



WIRED4MUSIC

Wired4Music reaching out: harnessing the power of youth voice in challenging settings

Case study: young refugees and asylum seekers from the perspective of Soundmix and Fairbeats, written by Gawain Hewitt

The delivery organisations

Soundmix provides structured music and arts activities for young refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in London. Project Manager, Andrea Kempson, was interviewed for this case study.

Fairbeats! is a music organisation that works in partnership with the supplementary school at Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) and the holiday club at Refugee Action Kingston (RAK). Co-founder, Catherine Carter, was interviewed for this case study.

The client group

Soundmix works with teenagers. A key consideration within their work is participant immigration status, which can have an impact on attendance. Most of the young people have recently arrived in the UK, are separated from their families and have often escaped traumatic experiences in their country of origin. If they are asylum seekers, not yet granted refugee status, they will still have a commitment to meetings as part of their asylum application. If they have indefinite leave to remain, humanitarian protection or refugee status then they don't have the burden of asylum application meetings; they are considered British Citizens, or are treated as such in terms of support and access to facilities, and therefore are more likely to be able to commit to a project such as those run by Soundmix.

Fairbeats!' ongoing work is mainly with primary school-aged children although their projects sometimes engage secondary school-aged children and young people. The children and their families suffer from a range of challenges: mental health illness, isolation, destitution and homelessness, and limited English language. Catherine Carter from Fairbeats! explained how the success of their engagement relies heavily upon building strong, trusting relationships with families; the level of a families' desire to participate in music activity; and families trusting the project and feeling like the work is relevant to them.

Specific access issues to consider with this group

- Providing food makes attending a project or event more feasible for refugee and asylum participants, and meets a dominant support need. Wired4Music group meetings generally take place in a restaurant or with food provided. With this in mind, it is important that dietary requirements such as Halal are taken into account, and that this information is shared with the group prior to the event.
- Location is mostly a barrier when it takes a participant outside their comfort zone or prior experience. The anxiety that comes with this is magnified for many Soundmix and Fairbeats! participants. Confidence with public transport, and understanding of how to use it, varies within this community. Some young people are really comfortable taking the tube, and others are not as



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confident, finding the tube system overwhelming, preferring to go with an adult that they trust. Even if they are 15-16 years old some still prefer to be chaperoned. Involvement is dependent upon a combination of location and confidence levels, although it's likely that young people interested in a project like Wired4Music are more confident about travelling independently.

- Language can present a barrier, although those who have been in the UK for longer tend to have greater command of English. Some young people lack confidence in their level of English, and speaking in front of those they don't know makes them feel nervous or anxious.
- It is worth stating that, in common with most young people, an asylum seeker or refugee won't want to be identified as 'different' to the group, rather they want to be there as a young person, the same as anyone else, which means support is best when sensitive and discreet.
- One focus of Fairbeats!' work is supporting young people to engage with other music providers and projects. Doing so requires significant additional support. Participants require multiple reminders in advance, along with an information pack in which the language is very simple including lots of pictures to show where they are going and what to expect. Young people are given travel money and are reminded of the session, for example a text the night before. Fairbeats!' experience has been that young people are really keen to engage with new projects, they're just not necessarily that used to making journeys outside of the areas that they know.
- As well as preparing the young people for the practicalities, Fairbeats! has found that you need to prepare them for the emotional experience, for being in a different space. Young people's sense of self belief and confidence can be fragile, so it would require extra thinking to make sure this group feel that their views are valued.

Recommendations for inclusion

Transport and food being covered financially is excellent as it removes a really big barrier for this group and basically makes it possible. Both Soundmix and Fairbeats! said that they could arrange for a support staff to attend as well to help with translation and any issues.

"I think what would be best is to make sure that there is support for young people from our end for young people who feel that they need a little more support in order to attend something like this because of the nature of their status. "

Andrea Kempson, Soundmix

"Working with a referral partner would be important as they can give support in terms of preparation, travel, support, relationships with family, trust, communication and links to other agencies. These are specialist skills and individual knowledge, so not necessarily what hosts of a project such as Wired4Music would be expected to be trained and skilled in."

Catherine Carter, Fairbeats