



Amies Freedom Choir Project Report

September 2024 to July 2025

Prepared by Cat Foley, Project Manager

The Amies Freedom Choir is for women who have survived human trafficking and modern slavery. The project aims to develop musical and cultural awareness by exploring music from a wide variety of cultures and languages as well as empowering participants to write their own music, make professional recordings, and explore performing in an informal work share.

We use the therapeutic power of group singing to support participants to form friendships and build confidence. Pan artists and professional musicians from different musical traditions support the choir in building a repertoire of songs, vocal and choral skills and developing musical and cultural understanding. Singing in the choir helps the women to build their confidence and find their voice, in a safe and supportive environment.

The Amies participants face many struggles connected to their lived experience of human trafficking and modern slavery: housing insecurity, long waits for documentation, financial insecurity, loneliness, poor mental and physical health, difficulty sleeping, PTSD and other trauma-related disorders and conditions. What is observed that they most need is the ability to see themselves in a different way, to form connections with others and to be noticed by others in a positive way. Whilst there is a lot of development of the vocal and choral skill of the group, the real work is being done before the participants sing a note: in the communal sharing of food, in the laughter during warm up games, in the cheers of support and visible changes in confidence levels when the participants are empowered to verbally and physically present themselves to the group by saying their name and using physicality to pose confidently.

Our participants come to Pan because our work is enjoyable, different to their everyday life, brings them confidence and self respect, allows them to reflect positively on their lives and gives them space for their creative imaginations to flourish - all elements largely missing in their lives. Our participants tell us that involvement in our projects leads to increased confidence, increased communication, increased engagement in creative activities, improved connections and increased hope and aspirations.

These results go on to deliver short-term outcomes: empowering and helping individuals to consider positive narratives of their futures; bringing joy and enabling social harmony. Pan's work contributes to participants having a positive self-identity and a sense of belonging, which ultimately aids social cohesion, integration and social harmony. It helps our participants to overcome prejudice and obstacles and see new life paths opening up.

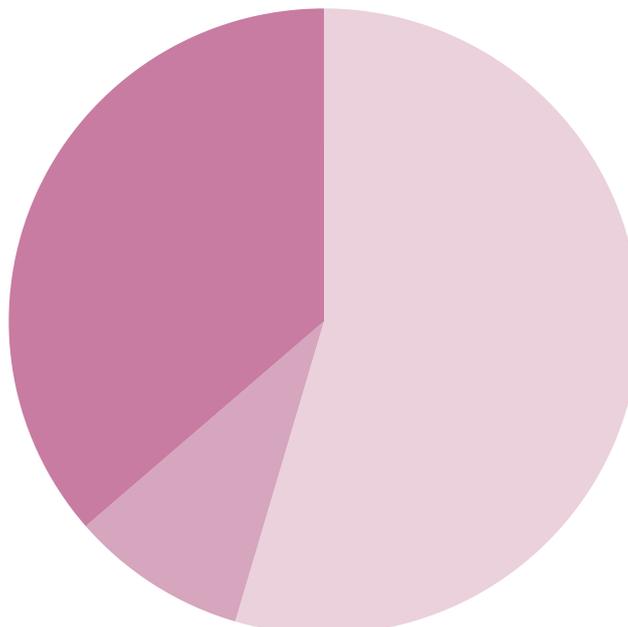


Throughout the Year

Sessions:

- We delivered 35 **regular sessions**, once a week, during term time (23/09/24 to 07/07/25), on Mondays between 5:45pm and 8pm in Homerton.
- We provided sessions for a total of **22 participants**, with 95% of these participants attending 5 or more sessions.
- They had 2 masterclasses, Afro-Cuban music workshops with Bombo Productions.
- They recorded 3 songs, alongside the Alumnae choir with sound recordist Joy Stacey, and wrote a new piece of music, with the working title 'Deep Breath'.
- The group attended a performance of the Snowman at the Peacock theatre in December 2024. They also attended a performance of the Amies Alumnae Choir at Southwark Cathedral in July.
- They did a workshare performance for an invited audience of 20 people alongside the Alumnae Choir, which for many was their first performance.
- In all we delivered **1069 participant hours** of workshops and creative activities.
- The ethnic breakdown of the group is 55% Black, 9% White, 36% Asian/middle eastern.
- All participants identify as women, and are referred to the projects by professional services supporting them as survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

