Amal Project Report

September 2024 to July 2025

Prepared by John Martin, Project Director

The Project:

Following ca. 15 years of using the arts with Female Survivors of Trafficking with great success, we have now piloted a project with Male Survivors of Trafficking. We first commissioned research into the conditions of male survivors and based our recruitment on this.

This group, initially called “Men Get Creative”, subsequently, after ideas from the group, changed the name to **Amal** meaning Hope in Arabic.

The aim of the year was to test the viability of our work with this new community of participants.

The Need:

Male Survivors of Human Trafficking are almost invisible within an already well hidden community. Our research had informed us that male survivors were likely to be more difficult to find, that they may have complex psychological needs and may be very withdrawn, depressed, lacking in confidence and communication skills.

Those we found had, at least, been identified as having been in modern day slavery and were in care. Nevertheless, even in their safe houses, they tended to spend 22 hours a day in their rooms and not engage in any kind of social activity.

How Amal Meets this Need:

This pilot year was precisely to respond to this need with the skills and methods we have at Pan.

The team included:

- Adwoa Dickson, music therapist, who has led 15 years of working with female survivors.
- Bruno Batista, a fine artist who was trafficked as a young man and brings lived experience to the work.
- John Martin, who a has led workshops with traumatised participants in many situations for two decades.

Together we developed sensitive ways of bringing confidence back to participants while encouraging them to explore their creativity (often reduced by trauma) and their sense of playfulness and trusting each other.

The results have been recognised as successful by the participants, by their Safe House staff and by the team.

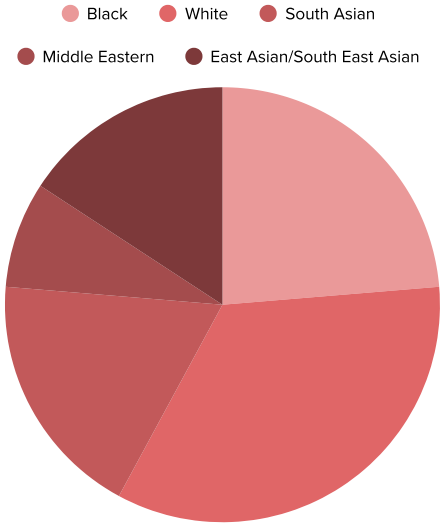
Throughout the Year

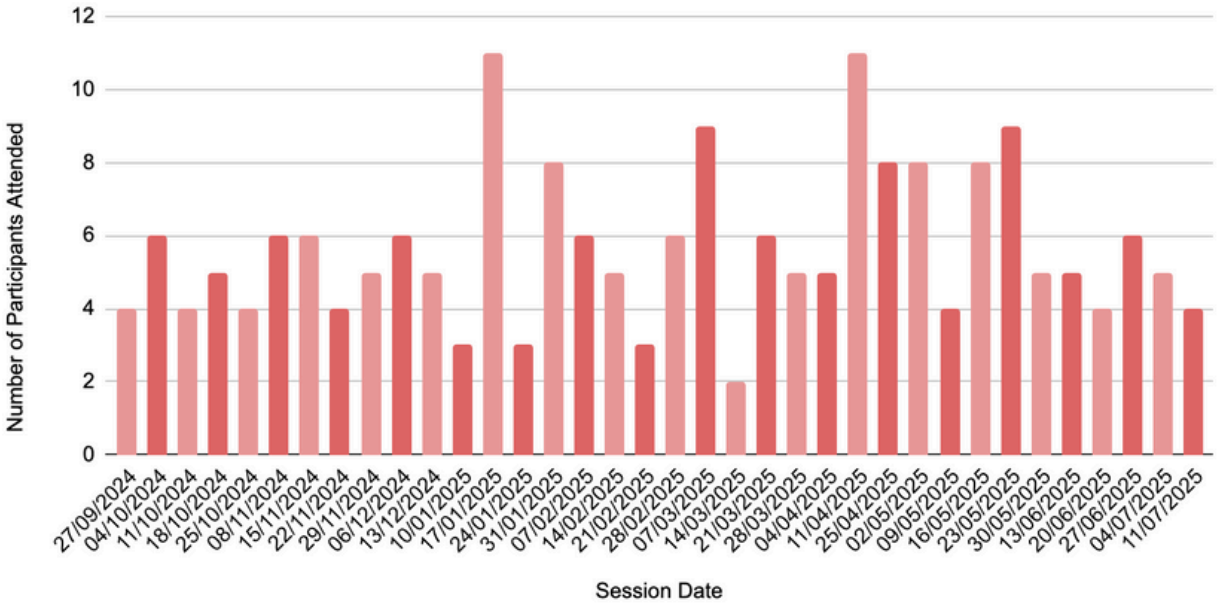
Sessions:

