national leadership and ownership.

We have started working with organisations who straddle mental health, psychodynamic and literary spaces, who are mindful of the traumatic outcome of the pandemic and George Floyd on black and brown people and are ready to rethink (and reframe) how they lead, develop their teams, support their constituencies and communities of colour, and be anti-racist organisations.

It is early days, but in 2021 we intend to be part of a healthier and more informed space expressing a bold, empathetic and inclusive narrative. I hope you are ready to make that critical shift – wherever you are.

About the author

Joy Francis is Executive Director of Words of Colour Productions, a creative development agency that promotes, facilitates and develops writers of colour, of all genres, and collaborates and co-creates with arts, creative, writing and entrepreneurial industries to increase cultural inclusion for social impact. She is also Co-Director of the Lankelly Chase-funded Synergi Collaborative Centre,

a partnership between Words of Colour, University of Manchester and University of Oxford, focusing on eradicating ethnic inequalities in severe mental illness through championing systems change, new science, creative inclusion, collaborative leadership and co-creation, while forging solutions with those experiencing severe mental distress, carers, commissioners, policymakers and politicians.

³⁶ www.renaissanceone.co.uk.

³⁷ www.renaissanceone.co.uk/events/2021/2/19/the-care-project-new-sessions-start-from-february-2021.

³⁸ museumofcolour.org.uk.

Art Matters

BY SANDRA GRIFFITHS

Mellow

Twenty years ago now in October 2000, I started the Mellow Programme at East London Foundation NHS Trust, to stimulate and develop creative and sustainable solutions to reduce the overrepresentation of young African and Caribbean men in psychiatric services.

Mellow's approach was holistic in that the spiritual, emotional and creative wellbeing of users co-existed with employment opportunities, training and personal development. All Mellow activities were completely user driven, with users central to both planning and the delivery of key elements of programmes and events.

Through Mellow young Black men were given space to talk about racism and its impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

As Mellow evolved we widened our remit to include Black men and women over 18 years who were using mental health services.

My team and I found that the most effective way for Black people to speak openly and express their feelings about their mental health problems and their experiences of treatment was through the arts, and in particular our StereoHype event programme that uses creativity to support their recovery and challenge mental health stigma and discrimination.

StereoHype

StereoHype, established in 2002, features live performances by emerging and professional artists with lived experience of mental health problems who work together to create new work.

StereoHype also includes workshops that promote better community mental health and wellbeing and support mental health practitioners to consider how they can work more effectively to support Black people with mental health needs.

We have an 'art market' that also includes space for mental health organisations to engage with and promote their services to Black people.

Between 2002 and 2012, over 200 Black mental health service users have participated in over 20 StereoHype events across London. They worked with Black artists with lived experience of mental health issues who provided them with mentoring advice, facilitated workshops to create new work, including plays, spoken word, songs, series of short films and an art exhibition.

StereoHype has grown into an annual African and Caribbean Mental Health Arts Festival. Since 2012 we have delivered two-day events in London and Birmingham and satellite events across the country, and we have also worked with two Black led theatre companies to produce two new plays about the mental health experiences of Black men and women.

Since 2002 we have attracted audiences of around 10,000 people to our StereoHype events. Over 80% are Black or from other racialised and marginalised communities.

How do we engage people?

We are pleased with what we have achieved through StereoHype but know much more needs to be done. In November of this year, we talked to a few colleagues and organisations, artists, audience members and our service users about what works and what is still needed to engage and support Black

people in creative activities that challenge racism and mental health stigma and that support recovery.

We came up with few pointers which, I hope, are useful in helping others to think about these issues.

Lived experience

All the work we produce is created by people with lived experience of mental health issues. People want their voices to be heard but are often not confident or do not feel safe enough to express themselves, so we provide opportunities for them to work with professional artists to create stories that express their emotions and address their experiences. This resonates with our audience members as they are presented with authentic and therefore believable narratives that very often also provide a voice and context that is like their own experience of mental health problems and of using services.

Through our events we can also show that lived experience of a mental health issue can be used positively. We work with a wide range of professional artists with lived experience. A performance at StereoHype challenges prejudice in audience members and inspires hope in people who are struggling with their mental health.

By encouraging people with lived experience to perform we have been told that we help professionals see beyond a 'set of symptoms'. StereoHype's creative setting enables the audience to understand the factors that may influence the mental health of Black communities.

Stimulating debate

When you watch a film or TV programme you are usually keen to discuss it with others, so we aim to create art and performances that stimulate debate about mental health, racism and creativity.

All our StereoHype events are set up to facilitate conversation and debate. Typically, this would include a facilitated panel discussion and audience Q&A with artists, service users and mental health professionals all sharing their opinions. We also encourage our volunteers and staff to talk to our audiences before and

after the event and during the interval. These conversations have stimulated our thinking and led to several collaborations.

We also use these events and conversations as a starting point for further discussion. For example, the two mental health plays that we have co-produced led to requests from audience members for additional workshops and conversations about black masculinity and the 'strong black women stereotype'. We have also been approached by Mental Health Trusts to facilitate creative workshops to foster better engagement between Black mental health service users and staff.

Creating safe spaces

Creating safe spaces for audiences, service users and performers enables them to speak openly about their mental health experiences and how racism and mental health stigma have shaped that experience.

“From my own experience, there is plenty of evidence that suggests that Black people do not access mainstream arts venues as they feel that they do not belong there. There are also occasions where Black audiences and white staff feel intimidated by each other's presence.”

From my own experience, there is plenty of evidence that suggests that Black people do not access mainstream arts venues as they feel that they do not belong there. There are also occasions where Black audiences and white staff feel intimidated by each other's presence.

We have worked closely with venues particularly at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham to create spaces where Black audiences feel welcome. On a very basic level, this has meant having more Black staff members stewarding our events alongside our volunteers, ensuring that there are African and Caribbean options on the food menu, dressing the venue in a culturally appropriate way, and ensuring that our team are on hand to greet people and engage in conversations. All very simple things, but we have attended many events where this lack of attention to detail has put Black audiences off coming back.

Even more important is considering how we work with our service users to create a safe space that supports their recovery. We deliver workshops in community settings, in hospitals and in prisons. In each setting we consult with the group to define what makes the space safe beyond the physical environment. By doing this we co-create a space together where there is a mutual exchange of creative ideas. We check in with people at the beginning and end of the session to see how they are feeling. It is important to create a space where people can speak openly and honestly, where there is clarity about ownership of creative work that is produced, and a culture of sharing work and giving encouragement and positive feedback.

Signposting to creative opportunities in the community

It is difficult for some Black service users and organisations who support them to easily access information about creative projects and activities. Mental health staff are often rushed off their feet and do not have the time to investigate and make connections. Very often arts engagement is not considered a priority for staff who are tasked with supporting patient or service user recovery and with housing, medication, benefits and employment needs.

People in secure settings including prison and on mental health wards face many urgent challenges when they are released and nurturing their creativity is not one of them. I and many of my colleagues know that creativity is a very important way to support their recovery and likely to be even more important in a post Covid-19 environment where there will be less opportunity to socialise and build and maintain support and social networks.

At our StereoHype events we invite statutory and community mental health and wellbeing services to have information stalls where they can promote their services to our audiences. We also work with them to deliver workshops that give audiences the opportunity to participate in activity that supports their wellbeing.

People find it easier to engage with services at our events. There is no need to make an appointment or travel to an unfamiliar venue. Many of the people we work with have very

negative experiences of mental health services. Coming to an arts event that celebrates Black mental health and wellbeing is a much easier sell than inviting people to an event where they can meet mental health experts and organisations. Subsequently people feel more comfortable and able to engage with services in an informal and relaxed setting.

Collaborate with mainstreams arts venues and organisations

To better engage and create wider creative opportunities for Black people with mental health problems, we actively target mainstream venues and organisations to work with us to deliver StereoHype Events. We get access to great resources and facilities and marketing and ticketing services and in return we create inclusive and diverse events that include stories and productions that represent Black mental health experiences.

“We have talked to venues about their under-representation of Black audiences and limited programmes exploring issues of race and mental health. At times, these conversations have been difficult and awkward. But from my experience venues have eventually positively welcomed our effort to reach out and support them to attract and engage Black communities.”

We have already spoken about the uneasy relationships that can exist between established White led venues and Black audiences, and we can add Black artists to the list. We have talked to venues about their under-representation of Black audiences and limited programmes exploring issues of race and mental health. At times, these conversations have been difficult and awkward. But from my experience venues have eventually positively welcomed our effort to reach out and support them to attract and engage Black communities.

Through StereoHype we have seen that we can break down barriers by inviting Black people into ‘white’ spaces and are able to work collaboratively with venues and organisations

to deliver arts programmes that consider the needs, concerns and aspirations of Black audiences and artists.

Build the capacity of Black artists with lived experience

Black artists need support, and we offer some limited services to help them to access funding, get bookings and to develop their creative practice. We also offer training to enable them to work in mental health settings and with groups facing mental health issues.

StereoHype offers opportunities for artists with lived experience as performers, panel members and workshop facilitators. We have already discussed the importance and advantages of working with professional artists with lived experience: they challenge prejudices about mental health and inspire emerging artists to succeed and people with mental health issues to be creative.

As we grow, we want to formalise our support offer to artists in a number of ways. We want to:

- offer training to Creative Facilitators with lived experience so they can work with Black people with mental health needs;
- set up a mentoring support programme between professional and emerging artists with lived experience;
- broker opportunities for artists with lived experience with venues, promoters, arts organisations and funders;
- provide professional management and advocacy services for Black artists with lived experience.

Evaluation. Where is it?

One of the main issues that we face in understanding the effectiveness of engaging racialised communities in organised creative opportunities is the near total lack of formal evaluation.

There is very little published literature which addresses the mental health benefits of arts and creativity for different Black and minority ethnic communities and specifically from African and Caribbean backgrounds. While there is an exhaustive literature on the

extent to which mental health services have failed African and Caribbean communities, there are few published studies of alternative frameworks for responding to mental distress for this group.

There are many examples of arts projects within the African and Caribbean voluntary sector, as well as a long tradition of arts and creativity as resources for health, wellbeing and challenging racial injustice within the Black Arts movement. Black led organisations that we work with are doing this very successfully.

The **African and Caribbean Community Initiative (ACCI)** in Wolverhampton uses the arts as a recovery tool to support residents, **Rites of Passage Production** are working with young Black people in Birmingham and London to produce films that explore issues affecting their mental health and wellbeing, and **Words of Colour** (see page 19) are working with Black and ethnic minority writers across the UK and diasporas to create opportunities for them to reach wider audiences.

However, these and many other initiatives have tended not to attract research funding and findings are largely unpublished.

An antidote to racism

In 2002 I commissioned Mentality to evaluate the Mellow Programme. Their findings highlighted that: participation in the arts was seen as a resource that empowered young Black men to explore their histories and cultures and which acknowledged and validated their identity; and 'the importance of arts and creative expression as a protective factor in the face of the racism and discrimination experienced by the young men, both within mental health services and in the wider community'.

“Crucially, arts and creativity are non-stigmatising, attractive to a broad range of African and Caribbean people and can provide an alternative pathway to mental health services, as well as to education and employment. Their emphasis on self-expression, growth, sharing cultural traditions and the development of new skills was widely seen as rooted in young men’s lived experience and engaging with their needs.”

Mellow, unpublished; Friedli and Gale, 2002

Eighteen years on, concerns about the failure of mental health services to meet the needs of African and Caribbean communities are still ongoing. Arts and creativity provide an important opportunity to explore the therapeutic potential of a very different model of responding to mental distress – both for individuals and the wider African and Caribbean community. A model that holds art and creativity up as the antidote to racism.

