Amies London Project Report

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Amies London January 2022 - July 2023

In the period January 2022- July 2023 is slightly more than a year for a number of reasons, the first is the need in the post-pandemic period to give participants a little more time in the project, and secondly as Amies is now moving to an academic year model, running September-July. In this period there have been 52 Amies sessions amounting to 104 hours of session time.

The Amies London group have visited the Old Vic 3 times, attended 2 Old Vic workshops and attended 2 Pan Summer parties. They have also been visited by representatives from organisations such as Hera and The Maya Centre, signposting to mental health support and employability programmes.

Amies Choirs facilitator FO has joined the Amies London team as a facilitator and is developing her skills in Drama facilitation. She brings specific skills to the space by using her dance and physical fitness background. There have been 2 volunteers working with the group, AF and AG, both developing their skills in applied theatre, focussing on working with women in a trauma aware way.

Staff have all attended Safeguarding and Trauma Informed Practice training, Old Vic CPD training as well as internal training on rhythm and regular supervision. Senior staff have had First Aid and Mental Health First Aid training.

The following report examines the impact of the project on this year's participants, using a mixture of self reported data from the participants, reports from the Project Director, as well as interviews and observations from the sessions, 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 early in the project, and then is followed with regular intervals across the project. Participants are regularly invited to participate in group feedback and evaluation activities such as shared reflections and games, as well as being invited for 1-1 interviews to share their experiences of the project.

Throughout the project, through interviews and reflective discussions with the project participants, 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:

Amies London 2022-23

Attendance

From January 2022- July 2023 there have been **52 Amies London sessions** across London, amounting to **104 hours of session time and 1260 participant hours**. Of **27 total participants**, there were 26 active participants plus 1 of their children, with the largest session welcoming 19 participants. All participants identify as women, and are referred to the projects by professional services supporting them as survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

	Amies London 2022-23
Black	67%
Asian/ Middle Eastern	22%
White	11%

Amies London consistently welcomes 17-19 participants each week. During the period in question, the group had some many changes in who makes up the 20 participants due to participants being moved out of London, college commitments, family commitments and unknown personal reasons. The group has operated rolling recruitment through the year, allowing new members to join each term when space becomes available. The participants who started before January 2023 will finish with the project this July, but those who have joined afterwards will be invited to stay so that they get the benefit of a full year of sessions.

One of the former peer volunteers has come back to the group following the birth of her child, and now brings her to be cared for whilst she takes part in the session.

Recruitment into the group occurs through referral from safehouses, key workers, case workers, professional services and other professionals. 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. There will be continued rolling recruitment throughout the year, with most of the cohort engaging with sessions from September 2023-July 2024. Engagement is good and attendance is consistent, and a slightly longer roll is kept to ensure sessions are full.

Evaluation Methodology

- Weekly observational session notes through staff and volunteer team discussions, logged by the Project Director.
- Monthly observations by evaluator/ project manager
- Observational monitoring of participants progress against outcomes by Project Director and Artist Facilitators (every 3-6 months)
- Annual group reflection and self-evaluative activities (coded to measure progress against outcomes)
- Annual case study interviews
- Participant questionnaires
- Ad-hoc discussions of impact with participants

Strengths of this evaluation methodology are that a wide variety of activity are included, and regular observations take place, allowing the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data:
- Weekly staff observational monitoring allows the team to see small changes in participant's progress, as well as identifying any adjustments needed to improve access to activities. 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.
- Individual case-studies allow focus on the journey of each participant.
- 1-2-1 interviews provide an opportunity for participants to speak freely unencumbered by group dynamics. Responses to questions are open so as to discover additional outcomes. This narrative is coded to find emerging themes and to measure progress against outcomes.

Limitations to the evaluation methodology:
- Written and spoken language barriers in conducting reflective questioning in English,
- Experiences of trauma resulting in a loss of agency in participants expressing their feelings.
- Participants struggle with self-reflective activities and can sometimes say what they 'think you want to hear' when responding to a question, so opportunity is given for qualitative reflective conversations to take place and cross reference this with staff observations.

Description of project

Amies London is a multi-arts programme of sessions for female survivors of human trafficking. The Amies London group meet weekly to make friends, learn new skills and get creative together. They sing, dance, perform, share stories and laugh a lot. The drama-based workshops help to empower the women to rediscover their confidence and aspirations, leading to engagement in education, training and employment. Movement and mindfulness allow participants the opportunity to reconnect with their bodies, to feel embedded in the here-and-now and to improve their sense of belonging.