● Black ● White ● Asian/Middle Eastern





Throughout the Year

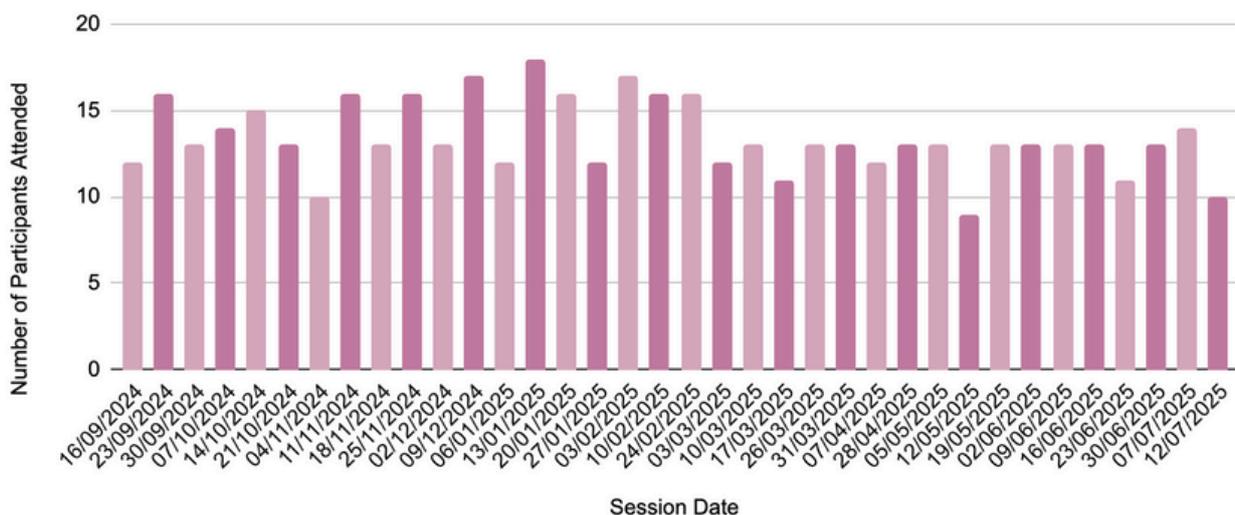
Recruitment and Retention:

Additional to the 22 project participants, there were a further 9 on the roll - invited to join the project after being referred, but did not engage, some due to starting college, or being moved away from safehouses/out of London. The project continues to hold more than 20 participants on the roll, to ensure that sessions are adequately full. There is a waiting list, and when participants drop off, or don't turn up for 6 weeks, spots will be opened to those on the waiting list.

Recruitment occurs through referral from safehouses, key workers, case workers, professional services and other professionals. The Freedom choir has a fabulous reputation, with frequent requests for participants to join. Occasionally a participant will bring a friend, but it is ensured that this is followed by proper referral to ensure the group is the right fit for them, and that the correct caseworker information is obtained.

Staff have seen an increase in referral requests for participants who are refugees/asylum seekers, but who do not have experience of trafficking/modern slavery. The team have been supporting voluntary organisations with tools with which to have these conversations, without being intrusive, to ensure that the experiences of the women in the group is protected, and retains its specificity.

One participant left mid-project as she got an engineering apprenticeship. 6 participants will have the opportunity to remain in the Freedom Choir next year, either because they started a little later in the year, had patchy attendance (eg due to Ramadan), or because they will benefit from a little more time in the beginner group. 2 participants will be asked to join the Alumnae Choir and also stay on to act as Peer Volunteers in the Freedom Choir, 3 will graduate to the Alumnae Choir, and 4 will be kept on 'the books' for a possible pilot of some shorter term projects - 'The Amies Experience'.



Participant Attendance September 2024 - July 2025

Project Overview

The first term of the project started really strongly, with many of the new participants showing considerable skill in music, as well as incredible focus and passion.

The facilitators were excited to plan the year feeling that they could push the musical level of the group - starting to work on harmonies and dynamics even by session 2.

The choir co-wrote a group agreement to describe how they would like the space to feel, which they read to the group each week. Some struggled to be confident in raising their opinions in this session (4 weeks into the start of the project) and the facilitators reflected on how to support quieter members to be heard in the group.