Through my work at The Red Earth Collective, it is clear that providing mental health programmes involving arts, creativity, spirituality and alternative therapies, and integrating these with education, training and employment opportunities are the foundations of a more holistic approach to recovery and wellbeing.

Exploration of the many potential dimensions of the mental health impact of arts and creativity for African and Caribbean people will depend on:

- a clear strategy for acknowledging, recognising and building partnerships with African and Caribbean artists particularly those with lived experience of mental health problems, African and Caribbean art organisations, statutory and voluntary sector mental health organisations and ‘mainstream’ arts programmes and venues;
- a commitment to generating resources and support for research, evaluation and dissemination.

About the author

Sandra has been using the arts to challenge mental health discrimination in racialised and marginalised communities for over twenty-five years, originally with her work leading the Mellow Programme at East London Foundation NHS Trust, as

a consultant and Community and Equalities Co-ordinator at Time to Change, as a consultant with NHS Mental Health Trusts in London and the West Midlands and over the past five years as the founder of The Red Earth Collective.

Exclusive Arts? Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and arts in Britain

BY ESTHER OMOTOLA AYOOLA, JABEER BUTT, LEANDRA BOX
AND GEORGE BELL, RACE EQUALITY FOUNDATION

Existing literature has demonstrated a consistently positive association between participation in creative activities and mental health and wellbeing.³⁹ In spite of this, engagement with the arts is disproportionately low among both people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and people experiencing difficulties with their mental health.^{40,41} The reasons for significant ethnic differences in arts engagement are multiple and complex, with some high-profile successes in sectors such as the performing arts combined with poor or limited engagement as a whole. One thing is clear: there are inherent flaws in the way that arts activities and projects are designed that serve to systematically exclude people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. This may be particularly so for those with mental health needs. As a consequence, the benefits of participating accrue to some and not others. Therefore it is imperative that we seek to understand the barriers people from these groups face, but also implement effective ways to improve inclusion and engagement in order to ensure that the benefits of engagement with the arts are shared with Black, Asian and minority ethnic people with mental health problems.

The benefits of arts participation

Participating in creative arts activities holds several benefits and has been shown to have a powerful effect on a people's mental health. It has also been shown to contribute to the prevention of a range of physical and mental health conditions, in addition to helping people to better manage ongoing mental health challenges and support their recovery journey.⁴² This is true of a range of participatory arts including the visual arts (such as painting, textiles and sewing) as well as the performing arts (including dancing, singing, acting and spoken word). A significant positive outcome is the opportunity for people to express themselves in ways that do not involve structured conversation, as is common within most Western and/or medicalised approaches to managing mental health difficulties. This is beneficial as studies have shown that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to be offered therapies that are suitable and Black people in particular are more likely to be hospitalised and report being over-medicated as a response to their mental distress.⁴³ This finding underlines the preference of many people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities for communication and interaction as a better

³⁹ Eising, D. (2019). *How arts can help improve your mental health*. Retrieved from: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/how-arts-can-help-improve-your-mental-health. Accessed 2 December 2020.

⁴⁰ Arts Council England. (2014). *Equality and diversity within the arts and cultural sector in England: Evidence and literature review final report*. Manchester: Arts Council England.

⁴¹ Fancourt, D., Baxter, L. and Lorencatto, F. (2020). Barriers and enablers to engagement in participatory arts activities amongst individuals with depression and anxiety: quantitative analyses using a behaviour change framework. *BMC Public Health*, 20(272).

⁴² Eising, D. (2019). *How arts can help improve your mental health*. Retrieved from: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/how-arts-can-help-improve-your-mental-health. Accessed 2 December 2020.

⁴³ Abou Seif, Campbell, Chase, Ching, Hahn and Schlieff (2020). *CALL TO ACTION: The Mental Health of BAME Communities During COVID-19*. Retrieved from: www.traumagroup.org/post/call-to-action-bame-mental-health-covid19. Accessed 7 December 2020.

means of improving mental health and wellbeing than accepting the need for a reliance on drug-based approaches.

“Applying Western therapeutic models and constructions of wellness to people from non-Western or Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is highly problematic and less effective for people who are not of European or American heritage.”

It is also widely known that applying Western therapeutic models and constructions of wellness to people from non-Western or Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is highly problematic and less effective for people who are not of European or American heritage.⁴⁴ Furthermore, arts participation also creates opportunities for social and community engagement, and thus facilitates the development of emotional connections between an individual and the audience of their produced art. One study found that attending a visual arts class was especially beneficial for two attendees from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who were experiencing depression, as it enabled them to overcome social isolation occurring as a result of language barriers they were experiencing.⁴⁵ Similarly, a café playing Bollywood songs to South Asian elders with dementia was also found to be helpful for their symptoms of depression.⁴⁶ Ultimately this appears to reduce isolation and offers an outlet for stress and anxiety.

The ableist mind-set

Research has highlighted that people with mental health difficulties feel less physically and psychologically capable of engaging with the arts, and they are less motivated to do so.⁴⁷ People with mental health difficulties are often viewed as ‘lacking capacity’, with this language attributable to the Mental Health

Act and clinical understandings of what it means to have ‘poor mental health’. This appears to lead to a lack of understanding of needs and poor planning, and as a result, Black, Asian and minority ethnic people with mental health needs can be excluded from arts opportunities by design. Not surprisingly, an absence of opportunities to interact with artistic experiences can lead to people feeling unheard and excluded, which can lead to them not feeling valued as individuals. This in turn impacts negatively and significantly upon their identity and self-concept, which ultimately serves to diminish their mental health and wellbeing.

The impact of structural racism

Structural racism is a longstanding challenge that has negatively impacted people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities living in the UK for many generations. It can be defined as any action or way of thinking that works against an individual or group, with regards to their health or their development and that is based on their race, culture or ethnic background.

In many ways, structural racism has become embedded in processes that govern our development and/or wellbeing. For example, the belief that certain groups of people do not ‘belong’ in certain job roles or sectors of employment is undeniably racist. It becomes a structural issue when factors relating to race or ethnicity are used as a means of discrimination or lead to people from certain groups feeling unwelcome in particular settings. It is this form of exclusion and silencing that continues to place strain on the resilience of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and causes their mental health to be challenged incessantly. Within the participatory arts sector, structural racism manifests in a variety of ways. For example, the lack of representation of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds across the arts sector

⁴⁴ Christopher, J. C., Wendt, D. C., Marecek, J., & Goodman, D. M. (2014). Critical cultural awareness: Contributions to a globalizing psychology. *American Psychologist*, 69(7), 645–655. doi:10.1037/a0036851

⁴⁵ Van De Venter, E. and Buller, A. (2015). Arts on referral interventions: A mixed-methods study investigating factors associated with differential changes in mental well-being. *Journal of Public Health*, 37(1), pp. 143-150.

⁴⁶ Horton, C. (2020). ‘It’s good for the brain’: how music can help BAME people living with dementia. *The Guardian*, 2 September 2020.

⁴⁷ Fancourt, D., Baxter, L. and Lorencatto, F. (2020). Barriers and enablers to engagement in participatory arts activities amongst individuals with depression and anxiety: quantitative analyses using a behaviour change framework. *BMC Public Health*, 20(272).

as a result of discrimination in arts employment and arts commissioning presents a barrier to subsequent engagement.

“Valid concerns regarding cultural appropriation, recognising particular activities or practices as positive but only when considered in a transplanted context that fails to give proper recognition to its origins and heritage, have caused many people to lack confidence in the arts sector.”

Additionally, valid concerns regarding cultural appropriation, recognising particular activities or practices as positive but only when considered in a transplanted context that fails to give proper recognition to its origins and heritage, have caused many people to lack confidence in the arts sector. Examples of this can be seen within the fashion industry, performing arts and within music genres in the UK, where styles developed by diasporic subgroups have then been adopted into mainstream/popular music and labelled as ‘innovative’ or ‘unique’, with Bob Marley never securing a number 1 in the official charts and The Police securing five. These experiences of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are numerous and wide-reaching. Moving forward, it is pivotal that a substantially more targeted and focused approach that is both sustainable and empowering is utilised to boost the usefulness of arts opportunities to people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Adults with poorer physical and mental health experience more barriers affecting their perceived capabilities to engage with the arts, whilst these barriers appear reduced for people from white backgrounds.⁴⁸ This is reflected in the widening gap between white and Black,

Asian and minority ethnic people in terms of art participation, where we have seen engagement of people from white communities increasing while the engagement of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities has not.⁴⁹ A number of potential explanations have been posed, often relating to lacking time and money or feeling out of place. People are more likely to value artistic displays that relate to their heritage and lived experience, as they provide cultural continuity and assist them in sharing their culture with others.

It is also important to mention that intersections between ethnicity, social class and disability exert an impact on representation and engagement. People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are more likely to suffer from depression and other mental health conditions⁵⁰ and are consequently overrepresented in formal mental health services.⁵¹ This overrepresentation is often combined with being more likely to be socio-economically deprived, which serves as a compounding barrier to engaging with the arts as a result of cultural and financial exclusion.

Approaches to breaking down barriers

There are several ways to improve creative activities to increase the participation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people with mental health difficulties, by making them more accessible and culturally sensitive, for instance.⁵² Activities must be planned and delivered with a knowledge of the community they will serve and who should also be involved in the organisation process along with wider networks and partnerships. To increase accessibility, information about the activities can be developed through co-produced means and delivered through anchors with Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and include partners such as mosques, youth centres and community groups.

⁴⁸ Fancourt, D. and Mak, H. (2020). What barriers do people experience to engaging in the arts? Structural equation modelling of the relationship between individual characteristics and capabilities, opportunities, and motivations to engage. *PLoS ONE*, 15(3), pp. e0230487.

⁴⁹ Arts Council England. (2014). *Equality and diversity within the arts and cultural sector in England: Evidence and literature review final report*. Manchester: Arts Council England.

⁵⁰ Bignall, T., Jeraj, S., Helsby, E. and Butt, J. (2020) *Racial disparities in mental health: Literature and evidence review*. Race Equality Foundation: London.

⁵¹ Bignall, T., Jeraj, S., Helsby, E. and Butt, J. (2020)

⁵² Age UK. (2012). *Fit as a fiddle: Engaging faith and BME communities in activities for wellbeing*. London: Age UK.

Pooling community resources, knowledge and connections will also help to address potential language barriers and concerns about external organisation intervention.

Diversity within the participatory arts can be encouraged by presenting and representing people's experiences with, and encounters of, their heritage and culture in everyday life in a visual, expressive format. Not only does this provide a sense of being valued and respected, it also provides an opportunity for the introduction to and exploration of cultures and heritage outside of one's own and that are distinct from the majority.

“The key challenge to address is the lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic role models and people with lived experience of mental health difficulties in the participatory arts sector.”

The key challenge to address is the lack of Black, Asian and minority ethnic role models and people with lived experience of mental health difficulties in the participatory arts sector. The art that is seen is often not reflective of the true diversity that our country holds. It is important that the significance of participation in arts and creative expression as both a human right and a tool for preventing and/alleviating mental health difficulties is embedded into the fabric of our society across all sectors, cultures and age groups.

Taster sessions could help to remove some of the initial anxiety of attending both arts institutions such as museums and galleries as well as participatory arts activities that are hosted by local organisations that offer arts therapies or local groups. This will provide people with an additional targeted opportunity to meet people they will be engaging with ahead of committing to participate. Once in the sessions, encourage people already attending to recommend their friends, as some people may not join because they worry about a lack of social support available in the group. The knowledge that there will be at least one friendly face there could make all the difference.