- We delivered **36 weekly sessions**, from 27/09/24 to 11/07/25, on Fridays between 11.30am and 1pm, breaking only for the Christmas and Easter holidays.
- The sessions started at The Old Diorama Arts Centre in Euston and then moved to a safe house run by SJOG (St John of God Hospitaliers) nearby.
- We took the participants on a trip to the Saatchi Gallery in Chelsea to see the 'Flowers – Flora in Contemporary Art & Culture' exhibit in April.
- There was a total of **38 participants.** 40% of these participants attended 5 or more sessions.
- This totalled **510 participant hours** of workshops.
- The ethnic breakdown of the group was 24% Black, 34% White, 18% South Asian, 8% Middle Eastern and 16% East Asian/South East Asian.

Attendance:

- The nature of these men's lives means there was a very fluid turnover of participants.
- We initially had lower attendance when hosting the sessions at The Old Diorama, leading us to move the sessions to within a safe house.
- We had a few regular participants stop coming to our sessions as they were unexpectedly moved out of the safe house.
- Other participants had inconsistent attendance due to health problems and hospital/doctors appointments.
- We expect the inconsistency to continue for attendance in this project, due to the nature of the participants' lives.





Participant Attendance September 2024 - July 2025

Project Overview

Over the period of three “terms” we have seen significant progress in many of the participants. However it is in the nature of the lives of our participants that there is great fluidity on their lives.

This may mean that they are transferred from their safe house to elsewhere, even out of London, some may find work and not be able to attend, some may have major health problems and others may have vicissitudinous mental health which affects attendance and engagement.

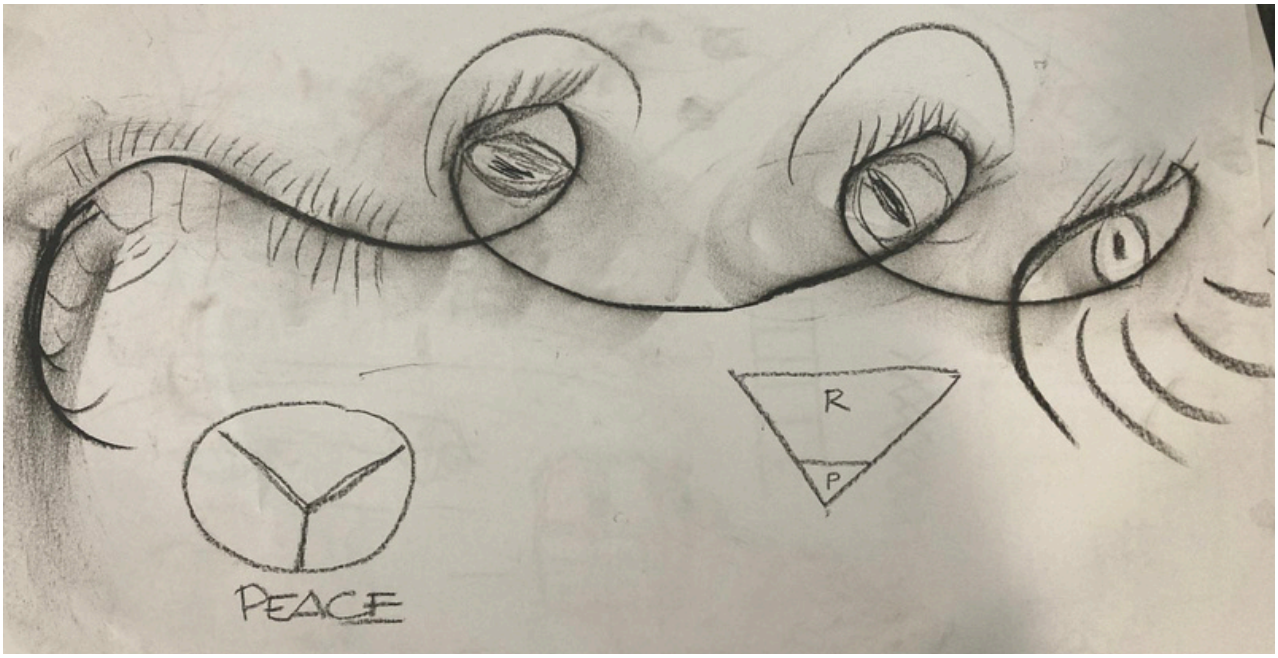
Examples of the above:

- S*, a regular attendee showing great progress, was suddenly transferred to Manchester with no notice.
- V*, another regular attendee, told us on one day that he could not come again as he was being moved to independent accommodation.
- C* had to undergo major surgery for wounds inflicted during his slavery and convalescence was long.
- J*, one of our most regular supporters, became depressed about his Home Office claim to remain and it was difficult for staff to get him out of bed in the mornings.
- There were several occasions when some participants were obviously intoxicated, although never in a dangerous way to our staff or each other.
- Some who tried out the sessions in the early period were very nervous and would keep on their coats, hats and rucksacks as if they might want to leave at any moment.

The result of this was that we had to accept very quickly that there would not be a regularly attending bonded group and we had to adapt to whoever came on a particular day, trying to pick up on threads explored in previous weeks to give whatever continuity we could. This did not diminish the work but changed its nature.

The change of venue from Old Diorama to the SJOG safe house also had pros and cons:

- Pros:
  - More people attended as they did not have to make the journey, albeit short, from safe house to Old Diorama.
  - The safe house staff were on hand to knock on doors and remind them of the forthcoming sessions.
  - Staff were able to attend sessions to understand the work and often to benefit from it themselves by participating.
- Cons:
  - The space in the safe house was smaller, less neutral, sometimes not available.
  - Participants from outside the safe house could not easily attend.



Project Overview Continued

Testing Methodologies:

The year was experimental in so far as we did not know what would be most effective for this group.

Here is a summary of some of what we discovered to be useful:

- Simple ‘warm up’ stretches and vocals. Many participants were very limited in their movement, possibly as they are not active in their lives or due to psycho-physical factors. These had to be gently progressive but we saw real progress and this was appreciated by participants.
- ‘Game based’ movement exercises, e.g. ‘Stop, Start , Jump, Clap’.
- Image Making - this was particularly popular, both in the abstract and theme based, eg. their favourite leisure, their favourite work, their current mood, their aspirations, etc. These sometimes grew out of ‘Mirror’ and ‘Complete The Image’ exercises and they were, by the end of the year, able to bring these to life, add sounds, etc, which brought a lot of fun.
- Rhythm Exercises - from simple clapping to more complex voice rhythm, eg. ‘Banana Mango’ with their own words. They also created a rhythm voice piece with parts ‘Coffee Coffee, Tea’.
- Trust Exercises - overcame many barriers and revealed surprised and calm faces.
- Art work - this took a larger part of our work than normal but gave another channel for creativity to be tried and accessed. Simple exercises allowed feelings and interpretations to emerge and find form and voice. In general solo worked better than group work. Some participants were, at first, very hesitant even to put charcoal/paint to paper, as if the could not commit, but over time found it easier and much more fun.