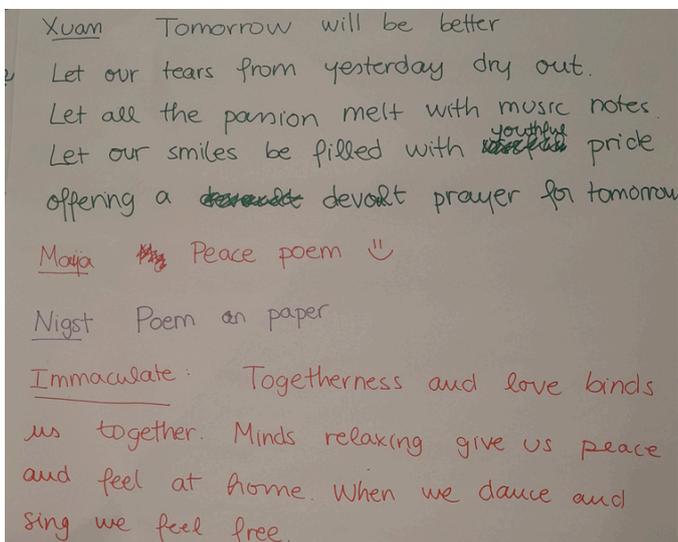
They started work on 'Make them Hear You' which is a challenging piece with many lyrics - the participants worked hard to manage it, and found the lyrics to be poignant.

To end the term, the choir visited The Peacock Theatre to see a production of 'The Snowman'.

During the second term of the project the energy built in the room each week, with participants visibly growing in confidence when reading the group agreement, saying their names in front of the group, in physical activities and stretches. Several new participants joined the group and settled in well. Facilitators noticed there was a particular focus on the higher voices in the choir, with participants struggling to have the confidence to sing high. The team switched some of the voice parts around which has allowed the overall sound of the choir to improve.

Facilitators started a songwriting process, asking the participants firstly what they would like to write a song about. They returned the following week with lots of creative writing to share. Participants read out lyrics they had written, and shared songs from their cultures, singing in Yoruba, Mandarin and Amharic. At the end of term, the participants had masterclasses in Afro-Cuban music with Bombo Productions.

In the third term, the choir developed their piece of new writing, exploring musical improvisation around the words they had generated, exploring melody, harmony, call and response. They continued to work on other repertoire - focussing on details such as dynamics, harmony and vocal bend. The working title 'Deep Breath' emerged.



They took part in a recording alongside the Alumnae choir and performed in an informal work-share to Pan supporters, friends and family - and debuted the new song, which the audience loved. One participant who had arrived very shy, surprised everyone by speaking out to give thanks to Adwoa, the Choir Director. The team note what a milestone this was for her, and what a journey she'd been on. The participants also visited Southwark cathedral to see a performance by the Alumnae Choir.

External Partnerships, Funders & Supporters

Partnerships:

We continued to run weekly sessions in Homerton Baptist Church, who support the project with reduced venue hire costs. We received referrals from organisations we have worked with before: Medaille, Hestia, Body and Soul, Women for Refugee Women, Praxis and Ella's House. We also developed our relationship with the Hackney migrant charity, Akwaaba - offering their volunteers advice, and welcoming one of their members onto the project.

We retained our existing partnership with Bombo Productions, providing two Masterclasses in Afro-Cuban music. The participants enjoy the style of music, and the addition of movement and percussion which comes with the style. We developed a new relationship with sound recordist Joy Stacey, who was able to complete audio recordings of the choirs music in their regular venue - bringing equipment in. This created a relaxed atmosphere and produced great outcomes.

We continued our relationship with Sadlers Wells 'Get into Dance' programme, attending a production of 'The Snowman' at the Peacock Theatre. The Amies groups were involved with Southwark Cathedral's Modern Slavery Awareness programming, and Amies Freedom participants invited to watch a performance of the Alumnae choir in July.

Funders:

Funding came from Albert Gubay, Lifelines and Scottish Power.