The location of events and activities is also a problem faced by many. To negate this, activities that are held at specialised arts venues such as the British Museum or Royal Opera House among others should incorporate practical actions that reduce barriers to participation, such as subsidies for travel costs, visual and auditory resources that are accessible in a range of languages, and international arts events that reflect a range of cultures from across the world. It is critical that the context and the content of the art embrace different cultures, and any projects or activities are delivered with a culturally-sensitive focus that appreciates the variation within and between Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

Engaging with participatory arts is often considered to be costly due to the price of items required to participate such as clothing (e.g. dance), equipment (e.g. music) and entry (e.g. being part of an audience), which serves to prohibit people from certain backgrounds from taking part. Dedicated and protected funding will remove socio-economic barriers that often impede engagement. Consequently, the onus remains on formal and national arts bodies with influence in the policy and decision-making fields such as the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport along with the Arts and Humanities Research Council and national Arts academies and societies to collaborate with people and organisations within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in order to improve their experiences of arts participation.

There is limited evidence of the impact of formal events that are focused on celebrating and sharing cultural diversity through participatory arts as a vehicle. For example, events such as Notting Hill Carnival or Moss Side Carnival, Eid Melas or Diwali celebrations have received little to no formal evaluation, yet the growing number of activities and their increasing popularity suggests that they are an important part of various communities' cultural expression. In addition, there is no evidence of informal cultural artistic events, such as Blues parties (which are a key driver to a major British art form, Lover's rock) being recognised for their cultural significance.

“Although examples of initiatives that have originated from within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and that work well are widely available, formal arts bodies have not yet allocated resources to supporting the analysis and reproduction of these works.”

Although examples of initiatives that have originated from within Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and that work well are widely available, formal arts bodies have not yet allocated resources to supporting the analysis and reproduction of these works. As a consequence, formally recognised ideas of better practice are inevitably limited.

There have been many examples across the UK of services employing these principles to develop activities with good reach into Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. **The Irish Community Garden** in Coventry enables service users and volunteers to transform an allotment which keeps them busy, allows them to socialise with others and ensures they get some fresh air⁵³. Another initiative entitled **Movers and Shakers** aims to encourage healthy living for older adults in Buckinghamshire by engaging their minds and bodies in creative, physical and mental activities.⁵⁴ The strength of this programme lies in its versatility, as it can be adapted to suit the needs of different communities which has created an environment of social inclusion for older Asian and Caribbean people. **Showcase Smoothie** set up a programme of artistic activities to support Black, Asian and minority ethnic men with mental health issues, including a poetry event at the finale⁵⁵. This finale ‘demonstrated how the arts can clearly contribute to boosting wellbeing, opening a dialogue and challenging the stigma that can still sometimes surround mental health issues’. Finally, **Touchstone** set up a project in Leeds for older people to go and weave textiles while socialising with

other people.⁵⁶ The sessions used culturally appropriate materials which encouraged discussions about the significance of cultural heritage and living in Britain. Being able to relax and enjoy these sessions was beneficial to the mental health of everyone attending. These examples all demonstrate that when creative activities are set up correctly they can engage Black, Asian and minority ethnic people with mental health difficulties, thus providing them with support.

Key recommendations

In summary, there are a number of key recommendations that can be built upon to increase the engagement of people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds with mental health difficulties in participatory arts opportunities. Firstly, health professionals must actively link with voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations and endorse participation in these opportunities, as many people may not be knowledgeable of potential opportunities or understand the potential benefits of participation to their health and wellbeing. Secondly, direct referrals from health professionals via mechanisms such as personal budgets could also be used to remove the impact of limited finances as a potential barrier.

Additionally, it would be useful to utilise a range of participatory arts mediums that are available, for instance, facilitating video diaries where people can record themselves talking about their experiences and how taking part in arts has helped them. In incorporating lived experience expression as a method and ensuring that co-production is at the forefront, this will ensure that opportunities are designed for and fully accessible to people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who have experienced difficulties with their mental health. A further benefit of making inclusive design the standard would be addressing the perception that engaging with the arts is an

⁵³ Age UK. (2012). *Fit as a fiddle: Engaging faith and BME communities in activities for wellbeing*. London: Age UK.

⁵⁴ McBarnett, O. (2010). Movers and Shakers in Buckinghamshire: An action research pilot involving Asian and Caribbean communities. *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*, 3(3), pp. 33-37.

⁵⁵ Mental Health Today. (2014). Innovative project uses poetry to improve mental health of BME men. Retrieved from www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/innovative-project-uses-poetry-to-improve-mental-health-of-bme-men. Accessed 1 December 2020.

⁵⁶ Touchstone. (2017). Interwoven Histories – A new creative project for older BME people in Leeds! Retrieved from touchstonesupport.org.uk/interwoven-histories-a-new-creative-project-for-older-bme-people-in-leeds. Accessed 1 December 2020.

activity that is exclusively for rich, white people and instead show how participation can be beneficial to people who otherwise may not be interested or who have historically been excluded as a result of intersectional factors, their background or life experiences.

Furthermore, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who have experienced mental health difficulties face numerous barriers in attempting to engage with creative activities, which are important to try and overcome because participation could be especially beneficial for these communities. There are several methods available to try and tackle this problem, which we have seen implemented effectively by various activity organisers around the country. However, these

methods are not widely in use and there is still a lot of work to do so that this marginalised group of people can be given all the same opportunities as other members of society to express their creativity as part of a group.

While these are good starting points as recommendations, it is important that organisers record information about their activities so that successes can be replicated elsewhere, and all activities can eventually benefit from more detailed guidance on how to engage Black, Asian and minority ethnic people with mental health difficulties and national frameworks of best practice can be shared and celebrated.

About the author

Established in 1987, the Race Equality Foundation became an independent charity in 1995 and seeks to explore discrimination and disadvantage, and use that knowledge to help overcome barriers and promote race equality in health, housing and social

care. They have recently been working on a project with Flourishing Lives and the HEAR Network to explore the strengthening of BAME inclusion in the arts and health sector.



Putting communities at the heart of arts practice

BY SABRA KHAN

There is no word for depression in Urdu or Hindi I am told. Possibly the closest word is 'dukh' which means pain, but also sadness or suffering. I found this out whilst producing a new play about perinatal mental health – *No Bond So Strong*⁵⁷ – for Sampad South Asian Arts in 2019.

This wasn't Sampad's first foray into mental health and creativity though. In 2017, Sampad developed a partnership with Dolphin Women's Centre and Birmingham Mind for **Create and Change**,⁵⁸ a project supported by seed funding from Near Neighbours and commissioning funds from Birmingham City Council to offer participatory arts activities in the Washwood Heath area. Washwood Heath is in the top 10 per cent of most deprived neighbourhoods nationally and 63% of the population is drawn from minority communities with the largest group being of Pakistani heritage.

Birmingham Mind were already working with Dolphin Women's Centre through its Community Development Worker scheme – enabling a support worker to be a regular presence in the Centre, supporting women and their families with mental health issues. Our collaborative project designed with these partners offered a series of workshops, events and trips over the course of a year which introduced the women and their families to different art forms through gentle participatory activity. We offered workshops in crafts, spoken word, screen printing, photography and jewellery making working with professional artists. Along the way we added new partners to the project – Unity Hub, a local community centre, and Ward End Library.

The project wasn't about numbers but about quality of engagement – we sometimes had very small groups of five for workshops, rising to 20 participants as the project developed. Activities were drop-in and we scheduled them with family commitments in mind and around the schedule of the Dolphin Centre – both in terms of space but also to coincide with when women may be in to take part in training courses. Sampad's approach was to gently introduce different activities; to co-design the activity with the participants and partners so that workshops took place in a safe space within their local area; to work with a variety of experienced artists, finding wherever possible artists of a South Asian background; and last but not least we were fortunate to have staff time available to manage the project. We were lucky at this time as we had a full-time paid intern who was able to spend a minimum of two days a week on this project, having a presence in the centres and developing relationships. Over a year, Create and Change engaged with participants who would not normally engage with the arts – and would not see it as something to do for wellbeing.

When reflecting on some of the barriers that people from a South Asian background with lived experience of mental health problems might face in participating in creative activities, the core components of Create and Change have similarities with the **Arts 2 Heal**⁵⁹ project in Blackburn, Lancashire and I recently spoke to its founder, Banu Adam.

⁵⁷ sampad.org.uk/project/2020-2021-no-bond-so-strong.

⁵⁸ sampad.org.uk/project/2018-2019-create-and-change.

⁵⁹ arts2heal.org/index.html%3Fp=17.html.

Banu says some of the barriers are about assumptions on both sides of the fence. Communities can think the arts aren't for them, they are for others. And arts organisations can assume when putting on activities that participants have done them before. She cites an example from her own work – when she first ran a workshop in visual arts for people from the local area, mainly drawing on Blackburn's local Asian community, she assumed they would know how to hold a paintbrush. "For me, this was an eye opener. I saw that it can be intimidating, when the women look around and feel that others know how to do this, how to paint. I went back to the start of the process by showing the participants how to hold a brush."

“For me, this was an eye opener. I saw that it can be intimidating, when the women look around and feel that others know how to do this, how to paint. I went back to the start of the process by showing the participants how to hold a brush.”

Banu Adam, Arts 2 Heal

In addition, she focuses on the process: it isn't about what they create but that they enjoy the creative process. This chimes with Guleraana Mir,⁶⁰ a theatre-maker and writer, who spent five years delivering workshops in a mental health setting in London. She was brought in to run creative writing and drama workshops but the charity that commissioned her then realised there was no interest in drama or writing. Instead, residents wanted to do cookery and as the service provider was happy for her to run these, she spent five years leading cookery workshops. She said it is difficult to explain to participants that it is about the process, not what is created; that taking part in creativity is where some relief, respite or joy may come from; and that it can provide an outlet for feelings and emotions.

Similarly, Guleraana describes a recent online workshop with a group of young Asian women where when she asks them to write a list poem and read it out, a participant responds: "it's a list not a poem". She feels that they don't have

the confidence "to see the list as a poem and therefore deliver it as one". She doesn't want them to worry about the output.

Guleraana and I discuss whether this goes back to the arts not being valued in some South Asian communities as something to take part in because it is felt they don't lead anywhere. As she says, the refrain might be, "Why become an actor, you aren't going to end up in Hollywood?" I don't think this is unique to South Asian communities and I quote the example of a good friend who is an Consultant Oncologist of Polish background who contacted me in a slight panic as her teenage son had declared he wanted to be an actor and she was worried that success is impossible in the arts. Guleraana feels that it goes back to being part of an immigrant community – you must always do better than your parents or previous generations. One way of overcoming this barrier, of effectively selling the process, is through persevering, gently enticing participants, working with artists who understand that the process is important and, as Banu does, creating peer mentors. I also wonder if social prescribing is a way of overcoming this barrier. Medics are held in such high regard in South Asian communities that surely if a health professional recommends that you attend a visual arts workshop or a creative writing group, it could really start to break down these attitudes?

The stigma of mental health is not unique to South Asian communities, but it still exists. Therefore Sampad's Create and Change project didn't badge itself as an arts and mental health project. It gave people opportunities to take part in creative workshops, but we knew when we started to develop the project that there was a prevalence of mental ill-health amongst the users of the Dolphin Women's Centre. However, those attending didn't have to declare any lived experience of mental ill-health or talk about those experiences.

This cultural sensitivity is also part of Banu's approach at Arts 2 Heal. Her 'open door policy' means that she can get engagement from the local community but also that others in the community, wider family or leaders, do not feel threatened. "We are here for the learner," she says. "We do not want to complicate their lives, as participants will talk about this activity

at home". In essence, Banu's ability to operate within the local community – that they trust her and do not believe she is challenging their views – is key to her success in drawing in both men and women from the local South Asian, mainly Pakistani, community. I push her, asking about challenging some of the stigmas when they come up in a session and she says her approach is to provide a safe space in which she and her team can listen – and that they might gently suggest that alongside the advice someone gets from their spiritual leader, they could also seek medical help and support or therapy.