Observations:

- The participants did not know each others names although they lived in the same house. The name games underlined, but helped, this.
- There were occasional moments when our female colleague felt a little uncomfortable with the attention she received. We made it a rule that she should never be alone in the room with the participants.
- Staff development. There were very many occasions when staff took part in sessions and they all reported great benefits from so doing.

External Visits:

We were able, through our colleague facilitator, to arrange a visit to the Saatchi Gallery to see the exhibition “Flowers”.

The only way the men would travel was to take them in taxis but this expense was worth it. They progressed from being excited to hesitant about entering the space, to feeling curious and fascinated. They were particularly interested in the ‘Fleurs Mortes’ a walk through installation of many thousand dried flowers. Some appreciated the “world’ it created , others in the mechanics of putting it all together.

A follow up workshop, on visuals of colour and silhouette, gave everyone a chance. The outing (literally getting ‘out’) and the impact of art on such a scale was clearly enjoyable and liberating.

External Partnerships, Funders & Supporters

Partnerships:

In December 2022 we contracted Ray Malone of Heads Bodies Legs to conduct research on Males Survivors of Trafficking in the UK. This research enabled us to organise meetings with survivors, with managers of safe houses, relevant charity leaders and case workers to explore how our work could be implemented and useful.

We then worked with ATLEU who connected us with Bruno Batista, an artist who they had worked with. He was running art workshops for homeless people. He was a survivor of trafficking himself, and we met with him to discuss how best to work with other male survivors of trafficking. It was clear his artistic methods were incredibly effective, so we invited him to facilitate with us on this project.

In March 2024 we entered into a relationship with Hestia Housing and Support to help us in recruiting participants for our pilot project. They were unable to find enough participants to start the project, so we then partnered with The Salvation Army. They connected us with local councils working with survivors and also safe houses, meaning we had enough interest to start the pilot. The Salvation Army also asked our facilitator, Bruno Batista, to give a talk at a conference in Birmingham to other people and organisations that work with survivors of trafficking and modern slavery. His talk was on his own experiences and the work that Pan does.

In September 2024 we ran 5 pilot sessions, which were a success, leading us to launch the project fully and confirm sessions for the rest of our working year, until July 2025. It was immediately clear that the work was needed.

We ran 12 sessions from September to January at The Old Diorama Arts Centre in Euston. The offered space in kind for the pilot sessions.

From January, the sessions were run in a safe house run by SJOG (St John of God) Hospitaller Services. We found this helped greatly with accessibility for the participants, increasing the attendance. The staff at the safe house were invaluable in helping and encouraging the participants leave their rooms and join the sessions.

In April and July 2025 we were invited to participate in Southwark Cathedral's Modern Slavery Awareness Days. Our Amies Freedom Choir performed on both days, we also ran a stall on both days talking about our work with survivors of trafficking and modern slavery, including our work with male survivors.

Funders:

Amal was funded from our Strategic Development allotment.

Evaluation

As this was a pilot project, testing ideas and methodologies, we have relied on gathering observations from weekly sessions in session notes, from participants in “checkouts” and from staff in the safe house.

With the fluid nature of the group a number of micro case-studies best shows how confidence, communication and creativity have been affected by the work.

- **S*** entered as a very timid presence with a back support belt and almost no speech. However he was always first in the space with a willing smile. He was careful in movement and hesitant in engagement. Some key moments seemed to help him ‘emerge’. One was when relatively few people were in the room, which sometimes helps those present. He very happily helped compose the ‘Coffee Coffee Tea’ rhythm piece and seemed to enjoy the ownership. He similarly progressed when doing the trust exercises, particularly the blind leading which relaxed his whole body. Thereafter his speech started, his playfulness increased, the support belt was not visible and he very happily created a moving, sound based body as a chef, which we believe he had once been.
- **C*** came with a smile but had a shattered hip (“from what they did to me”). In an early art exercise he showed his childhood as a block of red, saying “I had no childhood. They took it”. He found the image exercises a useful way of revisiting how he had been treated and said this had been helpful. In a final exercise he painted his year’s journey from angry to “being in the best place”. His hip operation absented him for a while but he returned for the final sessions.
- **J*** was almost wordless when he first came. He seemed blocked and unhappy. The sessions seemed to remove the barriers and his laughter and smiles were ever more visible. He started to speak and be quick into image making, although external factors upset him towards the end of the year he had made major steps in language, confidence and creativity.
- **Ja*** - see case study.