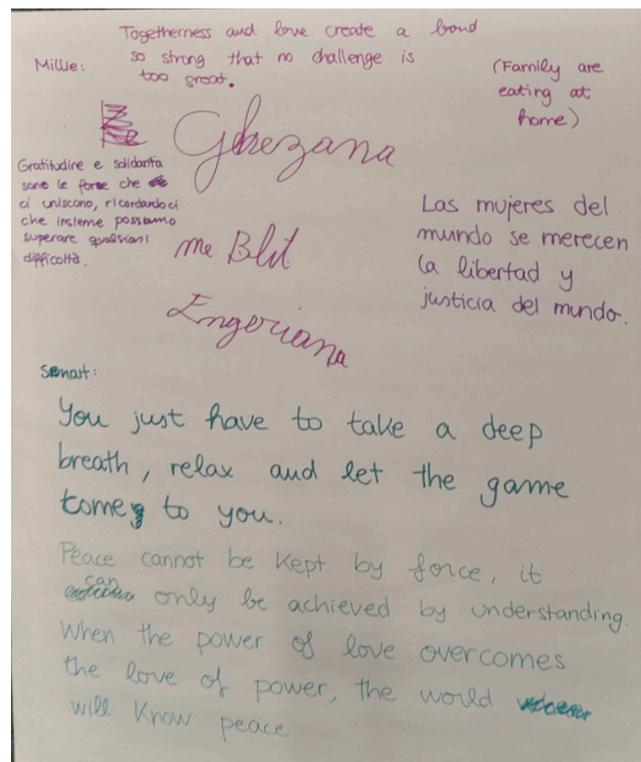


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Next Steps:

Two Amies Freedom Choir participants will take part in Pan's 'Emerge' programme - a year long project to train budding facilitators.





Evaluation

We examined the impact of the project on this year’s participants using a mixture of self reported reflections from the participants, both written and verbal, session reports from the Project Director, as well as session observations, using the Pan project objectives to measure the success of the project which are:

- Improved confidence
- Improved communication/expression skills
- Increased engagement in creative activities

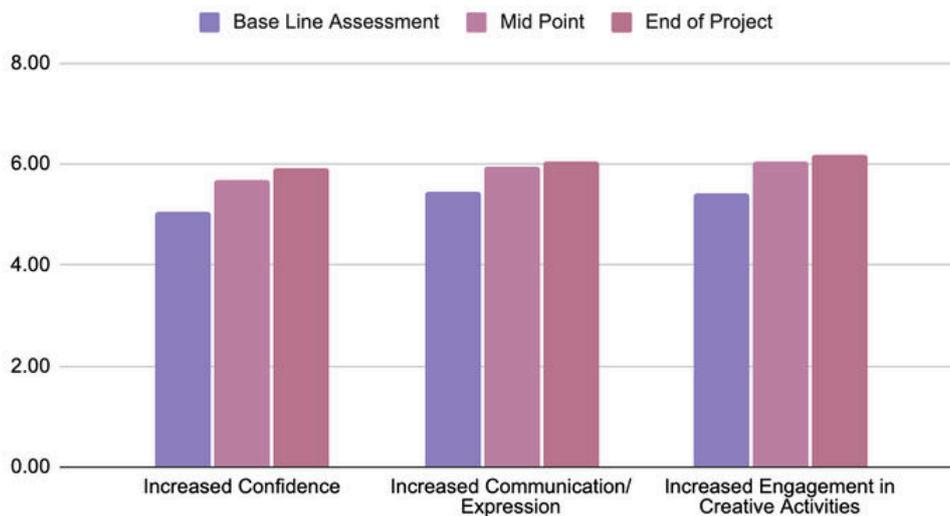
A baseline assessment is taken of each individual participant when they first attend the project, with further assessments taking place midway and at end of the project. 2-3 participants are invited for a 1-2-1 interview. Case studies are also written at the end of the project.

The variety of evaluation methods allows the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The weekly staff monitoring allows the team to see small changes in an individual participant’s progress, as well as identifying any additional needs a participant might have. Participants have a wide range of life-experiences, so monitoring exercises focus on observing the change in participant progress against outcomes, rather than observing the overall level. Direct feedback from the participants allows us to understand their needs and for our project goals to be led by them.

There are some limitations to our evaluation methods, including written and spoken language barriers, experiences of trauma resulting in a loss of agency in participants expressing their feelings and participants responding to questions with what they ‘think you want to hear’. The goal is that the variety of methods mitigates these limitations as much as is possible.

There was noticeable improvement across the year for all three categories that we measure.

Progress towards outcomes - Amies Freedom Choir 2024-25



It is observed that there are a number of participants who haven’t yet shown increases across certain outcomes. This is explained by the team as women who appreciate the community aspects of participation and have made many social connections, but do not always fully engage with some aspects of the sessions - sometimes due to health issues, language abilities, and processing ability. They are still however, valued and appreciated.

Amies Freedom Choir	Increased	Maintained
Increased Confidence	70%	100%
Increased Communication/Expression	70%	100%
Increased Engagement in Creative Activities	65%	100%

Key Outcomes

Amies Freedom Choir participants show clear progress in confidence, communication, creative engagement, and emotional wellbeing. Many start the project with feelings of shyness, isolation or low self-worth but develop a strong sense of belonging and self-expression over time.