“We do need to be careful about making assumptions about cultural sensitivity and I think as time moves on and communities develop, it is about having an ongoing dialogue with the groups we work with.”

Banu Adam, Arts 2 Heal

Cultural sensitivity itself also needs to be handled with care. Banu says that she tried to offer dance, music and poetry workshops but had pushback from members of the South Asian community who believed music and dance to be against religious values. Where members took part, it was on the proviso that no videos and photographs would be taken. “In many instances it's community stigma over personal religious beliefs,” she says. She is persevering though. We do need to be careful about making assumptions about cultural sensitivity and I think as time moves on and communities develop, it is about having an ongoing dialogue with the groups we work with. At Sampad we found that if participants were not expected to perform, they would take part in Bollywood dance workshops as part of Create and Change. A legacy of our project is that one of our partners raised funds to continue offering dance workshops as she found the women loved them and it was considered a good way of staying fit.

Again, on the cultural sensitivity issue, I asked Banu if she thought that mixed gender groups were a barrier to participation. Her workshops are open to all. She felt strongly that they weren't a significant barrier and that what she is doing is also breaking down barriers

between groups and communities. She talks passionately about how after workshops (prior to the pandemic), members would go into town for a coffee together – men and women drawn from the white English community and the local Pakistani community. Her work transcends into community cohesion and supporting integration.

We reflect together on how important it is to have artists and/or facilitators from the same background as those taking part. Is it part of the success of her project, I ask, that they see she looks like them? I know from my own experience of visiting workshops and family days at the Dolphin Centre that the women gravitated towards me as a South Asian woman with curiosity about why I was there. I felt privileged that some opened up to me so quickly. Banu feels strongly that the diversity of her organisation helps to reach into the community. She has created a journey for her participants: they take part in workshop projects and when they become more confident she asks them to become peer mentors to spread the word and encourage others to participate. In this way, she continues to grow the diversity of those leading activity and working with her. This is an interesting approach. I believe there is a barrier around the lack of workforce to deliver participatory activity within South Asian communities – finding excellent artists but also excellent artists that can work confidently with those with lived experience of mental health problems is a challenge. Add to that wanting South Asian artists – well, there is pressing need for capacity building in this area.

Arts 2 Heal has recently secured funding for its own building, on the edge of Whalley Range and Blackburn town centre. Their new hub is not 'shiny and new', has no hot water at present (they are currently raising funds to refurbish), but it has big windows so people can see in and the location of their space is critical. The hub is 'on the way into town', next to the bus station, and crucially on the edge of the South Asian community that they primarily work with. Location is a barrier and the alternative spaces – some of which she was offered for free – were not right, Banu says. One was on the first floor and she wanted it on the ground floor. One was on the 'other side of town' putting up a barrier of distance to those she wanted to

work with. Similarly at Sampad, we found that working in the heart of Washwood Heath, in community centres and the local library, were key to success. People felt comfortable in that space and with staff members there and so this helped us to engage people much more easily.

The fear of the unknown can also be a barrier to participation. That is why the first phase of Sampad's Create and Change programme was to offer a series of taster workshops to allow the participants to try art forms they may not have come across before – from spoken word to ajrak, a unique form of screenprinting practised in Pakistan and India – to see what captured the imagination. For Banu at Arts 2 Heal traditional marketing doesn't work; her outreach strategy is to take her work out to encourage people to sign up. She offers taster/open workshops at Preston Mela every year and she runs pop-up workshops in the town centre – these tasters offer participants an opportunity to try things out and to ask questions.

So how have these activities fared during 2020? For Sampad, the strong partnerships that are key to our work remain strong well after the first iteration of Create and Change has finished. We grasped the opportunity during the Covid-19 pandemic to work with the Dolphin Women's Centre again by setting up a WhatsApp project, which is currently underway. The major barrier here is the same as for many participatory activities – lockdown and social distancing. WhatsApp seems to be a workable platform where at a press of a button you can be guided to YouTube concerts and online Zoom activity, all the while still conversing with the group. It is an ongoing project and a learning curve in how to keep a small group of women who may face many challenges at home – looking after children at home who may be self-isolating, looking after wider family members, juggling lack of digital resources – engaged with us.

Arts 2 Heal also took their work online and when I spoke to Banu she had just come from a workshop with 25 participants. Similarly, she started off with WhatsApp with her groups and is now delivering art packs of materials so that they can continue to have a rewarding creative experience when taking part in her workshop. The challenge for her is the significant cost of the art packs: each participant needs their own materials and cannot share which results in a cost of £10-£25 per pack.

Another example of good practice that could be valuable to the arts sector is the Mind model of Community Development Workers. This comes back to investment in resources as a key part of encouraging participation. The Community Development Worker who we worked with at Birmingham Mind was regularly at the Centre, available to the users there for informal conversation, supported activities and able to refer people on to services, as well as supporting Sampad by giving feedback and advice.

For organisations or creatives looking to offer participatory activity to groups that include those with lived experience of mental ill-health, my advice would be that we need to invest in training and supporting artists from diverse backgrounds so that the workforce can represent the participants we are trying to reach; that seeking to establish longer term ways of working with an emphasis on partnerships is key; that we need to find ways of investing in evaluation and tracking so that we can sing about the benefits of the work; and that we need to actively seek out and be part of networks with others in this field so we can learn from each other.

I believe, if we can put these things into place, we can support individuals in these communities to develop creative strategies that strengthen their mental health.

About the author

Sabra is the producer of the BEDLAM Arts & Mental Health Festival (www.bedlamfestival.co.uk) and the Executive Director of Sampad South Asian Arts.

Case studies



Dionysius. Photo courtesy of Key Changes (see page 53).

Art in Healthcare

BY LOUISE DONOGHUE

ABOUT US

Art in Healthcare⁶¹ is a Scottish based charity with a mission to bring art into every health setting in Scotland and to use visual art to improve health and wellbeing.

Our outreach project, **Room for Art**, offers socially prescribed art workshops, facilitated by professional artists, to support health and wellbeing. Workshops run weekly in community settings, libraries and health centres for adults in areas of multiple deprivation in Edinburgh. Our participants are referred by GPs, occupational therapists, community link workers, health and social care agencies, and through self-referral. Our participants are people who were already very vulnerable prior to the Covid-19 crisis. They suffer from mental health issues (including depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts), long-term health conditions, are socially isolated and experience loneliness. Many of our participants have caring responsibilities and are experiencing challenging living and housing conditions. They include people with disabilities, and people who are financially vulnerable including those on low or unstable incomes. Our role has been to help keep people well through connection and creativity; often we are the only service they engage with.

OUR APPROACH

We recognised that referral routes largely exclude BAME people as they are not accessing health and social care support for issues relating to mental health. Very few BAME people had joined Room for Art groups through referral routes, either through self-referral or a carers' organisation.

To become a more inclusive project, we started to build key relationships with organisations such as Saheliya,⁶² a specialist mental health and wellbeing support organisation for black, minority ethnic, asylum seeker, refugee and migrant women and girls, and Edinburgh and the Lothians Equality Research Council (ELREC).⁶³ We also partnered with the Open Arms Project⁶⁴ which engaged with participants that we were trying to reach, as it targets women in social isolation and struggling with their mental health. Open Arms is a three-year partnership between ELREC, Sikh Sanjog, Linknet Mentoring and Saheliya.

Instead of tasters workshops, we ran blocks of art sessions in a regular slot. It was very important that the workshops were held in a trusted venue that women regularly attended for other sessions such as language learning or new skills. During lockdown some participants have joined our other Zoom art workshops and received art material packs.

We are also developing a new relationship with Feniks – Counselling, Personal Development and Support Services Ltd,⁶⁵ which offers mental health support to help tackle social isolation and loneliness among vulnerable members of the Polish, Asian and African communities, and are running workshops for them in 2021. For these sessions we have a specific remit of delivering art sessions, but with the added element of sharing the cultures and art of the countries of each of the participants. This is a new way of working for us and we are excited to explore possibilities with our artists and with feedback from the participants.

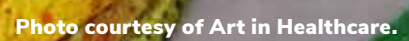
⁶¹ www.artinhealthcare.org.uk.

⁶² www.saheliya.co.uk.

⁶³ www.elrec.org.uk.

⁶⁴ www.elrec.org.uk/services/open-arms.

⁶⁵ www.feniks.org.uk.



There is still much more work, research and engagement to do and we are in the very early stages of developing these partnerships.

FEEDBACK FROM OUR CURRENT BAME PARTICIPANTS

Carrie

Attending since 2017. Referred by doctor. Very shy to begin with but now a great ambassador for the project, spreading the word and making suggestions to shape the project. Very creative and tries a lot of techniques at home. Missed a lot of art at school due to childhood illness.

“I noticed last week as I was really tired and I didn’t want to do anything cos I felt that rubbish...had the start of migraine. It totally helped cos I totally de-stressed – I didn’t realise I was feeling all tense so what I done was I painted a background – Heather suggested instead of figuring out what to paint, just paint loads of backgrounds. So I really liked doing it and felt so much better after the class.”

Stacey

Attending since 2018. Self-referral (sister to Carrie).

“It’s been good coming to get time for myself doing something cos I get a lot of time on my own but I don’t do anything so it feels like I’m doing something for me.”

Rose

Attending since 2018. Referred from another community organisation. Very shy and emotional when she started as her mum had recently passed away. Growing confidence in English. Creates beautiful Chinese ink paintings. Helped to exhibit her work.

“Thank you so much...you are my guardian angels!”

Majid

Referred from ELREC in June 2020. Majid was very quiet in the Zoom workshops to begin with but he is sharing a lot more now. The group are trying to convince him to share his music as he is a musician. He creates a lot and often comments that what we do gives him a lot of ideas.⁶⁶

Nahid

Referred from ELREC in June 2020. Some difficulty in Zoom sessions and we were unable to supply a translator.

“I was enjoying your classes but because of my other classes I’m attending during the week, I’m not able to attend your classes as I have not any energy left and so tired. I do appreciate your concern and thanks for all your support.”

WHAT WE’VE LEARNT

It is important to engage participants in feedback on the sessions and what they are finding important and where there are gaps. For example, do the Room for Art⁶⁷ sessions support positive health and wellbeing of participants by:

- offering a time to relax, bringing focus and calm
- improving mood
- using creativity as a coping mechanism, expressing feelings through art
- connecting to people in a meaningful way, feeling valued and part of a community
- offering opportunities to learn skills from our artists and each other?

It is crucial that there is a genuine commitment to undertaking engagement work with BAME communities and organisations. It takes time to develop relationships with organisations and participants, and to build a trusted and safe space to explore creativity. Support such as for translation could be really valuable. There must be the intention of meaningful engagement, not as a tick box exercise or as a way to access funds.

⁶⁶ roomforart.squarespace.com/living-in-2020-exhibition/majid.

⁶⁷ Explore some of the art from Room for Art here: roomforart.squarespace.com/living-in-2020-exhibition/anonymous and roomforart.squarespace.com/living-in-2020-exhibition/nazley-1.

British Ceramics Biennial: Resonating Spaces

COLLATED BY KAT EVANS

ABOUT US

We work with clay, a humble yet fascinating material. It's a material that transforms: moulded, fired or reclaimed to make something new. This ability to change inspires our work.

BCB fosters positive change in Stoke-on-Trent, the UK's capital of ceramics. We nurture local creative talent and bring the best inter/national artists to our city, breaking new ground in contemporary ceramic practice.