Key Words

From the evaluations run across the year, the following key words and themes have emerged as the most prevalent, and give a snapshot towards the impact of the projects on the participants.

Evaluation Continued

Whilst we did not focus on measuring our key objectives with this project, the following are quotes from the participants show that there was growth in these areas.

Improved Confidence: Participant feedback

- "*I felt overwhelmed at the beginning, but, as we worked, that fell away and I feel great.*"
- "*The men change when they enter your space. They start to smile and to talk with each other. this stays after the session. It changes them.*" - SJOG staff member

Improved Communication/Expression: Participant feedback

- **"***There's great cooperation, great feeling of a team, from us and from the leaders.*"
- "*At the beginning I was very tense, even saying my name clearly was difficult. But something happened and I am now totally relaxed.*"
- "*I understand now about my emotions. when the bodies change the emotions change. This will help me express my emotions, help me with my emotions.*"

Increased Engagement in Creative Activities: Participant feedback

- "*It was very enjoyable, and good to bring elements of my history into the images. It helped me with them.*"
- "*This shows how I felt tense and angry at the start. Then the sessions calmed me and now I have come through adversity to be in the best time of my life.*" - A participant about his artwork

Additional Outcomes/Observations:

The predominant feedback we received from the participants was that the sessions helped them feel relaxed and clear headed, something they were not feeling in any other environment.

- "*You don't know how much this means to me. I am really grateful for all you do.*"
- "*This is the most relaxed I have ever seen him.*" - SJOG staff member
- "*When I am here I feel peaceful, here I can feel normal.*"
- "*I like the way it exercises the head and the body. Because of that it de-stresses me.*"
- "*When I came in I was in a state, but the work makes me see clearly. I am ready for the day.*"
- "*For the first time, I was able to have a clear head. Normally it is going all over the place.*"
- "*Doing the session really gives me hope. It reminds me that there are good people.*"
- "*S* looked like a different person after the (trust) exercise. He looked like everything had been released.*" - one participant speaking about another

The following are quotes from professionals that we have worked with this year on Amal:

- "*It may seem small to you, but this is something they look forward to, which helps them bond, helps them reflect on themselves and their potential.*" - Robert Oleksy, Manager of SJOG Safe House
- "*All of our staff that experienced your amazing Fridays [...] all came back with high praise and very positive feedback. We can really see how it is beneficial for our clients. It is a great space for them (and us!) to creatively and collectively relax, explore, and process the stress/trauma.*" - Max Leung, SJOG Coordinator
- "*I just wanted to let you know that one of our investigation teams had great success in referring a male victim of MSHT to the Pan Creative Workshop. This had a really positive impact on the individual and the process of referral was very smooth and took less than 24 hours. Please pass on our thanks – clearly an excellent project and I'm very glad I attended the MSEOG to hear about it directly.*" - Iain Ross, Vulnerability Partnership and Training, Modern Slavery Team, Central Specialist Crime,Metropolitan Police Service

The participants used the following words to describe Amal; "*Peaceful, great, relaxing, enjoyable, helpful, de-stressing, hopeful, calming*".

Artist Facilitators

John Martin is a founding member of Pan and has been the Artistic Director throughout its history.

Originally a dancer and actor in a previous life, he trained at Bristol University and the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris. In recent years he has concentrated on using the Arts for Social Change and has been invited by various global NGOs to deliver programmes to aid the rehabilitation of people affected by war, natural disaster and poverty in many countries. He regularly writes and teaches on issues around interculturalism, creativity and theatre for development both in the UK and abroad.