Through shared musical and creative experiences, women spoke of overcoming anxiety, rediscovering their voices, and building trust in others. They found not only joy in singing, dancing, and poetry but also connections - likening the group to family or home. Several noted improved English, greater emotional resilience, and a shift from passive to proactive participation.

Creative activities have helped participants manage their stress and trauma, the participants who have fulfilled leadership roles as volunteers have thrived on the opportunity to encourage others. What emerges powerfully is a transformation from silence to expression, from fear to freedom, and from isolation to community. This is a group where women heal together - through creativity, solidarity, and shared joy.

Improved Confidence:

The women described moving from fear and shyness to singing, performing, and speaking with greater self-belief. Their growth was supported by the safe, welcoming environment of the group, the consistency of weekly rehearsals and was reinforced by peer encouragement. Several participants spoke of the impact of performing or speaking solo for the first time, and others describe feeling more emotionally grounded after sessions. Development of confidence extended beyond singing, with participants expressing pride in their progress and in their ability to help others.

"Before I was singing I was shy, but now with this group, there is no need to be shy, I just sing. I'm comfortable, I'm relaxed." X - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

"I couldn't... sing a song... My voice is really small... Now I think I have more confidence, but still not in public. Speaking in front of everybody's always a struggle." C - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

"Making new music together that is nice as well makes us think, okay, we can do what we didn't do before." C - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

The facilitators note a huge leap in the confidence of one participant in particular, M, who has had an incredibly challenging year, and taken a few small breaks. She rose to the challenge of performing to invited guests at a work share with confidence and bravery. *"M made a huge leap last year, the biggest leap I've ever seen in a small space of time with a participant."*

Improved Communication/Expression:

Many participants reflected on how the project supported their ability to communicate — not just in English, but emotionally and creatively. Some shared original poetry in multiple languages, others spoke of speaking up for the first time, or of being able to talk more easily with others. Expression took many forms: spoken word, song, movement, and sharing feelings. Participants linked this outcome closely to the trusting, respectful environment and the support they received from both facilitators and peers.

"Since I joined, I change a lot. I improve my English, it's going better now, I feel more confident because before I was scared to speak English, but now I feel more confident... I speak. I understand." M - Amies Freedom Choir Peer Volunteer

"I'm very confident to say my name whenever I come here... Especially when you're depressed... Then you come here, like today... You relax. You are relaxed now. I'm okay." X - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

Facilitators commented that one participant in particular who is very quiet and reserved really excelled in the shared writing task for the songwriting sessions. She went away and wrote a poem in Amharic, which her niece helped her translate into English. Her words were so expressive, and the opportunity to work bilingually produced a depth of artistic expression which the facilitators hadn't seen from her before.

Increased Engagement in Creative Activities:

Participants expressed a deepening engagement with creative expression, with several reflecting on rediscovered or new creative practices. Many described the sessions as uplifting and joyful, helping them reconnect with music, dance, and even instruments like piano and violin (which some participants are learning in college). Activities such as singing, writing poetry, and performing helped participants process emotions, relieve stress, and feel more connected to others. For some, creative engagement also became a tool for identity-building and self-recovery.

"I decided to... focus on music... I lost my confidence in singing... but because of the exercise we did during the choir... my voice actually progress[ed] and I found some vibration." C - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

"When we're singing together, I love to hear 'Ooh, that was so good.' It's a nice thing. I think most of the time I'm a loner... But when we sing together, it sounds really good. I like it." X - Amies Freedom Choir Participant

Facilitators were astounded with how much material the group were able to generate, both in and out of the sessions. They approached the songwriting with so many ideas, some cultural and historical where participants shared songs from their own cultures, and also creative writing around a theme. The musical activities around songwriting developed enough material to write several songs, and the participants got a lot out of the process and the product - seeing the piece come to life, and taking it to the final point of recording and performing it.

Additional Outcomes/ Observations:

Sense of Belonging and Social Connection: Many described the group as "family" or "home," emphasising the importance of shared meals, cultural exchange, and mutual support.

Emotional Healing and Wellbeing: Participants repeatedly mentioned feeling uplifted, less anxious, or emotionally supported after sessions.

Leadership and Aspiration: two participants took on voluntary roles, helping others to integrate. Some participants expressed interest in future roles as facilitators, which will be explored through Pan's 'Emerge' programme in 2025-26.

Intercultural Learning and Respect: The group fostered understanding across cultures and religions, with participants noting how much they learned from one another.

Resilience and Empowerment: The project helped participants reframe challenges, cope with trauma, and imagine new futures.