From its base at the iconic Spode Works site, British Ceramics Biennial (BCB) produces:

- a year-round programme of education, community and health projects;
- BCB Festival, the single largest ceramics event in the UK.

ABOUT RESONATING SPACES

2019 British Ceramics Biennial and Middleport Pottery

The 2019 British Ceramics Biennial received 69,000 visits over five weeks, exhibiting work from over 100 emerging and established artists across five sites in Stoke-on-Trent. One of these sites was Middleport Pottery, a grade II* listed pottery built by Burgess and Leigh in 1888 and now run by community development charity *Re-Form Heritage*.⁶⁸ The famous Burleigh pottery is produced on site, making Middleport the UK's last working Victorian potbank in continuous production.

Burslem Jubilee Project

The Burslem Jubilee project group offers support, companionship and activities to asylum seekers and refugees in the local community. Expert project leaders Sheila Podmore and Dianne Yeadom are supported by a team of committed local volunteers. BCB have worked with the Jubilee Project since 2015. With the project's Elim church base just 15 minutes' walk from Middleport, BCB was keen to invite the group to explore and respond to the site, and work with commissioned artists to shape and create Resonating Spaces.

“We have learnt to listen to the voice of pottery, as never imagined before. We have wondered how this place has been kept safe for over 130 years, alive, with all its stories and histories. As we make together on site, we sense our pasts, our present and futures.”

Collaborative text, members of Burslem Jubilee Group

Resonating Spaces

*Resonating Spaces*⁶⁹ is an explorative project and installation. An interdisciplinary team of artists, Guillaume Dujat⁷⁰ (Sound Artist), Helen Felcey (Ceramic Artist Curator), Kieran Hanson (Film-maker) and Joe Hartley (Product Designer), worked alongside members of the Jubilee project.

During weekly sessions, Middleport was an inspiration, a temporary studio, and a home for the team, as they toured the factory, investigated infrequently used spaces, and shared lunch and hot drinks.

⁶⁸ www.re-form.org.

⁶⁹ www.britishceramicsbiennial.com/event/resonatingspaces.

⁷⁰ gdujat.com/resonatingspaces.



Photo courtesy of British Ceramics Biennial.

These talented and experienced artists designed open-ended material-led processes to develop and test ideas. There was no definitive answer to the question 'what are we going to make today?'. Trust within the group, and a sense of 'belonging' on site, meant the expert project team could hold a space of curiosity and exploration.

A moving and inspirational series of temporary structures, interventions and interactive soundscapes were created across Middleport.

New ways of seeing

The lunch has been cleared and the tables wiped. People work quietly, using graphite sticks and large sheets of packing paper to record the morning's site walk. In turn, everyone talks through their drawings and their reflections, observing what is present, but also what is absent (the old frit kiln).

Mehdi holds up his drawing. "Do you know what this is?" Unsure looks. "It's the bottle kiln. When you look up."

This drawing is kept and laid over archive imagery of Middleport in the opening of Kieran Hanson's film 'Resonance'. It is printed onto the paper that wraps the clay objects in the entrance to the bottle kiln.

A temporary installation, a different way of experiencing a historical place.

HOW EFFECTIVE?

Evaluation data collected by the Audience Agency was positive in terms of enjoyment, perceptions and understanding.

- 87% of respondents would recommend the exhibition to family and friends.
- 60% of respondents reported they had gained a lot of understanding about the city's diversity as a result of their visit.
- The installation also improved perceptions of the cultural offering in Stoke-on-Trent, with 29% of Middleport respondents rating it good before their visit, and 67% good after their visit.

“Showcased a huge variety of contemporary artists. Very diverse, very inspirational.”

“Middleport Pottery is amazing bringing cultures together.”

“Old meets new. Anything is possible.”

Visitors

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

Centring in on the artistic process increased the project's impact. Although we did anticipate health and social outcomes, Resonating Spaces was not driven by these goals. Sessions were characterised by agency and possibility: 3D sketching with clay; using a drill to create temporary structures along the canal-side; carrying timber to build a social space. In a matter of hours, an infrequently used area was transformed with laughter, graft and imagination.

“Companionship, shared experience and histories shape our time together. A real sense of worth comes through working together, creating something that others will see and be a part of too. We all need more connection with things and each other to understand ourselves.”

Burslem Jubilee group

“Materials dictated the outcomes. For example, how would we use the hazel in the installation.”

Commissioned artist

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Working with Burslem Jubilee was a highlight... they were involved in some of the major decisions.”

Commissioned artist

I'd recommend an approach that sets out to create opportunities for complexity – for multiple ideas and connections between places and people. If you're using a design approach, try applying this to ways of working – rather than the final 'thing'. Can you design accessible, engaging activities that facilitate communication, relationships and fun? Can you use materials and processes to build shared and transformative experiences?

WHAT'S NEXT?

“Finding the knowledge and materials to express ourselves is the beginning of a long journey of recovery. This brings confidence, self respect and self belief.”

Burslem Jubilee group

BCB aims to work with its local communities in a wider range of roles – as commissioners, co-producers, hosts, and critics, as well as artists, participants and visitors. To achieve this, we need to build long-term responsive and supportive relationships that are underpinned by trust and a belief in the transformative potential of people, places and processes.

Resonating Spaces credits

Commissioned artists: Guillaume Dujat, Helen Felcey, Joe Hartley, Kieran Hanson / **Burslem Jubilee Project:** Sarah Delvari, Dalit Fischman, Jane Kelsall, Mehdi Mohammadi, Taraneh Noroozi, Sheila Podmore, Mehdi Rostami, Sharam Vafa, Asal Vahedi, Dianne

Yeadon / **Middleport Pottery:** Clare Wood, Rebecca Hopkins / **Archive images and footage:** Staffordshire Film Archive / **British Ceramics Biennial:** Barney Hare Duke, Rhiannon Ewing James, Kat Evans.

Centrepieces

BY GEOFF NORRIS, COORDINATOR

ABOUT US

Centrepieces is a mental health arts project which serves the London Borough of Bexley and surrounding areas of south east London and north west Kent. It exists to promote mental health recovery through art, providing members with workshops and opportunities to exhibit and sell their artwork and participate in a wide range of art-related activities, public art and projects in schools and the community.

Bexley is an outer London borough with a significant older white population, an established Traveller community, a number of Asian communities, and a West African community which has been growing over the last 15 years or so. Of the two neighbouring London boroughs (Bromley and Greenwich), Greenwich has the most diverse, multicultural population.

OUR APPROACH

Links to local groups and communities

You don't have to reinvent the wheel. When Centrepieces first started we affiliated to the Bexley Council for Racial Equality (BCRE), which unfortunately eventually lost its support from the local Council and ceased to exist. Through BCRE we developed a relationship with a number of local BAME groups, including Vietnamese, Somali, and South Asian communities, and were then successful in applying for grants from organisations like Awards for All for a number of art projects with young people in particular, from these communities. One which was particularly successful was the It's a Breeze project involving the creation of five very colourful Totem Poles which used breeze blocks to sculpt iconic figures representing the visual traditions of the different communities.

It's a Breeze

For this project Centrepieces' artists worked alongside members of Bexley's ethnic minority and refugee communities with the aim of utilising the positive creative power of those who had experienced mental ill health to enhance culturally relevant creative expression in other groups with shared experience of social exclusion and stigmatisation.

The project targeted the northern wards of Bexley, which were in the top 10 per cent of socioeconomically deprived wards in England. We worked with Vietnamese children in Thamesmead, Somali and Sikh young people from Belvedere, and boys from the Kosovan, Colombian and Sierra Leonean refugee communities.

First produced back in 2001, the Totem Poles have become a signature artwork for Centrepieces and have been shown at various venues around Bexley over the years, including being exhibited several times in the gardens of Hall Place Historic House, initially as part of Bexley Heritage Trust's Celebration of Culture and Diversity and Black History month, where they stayed for several years, and more recently renovated and displayed again in the Gardens as part of 'The Twelve' installations by Centrepieces from 2018-2019.

Following this project, we developed close links with Humrahi, a local Asian community mental health support group based around the Sikh Temple in Belvedere, and formulated a number of art projects in which their members could participate, including a regular event as part of the Diwali Festival.

Using our new pop-up studio space in Bexleyheath, last year we started to run art workshops open to the public which included mask-making for the Mexican festival, 'Día de

Los Muertos' (Day of the Dead), and Puppet Dragons/Chinese lanterns/ink drawings to celebrate Chinese New Year.

At the time of writing in December 2020, we are currently holding our annual Centrepieces Open Exhibition, this year entitled Lockdown

Art, in which one of our artists has on show a number of pieces of work inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, supported by text and illustrating some important current social and political issues.

A statement by Centrepieces' artist Nadia

Another global pandemic happened. #BlackLivesMatter. As a person from the Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community, I knew that discrimination against people of different races still happened; I, and people like me, have personal experiences of being vilified or ignored just because of the colour of our skin. It's been something I wanted to put into my art, why? Not so much to be argumentative and controversial, but to personally express myself and my experience because of racism. The UK keep saying that it happened in the USA; why are black people upset here in the UK? Why? Because we know that other people in global political power would also vilify and/or ignore us and our plight. The other more poignant point is, I have family living and travelling the world; I don't know for sure that my family are going to be treated fairly in this country, let alone another

country. I would rather live in a world where criminals are imprisoned, not people who are made out to be guilty before they are proved innocent, just because of the colour of their skin. I have personal incidents on this subject, the most recent being when I visited Amsterdam with my husband last year in 2019, but that is another story.

I have had a quandary about how and what I wanted to convey about my experience of racism and, in fact, whether I should say or do anything at all. Part of my lockdown experience has been fighting with myself about my main lifelong subject. I literally can feel awkward in my own skin because of racism. For instance, "Am I ugly because I am dark skinned?"

The incident of George Floyd flipped the whole subject of racism on its head. I watched a video of crowds all over the world supporting the BAME community, shouting, "I can't breathe!" I was gladdened, encouraged and exonerated from the actions of these amazing people of many colours. Seeing this video and countless others linked to combating racism galvanized me into action and I started 'Journaling on Canvas'. I plan in the future to create bigger canvasses and installations on this subject as well as working on projects around media, colour, light, iconic images and feelings. This global problem of racism cannot be ignored any longer. We need to discuss, debate, deliberate, determine and decide a better future for all, no matter the colour of our skin.



“Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.”

Cesar A. Cruz



Mexican Day of the Dead workshop, photo courtesy of Centrepieces.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

We monitor our impact in a number of different ways, through the use of established questionnaires relating to wellbeing and social inclusion, feedback forms after all activities and workshops, and most importantly, just talking to participants in an ongoing way.

From our experience, it is important to:

- Gain an accurate picture of the demographics and culture of the population which the project is aiming to serve.
- Reach out to people and communities, both in terms of recognising, acknowledging and respecting important festivals and traditions, and finding ways to support creative artistic expression through them.
- Support BAME artists individually and try to create an environment which is open, friendly and welcoming to new BAME members; include as many members of diverse minority communities as possible to help reduce feelings of isolation.
- In our experience it is occasionally important to be assertive in order to take on challenges where people (e.g. other artists/ volunteers) have not grasped the significance of issues relating to race, ethnicity and art.
- Whatever the composition of the local community, it is essential to have representation within the organisation which reflects the communities of participants you work with, at all levels wherever possible, whether as staff, volunteers or trustees. There is a hugely positive impact for members in having people from familiar backgrounds around, no matter how inclusive, welcoming or friendly others within the organisation from the (normally white) majority community happen to be.

Next year, we will be expanding the number of culturally relevant art workshops we undertake in our new pop-up studios, and partnerships with community groups.