John worked as the Project Director for Amal this year, using his extensive experience and knowledge to shape this project into the success it has been.

Adwoa Dickson, Amies' Project Director, worked as an Artist Facilitator on Amal this year. She brought her over a decades worth of experience working with survivors of trafficking to Amal, working with John guide the direction of the project.

Adwoa has worked with Pan on various projects from almost its inception. She helped found the Amies project in 2010. It started as a pilot project for 20 women who were all survivors of trafficking with the Poppy Project. In 2014 the Amies Freedom Choir was born. It was clear from the beginning of the project the positive impact that the work had on the participants. Adwoa has directed multiple offshoots of Amies across the UK throughout her time with Pan, for both female survivors of trafficking and also other groups of vulnerable women and now male survivors of trafficking.

Bruno Batista joined Pan as a Peer Facilitator for Amal this year.

He brings with him his knowledge and experience of using art to help vulnerable people with their trauma as well as his lived experience of trafficking.

Bruno also works as a facilitator at London's Saatchi Gallery.

Case Studies

The following is a case study of a participant, mapping his progress across the year.

Case Study Ja*

Ja* is a big man from Afghanistan. He shuffled into the room about halfway through the year. His body showed signs of stiffness, unable to move easily, even to raise his arms or turn his neck. His face seemed similarly 'frozen', his eyes un-engaged. He had almost no language to communicate. We got "Afghanistan" and " No English" from him.

Ja*'s progress was by micro-stages. There was no great leap forward. We noticed the tiny changes, each one impressive in itself. Ja* did not progress to full confidence, full communication or easy creativity but the progress from his initial state was remarkable.

- The regular warm ups were difficult for him. It was therefore amazing that he finally managed to lift his arms above shoulder level. His neck turned slightly. He walked (albeit carefully) rather than shuffling.
- He smiled. This took months but went from sheepish to confident smiling. A joy to see.
- He would watch others and copy them rather than think of his own movement or idea. Until we talked of favourite leisure activities. He loved walking in the park and was able to show how he walked, what he saw and the pleasure in it. It was his.
- From uncertain drawing and painting he finished with an extremely carefully designed and executed painting of hills, trees and a house. This, he told us, was his "dream".

We know Ja* still has a way to go but we are confident he has made great strides along that path.

Sometimes it is the small steps and the slow progress which is the success.

Conclusion

We started the working year not knowing how the project would go. The research done by Ray Malone indicated that male survivors of trafficking would be harder to reach. The structures currently in place to help survivors of trafficking are mostly directed towards women, this is changing, but it will take time. This means that we could not recruit participants for Amal in the same way that we do for Amies - which is referrals from partner organisations. We also found that male survivors were far less likely to leave their rooms/homes. Our Amies participants are often in education, work schemes or other charity projects. This is due to the amount of support available for female survivors. This means that travelling to another location to attend our projects is something they are more used to doing. This does not mean they are less in need, just that the support they receive is working. Male survivors often become homeless, meaning they are more likely to be supported by homelessness organisations than anti-trafficking organisations.

All of this meant that we had difficulty getting participants into our sessions. This was helped massively by moving our sessions into a safe house. It meant that participants who were unable or reluctant to travel still had access to our work. However, it was very difficult to bring in participants from other places, meaning they were effectively excluded from the project for the latter half of this year.

It was immediately clear that our work was needed and beneficial. Whilst our Amies participants in the past have brought other women to our sessions from the safe houses they live in, the men we worked this year often didn't know the names of the other men in the safe house with them. Our work allowed the men we worked with to be creative, expressive and sociable. It gave them a place to relax and to focus their minds on more positive things.

This was our first year working with male survivors of trafficking and we can conclude that our work is greatly needed. There are not many other creative provisions for this group available at the moment. We will continue Amal next year, continuing our relationship with SJOG. We hope to move the project to Pan's new centre once it becomes more established, to ensure we are accessible to as many participants as possible.

We look forward to another year of Amal and the joy and development it can bring to Male Survivors of Trafficking.