"I'm very confident to say my name whenever I come here. It helps me a lot. Especially when you are told, say your name. Do some dancing, do some activity, and all what we do is fun. Especially when we, when you come, when you are very depressed anxiety running up and down. But when we come here, you relax. You are relaxed now. I'm okay." I - Amies Choir Participant



Case Studies

Case Study B - Prepared by Adwoa Dickson, Project Director

Maria, heard about the Amies Freedom Choir, through a charity that she works with supporting migrants and disadvantaged Britons access employment justice and improve their social mobility. Discovering that certain life experiences she had, meant that she herself survived human trafficking was an impetus to get herself referred to the choir. Having no support worker, she was referred by her GP with multiple indications of depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and multiple overdoses.

She was a latecomer to the choir, joining after it had been up and running for three months. It seemed like it was a 'baptism of fire' in some ways and she was resistant to certain aspects but despite this, kept on coming.

At the beginning of the year, we encourage our participants to take ownership of the space and their identity by saying their names out loud and individually in a circle. Little by little, we encourage them to stand in the middle of the circle and gradually progress to moving around the circle in different styles and saying their names at the end of their procession.

Having missed the build up session by session to the point where it was comfortable to move around the circle, **Maria** was visibly uncomfortable doing this and only ever said her name from her standing position, occasionally with a small gesture. Her body language was awkward and she sought comfort in stances where she would hold her arms, twisting her hands.

In the pre-session time where we would have something to eat and time for socialising, she would hold herself apart and spend that time drawing. She drew fellow participants and a team member and whatever subject she was interested in at the time. Sometimes she would take herself away from the social space into the empty rehearsal room.

She was introverted and barely spoke to anyone, although when participants spoke with her she responded. When asked by the project director if she was enjoying the experience of being in the choir, she said *"I like coming here. I can be the weirdo that I am and don't have to pretend to be something that I'm not."*

Maria has a really good voice and is very musical, however, her expression when she was singing was blank and seemingly disengaged.

On the last day of the year working with the choir, she surprised everyone!

The first surprise was her smiling as she sang and looking totally invested in the music. The second was her standing up and speaking out loud to the audience members to thank the choir director for her time and work and the third was her telling a member of the team how much she enjoyed working with her even if she didn't look like she was in the moment.

Maria's agency in owning the space and talking with sincerity about the what the choir meant to her was for the team, a massive breakthrough and the biggest leap of confidence in the shortest space of time that the team has ever witnessed!



Conclusion

The Amies Freedom Choir has had an exceptionally good year, with participants joining the project who were excited in particular with music. The community thrived, with many participants forming lasting friendships and connections. New participants joining part-way through the project were welcomed and integrated quickly. The final recording session and work-share were fantastic, showcasing a choir that had worked hard to produce their own music, and to work on the details of other repertoire songs. They developed skills in harmony, dynamics, vocal blend and performance skills, and gained a lot of confidence from creative writing and using their first language.

5 participants will progress to the Amies Alumnae Choir, and facilitators feel they will fit in well and rise to the challenge of more public performances.

Next year the team are hoping to pilot 'The Amies Experience' which will be short-form projects of approximately 8 weeks, allowing engagement for long-standing Amies participants, as well as providing access routes to new participants who may be on a waiting list as they missed the recruitment phase, or if the project is oversubscribed. Several of the current Freedom choir members will be invited to join these projects. The team will use what they learned in the Amies Graduation choir to inform this different way of working, and to ensure that progress towards outcomes is still achieved during shorter projects.

Many of the participants continue to face struggles in their lives around housing, money, immigration status and isolation. The team will take part in CPD training towards the start of the next project year to further develop skills and signposting networks, focussing around self harm and suicide.

The project started with a Director, 2 artist facilitators and one support facilitator who left after term 1. The team adapted well to this change, and felt that going forwards they could operate without the additional staff member. Next year the team would like to explore working with volunteers who can especially support with meals for participants, and cover some childcare support when needed.

One participant in particular attended the project this year with a son who needs additional support. She said at the end of the project *"My children love Amies which makes me comfortable here"*. There was a lot of work to be done to ensure safe practice for children in the Amies projects, and several developments in policy and procedure.

For the next year of the project, 6 participants will stay on from this year's cohort, 2 of whom will act as peer volunteers and the others to continue their development in the project. Recruitment will take place from August to November 2025, working with some existing partners, and some new who are more firmly rooted in the location of the sessions.

We look forward to another year of the Amies Freedom Choir and the joy and development it can bring to women who have survived human trafficking and modern slavery.