Hive Bradford

ABOUT US

Hive⁷¹ is a community arts organisation that has been working in Bradford for nearly 40 years. We deliver arts and wellbeing projects for people with mental health issues. Our work reflects the multi-cultural community of Bradford and surrounding districts. We work with various BAME Refugee communities bringing different communities together to help increase understanding and support to improve wellbeing.

OUR APPROACH

Hive has identified and built links with community mental health organisations and other partner organisations and agencies working with people from BAME communities experiencing mental health problems. We have also delivered outreach workshops to various BAME community groups through work with community centres and local groups.

Across the delivery of our creative activity classes and supported drop-in we work with the nationally recognised '5 Ways to Wellbeing'.

Facilitators working on projects use a variety of strategies to make their work inclusive; for example, completing ESOL Supporting Arts Tutors and Mental Health Awareness training. We have also recruited volunteers from our sessions and student placements from BAME backgrounds both at Hive and in community settings.

“I loved working as a group, learning about combining recycled materials and colours, and making artworks that will be seen by lots of people.”

Participant

Recognising issues such as social isolation and stigma experienced by BAME people with mental health problems has led us to deliver our work in targeted ways:

- we plan and work alongside staff at partner organisations so that support is integrated. Engagement is improved through these organisations' contacts with participants outside of sessions.
- we have employed translators if required to support sessions. Having established contacts within sessions enables participants to feel safe and supports language issues if they arise.

Naye Subbah project

Providing engagement with the wider community is central to this work. For example, as part of the *Naye Subbah project*, we worked with a community mental health organisation and focused on 'green activity'. We delivered 20 creative sessions to a group of South Asian women based around the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, with simple, achievable and sustainable craft activities related to going out into nature and working with natural materials. Initial ideas for creative activity were given to the group and then through discussion they developed the way forward enabling ownership of the project by participants. The group was introduced to the local environment in new ways: we built a garden area with seating outside the venue together; visited our allotment to collect plant material; made and worked with plant dyes; and were part of an end-of-project conference with other groups and an exhibition for which transport and culturally appropriate food was provided. There was also a visit from a local walking group and visits from health professionals.

We have established links with a wide range of other organisations in the community such as those working with green space initiatives, healthy living, local forums, support with debt, employment, education and training and other mainstream services. We have had positive responses from both the individuals we work with and our partner organisations.

“Great to find local walks I didn’t know about and a chance to work on an allotment seeing changes through the seasons. Without this course I would have sat in the house depressed and not going out, even on a sunny day.”

“I gained a better awareness of the outside world – looking at colours, forms, patterns. Being able to sit calmly and not rush to fill in silences, listen to others and the sounds of nature.”

Participants

The Flourish project

Another recent focus for work has been the journeys that BAMER communities have made and their hopes for the future, looking at feet as the metaphor for their travels. We looked at the journeys and the landscapes of their home countries and explored words of affirmation that have also featured in their work.⁷²

Isolation is a big issue for refugee participants who have little or no social network or family nearby; for some anxiety may make it hard to leave the house and we have many participants who only leave the house to take part in Hive activities. We work with various agencies to help reduce isolation as they build support networks across the district. We have schemes where refugees can get their bus travel reimbursed – a lifeline for many who attend as it makes it possible to come. Some participants are taken to and from the venue in taxis or given lifts by various partners that work with us.

We have supported refugees to work as volunteers at Hive. One participant’s wellbeing has increased hugely through volunteering as she had been very socially isolated and though she wanted to work, had been unable to due to her refugee status. Her job in her native country of Uzbekistan was as a seamstress, so we offered her a volunteering opportunity on a sewing course that we deliver. She has told us she feels like she has a lot to give and is very happy to be able to pass on her sewing skills to the community.

The group in West Bowling area of Bradford have identified organisations the participants can contact when needing help at a critical moment. Partners include Refugee Action, The Youth Service as well as Bradford Council’s Mental Health Team. We have also signposted groups to various forums around the district where their voices and concerns could be aired, such as ROC Bradford – the Community Engagement Charity.

WHAT WE’VE LEARNT

We have learned that listening to BAMER communities and offering support for the problems they are facing is important. We do this by involving other organisations and agencies that create a support network for our groups. The sessions are aimed at providing a long-term safety net – not just at supporting people for the length of the project. We have found that BAMER communities have a lot to say about their situations and want to have a voice to get their feelings across. Community arts provide a brilliant non-threatening environment that allows this process to happen.

We would like to maintain our strong links with existing partner organisations as well as develop new ones.

⁷² Artwork from the Flourish Project: www.flickr.com/photos/188829843@N05/with/49994734827.

Key Changes

ABOUT US

Key Changes⁷³ is the leading provider of music services for musicians with mental health challenges, and we founded the first independent record label exclusively for artists with mental health lived experience in 2019.

Based in London but working nationally, we support over 3,000 artists each year to access collaboration opportunities with professional producers. We have delivered our innovative mentoring programmes and live music events in hospitals and the community since 1997.

Our award-winning Music Industry Recovery Programme promotes wellbeing by developing creative, technical and vocational skills, and building positive self-identity through progressive artistic development within our vibrant creative community.

OUR APPROACH

Our artists are predominantly young, BAME males – who are starkly over-represented among mental health service users. A vital aspect of our service is the appeal and cultural familiarity of an artist development recovery pathway for those who have often had negative experiences of mainstream mental health services.

Key Changes artists are empowered to develop and create music in a professional studio environment and further supported with expert coaching and mentoring in songwriting, live performance, and music industry skills/awareness. Our unique approach draws on clinical therapeutic techniques and professional music industry practice.

Our case studies (see two overleaf) suggest many young BAME adults have developed poor mental health problems not just from environmental challenges, but also because of negative self-identity stemming from prejudice against their backgrounds. Themes of being isolated, mistrusted, and in brutal/futile circumstances are common among the lyrics of our black artists. Our Music Industry Recovery Programme directly counteracts this paradigm through creative empowerment, offering a community of interest, friendly support and opportunities for development – evidenced by our Impact Evaluation data which show improvements across all dimensions (such as feeling optimistic, useful, and connected).

Our opportunities to collaborate with expert producers from many culturally-relevant genres – everything from Grime and Drill to Reggae, Soul and R'n'B – enable artists to express themselves fully and redefine their personal identity. Key Changes' InReach (hospital based) services have been widely recognised for their impact in driving increased engagement and inclusion through a fresh, culturally relevant, and accessible approach. Our growing network of music industry mentors and supporters includes many prominent BAME musicians including Brit Award winning singer-songwriter Nao, acclaimed UK rapper and producer Jords, music manager Steven Odufuye, and filmmaker, musician and DJ Don Letts.

Given their ongoing health disparities, targeting BAME artists in hospitals is largely organic, and continuing opportunities post discharge are facilitated by our close working with community mental health practitioners and social workers. This will be further strengthened by a new 'Community Gateway' manager joining our team in 2021.

Throughout 2020, we have strengthened our community inclusion through:

- Studio Connect – this remote version of our core Music Industry Recovery Programme gives vital support to BAME artists in hostels/ temporary housing, where they are again overrepresented – and often geographically isolated from services and family;
- Studio Discovery experiences – our five-week ‘taster’ programmes enabling new artists in recovery to learn more about our distinctive, collaborative approach through sessions in professional music studios across London.

These new service have given us vital flexibility amid changing restrictions, enabling us to take our support closer to vulnerable BAME people and ensuring we can continue engaging people in hospitals, hostels and other ‘cultural coldspot’ settings.

HOW EFFECTIVE?

Over 90 per cent of those who start our community-based Music Industry Recovery Programme go on to complete 12 or more sessions – we attribute this to several important factors:

- expert matching – through an initial consultation we gain an in-depth understanding of each artist’s individual creative tastes, influences and aspirations, helping us connect every artist with their ideal mentor;
- empowerment – artists drive the creative development process with mentor support to execute their work professionally. This promotes a powerful positive change in self-identity as each person begins to recognise and value themselves as an artist;
- progression – personal transformation is underpinned by our innovative music industry informed practice – offering not just opportunities for participation, but ongoing development through our in-house label and artist development programme;
- community – our support enhances artists’ natural drive to share their music – however low their personal/social confidence levels may be. The enjoyment and wellbeing

artists gain from recording, promotion and live performance is best evidenced by our weekly ‘Open Mic’ opportunities (currently delivered online) which are consistently oversubscribed.

Two of our artists:

Chantelle is a 22-year-old Alternative R&B songstress with British and Jamaican heritage. Her style is defined by her honest, straight-talking narratives infused into a sweet serenade of vocal melody. Chantelle began her musical exploits through poetry, which remains the fundamental basis of her song writing technique. She describes her first release, ‘Tired’ as a song about self-actualisation and overcoming adversity. “It’s about a rough patch in a relationship, though it can apply to any situation people are becoming tired about and unless you do something about it nothing’s going to change”. This same determination is present in the way Chantelle sees her role as a Key Changes artist and ambassador – “I want to eradicate the stigma around mental health, LGBT and race”

Rapper **Dionysius** (pictured page 42) was brought up in North London, with parental roots from Gambia, Barbados and England. Born 16 weeks prematurely, he describes himself as a ‘fighter from birth’, and says artists such as Nas, Bob Marley, Prodigy, Dead Prez, Chief Keef and Michael Jackson are his biggest influences. Rapping from a very age helped him build his confidence through school.

Dionysius says that growing up in Camden Town (which he and his friends often describe as ‘Cracktown’) exposed him to many negative influences, taking a toll on his mental health. His joint passions, music and kickboxing, have helped him on the road to recovery.

Dionysus aspires to encourage BAME young people to do better, have better relationships with families and stay more aware of their mental health.

The first Key Changes EP released by Dionysius – Lost Souls – is an unflinching yet uplifting reflection on his experiences of youth violence, mental illness and homelessness.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

Promoting professionalism

Key Changes offers a professionalised, music industry informed service, and we require artists to uphold the same level of professionalism, regardless of their mental health challenges. If artists are experiencing low mood, they are still required to attend their session on time – even if they feel unable to make music, they will access one-to-one support from their mentor and find different ways to use the time productively. This builds self-esteem, resilience, healthier mental health management skills and ensures creative momentum is not lost.

Supporting independent progression

Our data analysis shows that 12-16 sessions are optimum for most individuals to build the skills and confidence to progress into other new creative and cultural opportunities. Our 12-week programme (with some flexibility) offers a defined time for artists to achieve pre-agreed goals, such as recording an EP and promotional video. After this is completed, we encourage artists to try out a range of other services, even if they intend to return in the future.

This promotes focus, reduces dependency on our service, and supports wider inclusion. Our monthly 'drop-in' sessions (currently online) enable people to stay connected with peers and mentors. In 2020 we are further developing this by offering weekly progression support sessions from London's prestigious Barbican Centre. Sessions will help artists find continuing opportunities for creative/cultural participation, and volunteering/work experience.

Many Minds

ABOUT US

Many Minds⁷⁴ is a Bristol based mental health and performance arts charity. We bridge the gap between community and professional performance by working with practising professional artists and producing high quality contemporary performance.

We use artistic interventions that put people who identify with experiences of mental ill-health in the driver's seat as way to break down stigma and trigger generosity and equality.

We are a member-led arts organisation and currently have over 180 members. Most of our members have multiple barriers to engaging with the arts and we provide opportunities and a platform to grow and flourish and build careers in the arts for people who don't have easy access to these opportunities.

Collaboration is at the heart of our work and we work alongside partner organisations in the arts, housing, social sector and with the NHS and local authorities to meet our aims.

OUR APPROACH

Many Minds' approach is based around making the arts more accessible and inclusive. We work hard to engage the people who are under-represented to find models of engaging people and adapt our approach to meet people's needs where possible.

We embarked on a project in partnership with Borderlands, a refugee and asylum seeker charity in Bristol, to make a performance for the *Bristol Refugee Festival*.⁷⁵ We talked to their staff and volunteer team in depth about the best way to engage with people who were accessing their drop-in services. They advised us to come and build relationships with people by coming to their weekly communal

meal. We put posters up around their centre in English and Arabic with pictures of the staff who were running the workshops. We were told not to talk about mental health as it is still a big taboo in many cultures and would create a barrier to engagement. A series of workshops were delivered in their setting in a room on top of their drop-in space straight after the English classes to capture people whilst they were still in the building. We predominantly played games, worked with non-verbal devising techniques and built stories through drawing pictures and acting them out in small groups.

“I liked the dancing and the smiling. Very fun. We did drawings of our favourite places and our journey to UK. Sometimes hard to remember but everyone was so nice.”

Participant

Our work is largely thematic and based around people participating in the way that feels right for them and we used many of the games we played as part of our final performance so that people could easily join in without having come to many workshops and rehearsals. We worked with participants to adapt games that told the stories of their experiences: for example, Grandmother's Footsteps where someone in power can send you back to the start. Only a small number of people who engaged with workshops ended up in the final performance but many came to the show as an audience member and felt part of the performance as they recognised the games that they had helped to shape.

⁷⁴ many-minds.org.

⁷⁵ many-minds.org/yalla-walk.



Yalla Walk, Bristol, 2019. Photo © Jack Offord, courtesy of Many Minds.

“This is something I would never had done before. I didn’t think about doing drama but my friends told me to come and it was a lot of fun. I liked playing the games.”

Participant

The non-verbal approach was an effective way of making this work accessible – participants told us they found it ‘fun’ and ‘good’ and we had high numbers of people returning to workshops. Some of the participants saw being involved as a way to practise their English language skills by talking to us and some reflected that being part of a group and having something to do in their day was their main motivation.

WHAT WE’VE LEARNT

We learnt a lot from the project. Firstly, that we needed more time to engage with this group to develop trust and relationships so that people felt confident to take part in a performance. We did our engagement phase over eight

weeks, but we needed to be there consistently as part of the regular programme, all year round. Having strong relationships with staff and volunteers on the project really helped us and we found that we had a few advocates who helped encourage people to give it a go. Adaptability and flexibility with approach and structure was key. We found that people wanted to share the games they had played as children with us and we were able to support people to lead bits of the sessions, despite it sometimes feeling quite chaotic and confusing as we tried to find the communal language to establish the rules of the games.

Since the first lockdown, we have found it difficult to re-engage some of the people we built relationships with in this project. Many people do not have access to technology and phone-in sessions rely on verbal interactions that people find hard with little English. We are currently looking at ways we can support people back into our sessions and will be doing some taster workshops with voice work with the refugee groups that are still meeting online early in 2021.

Music In Detention

BY JOHN SPEYER

ABOUT US

Music In Detention (which from March will be renamed as Hear Me Out) works primarily with people held in immigration detention, i.e. incarcerated without a time limit because of their immigration status. In response to this structural exclusion of the most explicit kind, our work seeks to include people in detention in creative activity, and to use their creative work as a passport to their inclusion in society. Our participatory music activities aim to increase their resilience against this traumatic experience, meet their profound need for and right to self-expression, build solidarity with other marginalised groups, and bring their creative work and life experience to the public.

Music sessions in detention centres are our core work. Because detainees are held and segregated from society against their will, making our work inclusive means attending both to what happens in those sessions, and to how they are placed in relation to the detention system and the wider community.

OUR APPROACH

Accessibility

Participation in the sessions is fluid, people come and go. We try to place them near passing footfall, and get the word out through posters/flyers and word of mouth. Linking sessions to festivals or other centre activities can help attract attention. People often have bad nights and slow mornings, so we usually start in the afternoon.

We frame our sessions as a creative opportunity rather than a health intervention, to avoid stigmatising the activity and maximise the agency of participants. Unlike people we work with in community mental health settings, we find participants in detention centres generally see themselves not as having mental

health problems, but as placed under great stress by their circumstances. So we try to help them take control, not administer a remedy.

“This guy came to call for me this morning, ‘we’re running late, so we have to go’, which is very nice. the music has bring us together, which is very good, very good.”

Participant

Relevance

Most immigration detainees are black or brown, most are from former British colonies, and most are poor. The ‘hostile environment’ mostly degrades black lives. Our participants experience economic deprivation and racism, and their combined toll on mental health. Detention deprives them of basic autonomy. So it’s vital they feel our offer is ‘for them’, that is, appropriate and ‘on their side’. Thinking about race, class and autonomy leads us to three key considerations:

Artists

In a sector where privilege makes access so much easier, we think it’s unusual that our artists are not posh. Few if any have been to conservatoires. Many are people of colour and/or migrants, often with their own experience of forced migration. This narrows the gap between leader and group, helping people relax and feel accepted. (It works both ways: one of our artists, a black woman, said she felt accepted in a detention centre in a way that she never had outside it.) Deploying artists in culturally mixed pairs helps show that a session is for people from all backgrounds.

Method

We select artists who can co-create. They will see the creative process as inherently collaborative, a vehicle for agency; and participants as active agents rather than source material. They will 'hold the ring' and take a clear lead when needed, but whenever possible will 'lead from behind', stepping back so that participants can take the floor and lead. Most content is original, and likewise determined by participants. We try to avoid placing black people's oppression before a white gaze.

Genre

We also look to cede or share control of genre to participants, and select artists with versatile musicianship. Genres have social and political, as well as cultural, connotations. Western classical music is absent from our output. People sometimes share and blend traditional or pop music from their 'home' countries. But most of all we work in rap and hip-hop, internationally associated with dispossession and resistance.

“It made me feel over the moon – I like music! I was leading at times and everybody followed me – it was great.”

Participant

Independence

To improve the wellbeing of people in detention we need to work within the system that damages it. So we have to make a space which can at the same time be inside the system and distinct from it, in which people can express themselves truly.

In the music sessions the involvement of centre staff is valuable, but our artists play a key role in creating this special space. Visitors from the outside, they set a dynamic in which participants can playfully subvert hierarchies, assert under-exercised autonomy, and create new stories and identities for themselves. This leadership, and our support for it, is crucial.

In organising the sessions we likewise co-operate closely with centre staff, but carefully protect our independence from the system. Our Ethics Framework, overseen by trustees, helps us navigate its power dynamics and moral complexity, for example by often

articulating this independence. Occasionally the content of lyrics has become its acid test, and these experiences have confirmed that for inclusion that has meaning, it is essential participants control their own content. So we consult on difficult content but do not grant a veto.

“Exactly, this is an expression, a way of expressing your feelings, it's an art.”

“They're saying to us that we have to put our own input into it, and then when we did put our own input into it, it was deemed not suitable.... It's not a prison, but it is like prison because you're sort of locked up, you're not free, you know what I mean?”

Participants

Reach

Working inside detention centres limits the scope of inclusive practice. For inclusion not just in our activities but as an outcome of them, we need detainees' creative work to have an audience on the outside.

Recording sessions in general can give detainees the feeling of communicating over the wall. Sometimes they co-create songs and music with marginalised groups living nearby, whose comparable experience of things like class and stigma helps create a sense of solidarity (unlike token or momentary contact which can exoticise). Specific connections like this aren't always possible, and we need to do more to tell people in detention all the ways their work can reach people on the outside: through our online player, creative responses like covers and music videos, installations and performances.

“Yeah it was nice you know, you speak to someone and hear his story... that was quite emotional because for me... so I also wrote something relating to that as well. I didn't get to meet him one on one but sharing a common interest and a common goal, that made it real.”

Participant

FINALLY

We have more to do. Continued provision after release, still in its infancy, is starting to bring people with lived experience of detention into increasingly central roles in our public facing work and decision-making, with great potential for the development of the quality of our work in detention centres, and its effect outside them.

We're learning that giving the work meaning is a central task. For this we need artistic excellence fused with a close understanding of the social and political context, so that our creative activities and output can change both participants and audiences.

“Someone talks about their struggles and maybe their ups and their downs, or maybe tells a story through it, or has a meaning to do it then that's where it becomes good I think. Like you really feel their lyrics.”

“Even though we is locked up someone is listening to us.”

Participants

Outside Edge Theatre Company

ABOUT US

Outside Edge Theatre Company⁷⁶ is the UK's only theatre company and participatory arts charity which focuses on addiction. Based in London, we support recovering addicts and those at risk or affected by addiction. We also produce theatre to raise awareness of substance misuse and other addictions.

Using drama as a creative outlet, our approach helps participants build confidence, self-esteem and the skills required to lead productive, healthy lives, free from harmful behaviours. Our peer-led facilitated group activities include improvisation, creative writing, acting exercises, dance and performance opportunities. Last year we supported 231 people through Taster Sessions and regular weekly sessions and 97% reported that we supported their recovery.

OUR APPROACH

We make a conscious effort to be as inclusive as possible. We undertake the majority of our outreach work, which involves running drama or creative writing Taster Sessions, within local authority funded (i.e. public) drug and alcohol treatment services and mental health services. This means that we bring arts-based interventions directly to communities who otherwise do not feel that the arts are 'for them': normally at least 50% of participants will report that our Taster Session is the first time they have engaged in theatre or drama. We partner with local services to ensure that our arts offer is embedded into their existing activities (e.g. as an activity that takes place during a 12-week group work programme). We hire freelance facilitators for our weekly groups who reflect the diversity of the communities in which we work, most of whom have lived experience of addiction, and train current service users from underrepresented communities as Volunteer Peer Facilitators for our Taster Sessions. These measures ensure

that new participants feel that arts activities are indeed 'for them' because they are being delivered 'by them'.

The success of this outreach activity, and longer-term volunteering work with participants, is reflected in the comments of Jordan, one of our current BAME service users who first met us during a Taster Session in his treatment facility. He now accesses five of our weekly groups and volunteers with us as a Peer Facilitator. Jordan says:

“Outside Edge is very inclusive. People of different backgrounds, ethnicity, gender and sexuality can use the service and the facilitators are also from different backgrounds and are diverse. I believe people who are thinking about using the service who are BAME service users can be inspired to join Outside Edge by seeing other BAME people who are already facilitating groups and also service users who rely on the service to help them with their recovery.”

Jordan

Similarly, Aisha was a participant in our treatment facility Taster Sessions. When she first started accessing our activities she was receiving treatment for depression and alcohol addiction that had spiralled out of control. She now attends multiple Outside Edge groups across the week. She says: 'It is important for me to see diversity amongst facilitators and to know people like me are successful creative professionals and if they can do it, so can I. Same with my peer group; there is such a wealth of diversity in lived experience, creative experience, ethnicity, cultures, ages, physical abilities and mental health conditions.'

It encourages me to know that no matter who you are anything is possible, which has encouraged me to try new things creatively.'

“It is important for me to see diversity amongst facilitators and to know people like me are successful creative professionals and if they can do it, so can I.”

Aisha

In 2019/20 Outside Edge had a slight (-5%) drop since the previous year in the number of service users identifying as either BAME or Other (29% in 2019/20). But compared with Public Health England's National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) statistics for 2018/19, Outside Edge has a more diverse service user group than the averages for people in treatment in England: our service users are +20% more ethnically diverse than the national average in treatment, which is only 9% non-white.

The diversity of our participants, and the contexts in which we perform, also mean that our audiences are +18% more diverse than those at the National Theatre. To us, this demonstrates the need for arts organisations to engage at a grassroots level with statutory services and a broad range of community groups in their local area to proactively offer people the embodied experience of engaging in the arts in order to demonstrate its value.

But, of course, there is still a lot that Outside Edge needs to do in this area. For example, reflecting on her experience attending our 20th Anniversary Party last year, Aisha notes: 'I loved the celebration, but I remember thinking at one point that there aren't many black people in the performances. I felt disappointment, and a little sad, that Outside Edge was not reflecting people like me. I sat wondering why that was and what message this sent the audience. The answer that came to me during the evening was that if I wanted to see people like me on stage then "I" had to be that person in the performance. I have to be brave enough at some point, like my non-BAME peers, to stand up and have the confidence to put myself forward. If I don't, and people like me don't, then the talents we have will never be seen

and maybe others will never be encouraged to work creatively. And if I have the courage to put my performances or writing out there, then maybe someone else like me might think 'if she can do it, then maybe I can too'.

“[...] if I have the courage to put my performances or writing out there, then maybe someone else like me might think 'if she can do it, then maybe I can too'.”

Aisha

WHAT'S NEXT

Moving forward, Outside Edge is keen to explore more about how we can co-produce activities with local community groups to deliver targeted work for underrepresented communities affected by addiction. Listening closely to the particular needs of these communities and then responding appropriately will be key to the success of our future work. As Aisha pointed out: 'If there are socio-economic barriers for BAME participants in our communities (i.e. lower paid jobs, no jobs, etc), then this could be impacting their access to pay for the travel required to get to physical sessions or to access the internet. This is an area that Outside Edge and other arts organisations could improve their level of support around.'

We also want to continue building upon the diversity of our workforce, which we believe is essential to remaining inclusive and accessible for the communities we work with. This sentiment is shared by Jordan who commented:

“I do think there could be more people of ethnic origin who work for the company. I feel perhaps people from the BAME community are not coming forward and getting involved with the projects that are available.”

Jordan

Photo courtesy of Outside Edge.



Raw Material Music and Media

BY RACHEL NELKEN

ABOUT US

Raw Material Music and Media is a creative nucleus for the communities of South London. Our three-storey building hosts two recording studios, music and video facilities. Our specialism is music and media as a tool for self-expression and since 1993 we have worked with hundreds of people every year to create and perform. For eight years our **Raw Sounds programme**,⁷⁷ delivered in close partnership with South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, has offered creative opportunities to young people and adults age 14-65 who are currently experiencing poor mental health with conditions ranging from mild to acute, including targeted in-hospital creative sessions.

“I’ve been writing music since I was nine years old, writing on and off over the years. I’ve done college courses, university courses, but I always felt like a bit of an outcast. Here I feel comfortable, everyone is so friendly, everyone has an understanding of what I am going through because they have been through something similar themselves.”

Susan

OUR APPROACH

Raw Sounds works directly with a target group who often lack representation and a voice in society. Due to our location in the heart of Brixton, and the disproportionate levels of African, African Caribbean and mixed heritage populations experiencing mental ill health, we reach a high percentage of these communities, with around 75% of our 500 yearly referrals

falling into these groups. 65% of people admitted to the borough’s acute psychiatric wards are from African and Caribbean backgrounds, despite forming only 20% of its population. Raw Sounds participants include:

- the most vulnerable in society, who often have the least access to therapeutic creative activities, which can be particularly beneficial to this client group and support ongoing recovery. Their respective conditions or ongoing trauma often mean they find it hard to engage in mainstream society;
- highly skilled, talented musicians, sometimes graduate students who have been referred to us due to the severe stress they are experiencing through their studies or otherwise.

The ethos of the creative workshops is democratic and participant-led with the tutors encouraging participants to find their voices, to engage and express their experience and beliefs. The combination of these two groups, the non-hierarchical approach and the professional performance opportunities mean the artistic bar is set high, but in a supportive and safe space, encouraging great productivity and commitment. Participants experience a level of control and self-direction which they may not be feeling outside of the sessions, particularly if they are in hospital.

⁷⁷ rawmusicmedia.co.uk/raw-sounds.

“I love Raw Sounds as well as welcoming those with mental health problems with open arms and embracing all abilities, I was struck by how wonderfully multicultural the clientele are. Making the music that is produced brilliantly eclectic and profoundly interesting to listen to. It’s exciting to be a part of Raw Sounds.”

Alice

Our success in engaging diverse participants in Raw Sounds is through the nature of our practice. Studies show music can play a valuable role in recovery from mental illness. It stimulates emotional, aesthetic and spiritual responses, develops physical, cognitive and social skills and improves expression, communication and confidence. In contrast to a more traditional ‘music therapy’ model, Western classical music does not form the basis of our practice, which is driven by the music participants are listening to and writing themselves – soul, rap, R&B, rock, electronic music.

Our freelance staff are themselves mainly local and representative of South London’s communities. Artists like Floetic Lara or Rhoda Dakar, both experienced Raw Sounds tutors, are well known to many as successful commercial artists in their own right who have come up through South London communities. They are therefore authentic and credible role models, know the area and cover a diverse range of musical genres. Like our other tutors, they have developed an innate knowledge of good practice in working with those with mental health needs by working closely with care staff and coordinators over the years.

The Raw Sounds model incorporates culturally relevant music activities and learning opportunities. We celebrate Black History Month with special events, and will be part of a major high-profile project which will commemorate the Brixton Riots in 2021. Partnerships with social enterprises such as Hood Mentality specifically target young Black men in Lambeth through the use of poetry and free writing to explore their mental health. Raw Sounds is designed to incorporate progression

with volunteering opportunities for participants who have direct experience themselves of the settings we are delivering in, so provides credibility through role modelling and visible progression opportunities for those taking part. There is a substantial waiting list for our in-house services both for participants and volunteers, and more demand than we can currently cater for from the hospitals.

“From the moment I heard about Raw Sounds, I wanted to get involved. There was a waiting list of a few months; and then a space came up for me. The first session ABSOLUTELY blew me away!!! The talent!!!! The teaching together amazing. There are people of all ethnicities; and we are invited to be equally involved.”

Sharon

WHAT WE’VE LEARNT

We have learnt a lot over the years about the level of support that our participants need and the importance of working really closely with care coordinators to ensure that their needs are being met. Mental health services are not meeting the needs of those we serve – evidenced by the fact that the outcomes over the last 20 years have not improved for these communities. In contrast, participating in Raw Sounds can provide fulfilment and deep engagement. We have really seen this year particularly how important the social aspect of the work is, and how having access to the right kit/equipment (or not) can have a massive effect on ability to participate and progress.

Going forward we want to get participants more involved in our organisational and governance processes so they have a say in our direction of travel, are more visible to others, and gain experience in different realms of personal and professional development.

Shifting the Dial

BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE & PARTNERS

ABOUT US

Shifting the Dial is a three-year project to promote positive mental health among young African Caribbean men in Birmingham funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. It is a partnership between Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP), First Class Foundation, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT) and the Centre for Mental Health.

The project uses cultural activities including drama and spoken word to encourage young black men to discuss and explore mental health issues and build resilience through promoting wellbeing, improving self-esteem and encouraging personal development. We aim to increase economic opportunities, raise mental health awareness and encourage inclusion whilst addressing the weathering effects of racism, discrimination, negative self-image and invisibility.

OUR APPROACH

Each partner organisation has a different but complementary role. This has created a broad integrated programme which includes the development of employment skills and support as well as creative practice and mental health support. First Class Foundation is a community organisation specialising in working with young Black men. It runs regular #DearYoungers forums where relatable male role models and young black men promote strength based dialogue on wellbeing in culturally informed spaces. The REP runs a group called Lightpost Theatre (LPT) meeting every Tuesday evening to work on original, culturally relevant productions. The project is independently evaluated by the Centre for Mental Health.

Cultural activities are run by The REP and First Class Foundation at a range of places within Birmingham and Solihull, working alongside artists and facilitators who the participants can relate to, trust and can inspire them for their futures.

Lightpost Theatre (LPT) offers a supportive brotherhood of young black men aged 16-25. All come to the group with varying levels of need and expectation. For many in the group, this is often the only space they have to express their interests and talents in theatre making. The group is usually 15 people strong at any one time.

The project includes visits from figures working in the theatre and other industries, as well as one-to-one support for those applying to drama school, university or jobs.

There are many success stories from the project and there is a sense of pride from the young men involved in LPT. Some of the first cohort of members have now gone onto drama school, others have become peer ambassadors or found other opportunities within the theatre and wider creative industries. The project has nurtured the next generation of writers and directors. Recently, two new programme leaders were appointed, both of whom were former members of LPT.

BSMHFT are instrumental as a partner to ensure best practice in addressing mental health throughout the project's design, and there are a number of ways in which key members of the Trust's staff are engaged with promoting community awareness of mental health. For example, one project saw members of LPT deliver a forum theatre performance in a secure unit, engaging patients and sharing experiences. This type of engagement with

patients and the community goes a long way to destigmatising ill mental health and promotes access to NHS services. In addition the Trust are engaged with promoting access to training and work experience for participants within the range of job roles at the Trust itself, and also with other regional employers.

Another key element of Shifting the Dial is to advocate for changes in the systems that historically hold young African Caribbean men back. The partners work together to initiate conversations with sector policy makers and seniors through “Fix It” events. So far, Fix It events have been held around how the education system can better help young Black men thrive in school, public health approaches to youth violence, and at the time of George Floyd’s murder in the US a series called Fix It: Time to Breathe, addressing the topics of trauma, justice and healing.

“You feel like you haven’t got a chance, especially with Brummies ... no one’s looking for Brummies [for acting roles] and especially for people of colour, you’re even lower down on the line. And you’re here at LPT with everybody and ... all of a sudden this fire becomes I NEED to be doing this (acting) ... and you start asking questions ‘how do I get there?’ ... in the week I can be topsy turvy, one day I can’t be arsed, I’m not getting out of bed today and feel low, and then I’ll come in here and be like NO this is for me, this is the platform for me and what I’m supposed to be doing... and the only way I’m going to bring LPT up is by making this thing better and bigger, feeding each other’s energy.”

**Young man, LPT, focus group for an evaluation
by the Centre for Mental Health**

During the pandemic work has of course moved online but continues apace. Lightpost began to work on a new play by CJ Lloyd Webley called Constructed, set on a construction site and exploring the culture of working class Black men in Britain. The group implemented a soft audition process where members of the group were encouraged to try out different roles, expanding their horizons, and building confidence in the process. This was happening at the time of George Floyd’s murder in the US and served as a welcome distraction from exhaustion that many black people were feeling. To inform the show CJ conducted interviews with a local construction worker, who agreed to share insight on the industry with the group.

Shifting the Dial demonstrates what can be achieved when a group of organisations work together to tackle the things that really matter to their local community. It is also a brilliant example of how theatre can work with other sectors to tackle some of the most pressing issues in our society. The project will continue to grow, with a proposal for a schools and education specific element of the programme currently in development.

Selected Baring Foundation resources

All resources can be found on our website www.baringfoundation.org.uk



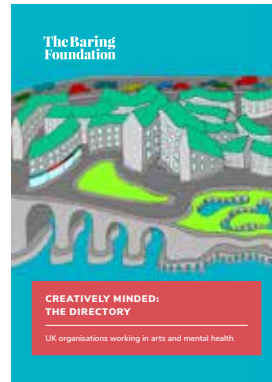
An initial mapping study of participatory arts and mental health activity in the UK – the first report of our Arts & Mental Health programme

David Cutler
2020



Creatively minded and young: a selection of arts and mental health projects with, by and for children and young people

Compiled by
Harriet Lowe
2020



Creatively minded: the directory – UK organisations working in arts and mental health
2021



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