In the creative sessions, facilitators utilise a wide range of drama and music-based methods, including physical and vocal exercises, games, storytelling, song-writing, group singing, chorus work, role-play and physical theatre.

The participants face many struggles: housing insecurity, long waits for documentation, financial insecurity, loneliness, poor mental and physical health, difficulty sleeping, ptsd and other trauma-related disorders and conditions. It is observed that the greatest need is the increased ability of the participants 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 expressive storytelling and physical theatre skills during the sessions, many of the skills are developed before they even enter the space: in the communal sharing of food, in the laughter during warm up games, in the cheers of support when one by one each person struts into the middle of the circle, and in the visible changes in confidence as participants announce their name to the group.

Theory of Change Narrative

Our key 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 programmes are delivered through group workshops, creating performance material for sharing with others, although it is the process of creativity which is the most important. 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. As long as there are people who need this type of intervention and as long as there are funds to enable it, Pan will continue to devote itself to continuing its work in Arts for Social Change.

Project Summary

Every session starts with some meditation and mindfulness, followed by a check in, where participants are invited to select words from the circle, or use their own, to describe how they are feeling that day. This supports participants to feel more confident with their spoken English, as well as having the ability to speak confidently and candidly in front of a group. It also allows participants to voice their concerns and worries before entering the creative space.

Sessions include a lot of movement: stretching and mobility, coordination and balance as well as dance and movement games.
Movement exercises are adapted for participants with mobility aids, and adaptations are given for those who need it. Even introducing yourself to the group can be a movement game- entering the circle as a model, or a wrestler to physically 'try on' confidence.

"My brain is not working properly- so when I'm looking for something I forget what I'm looking for. When we are asked to introduce ourselves, I'm always happy. I'm always happy to be here - all the things that I'm thinking, I just forget everything. I'm always happy to be here. I love what they are doing here. Because when we gather ourselves here now everybody is happy, but when everybody go back, everybody - we are having difficulties with housing and everything. The people that are here, we have something that is bringing us here. This Amies group, the way that they are doing this for us, I so appreciate them."

The Amies London have visited the Old Vic 3 times alongside the Amies Freedom Choir group, watching shows and participating in workshops. It is noted that the participants have adapted very well to working with new people, and guest practitioners are made to feel very welcome by the participants, showing huge growth in their skills from when they first came to us in 2022.

“For me it was a fabulous experience and to be honest, I hadn’t experienced that kind of outing before and it was really good and I enjoyed it. Coupled with the fact that it was like ‘WOW’ there were so many people different people there, rows and rows, even students were there with their teachers, it was really good.”
So this was the first time you've been to the theatre and seen a play?
“Yes”
The first time for many of you?
“Yes”"

Participant group reflection after Old Vic Trip to see A Christmas Carol

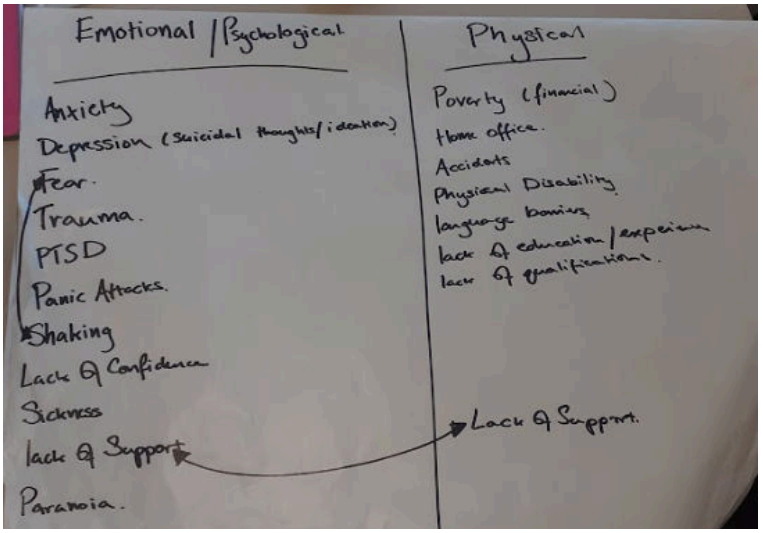
“For me, it was like I was in another world entirely, it was marvellous. I loved the sound, I loved the dress, I loved they were welcoming as the first thing when we arrived, giving us tangerines. It was magic for me. When they were coming out with the chains, I was blown away. It’s lovely and I want to say thank you very much. I believe us going out like this is a good experience, for me and all the other women here. Thank you very much, I really appreciate it.”

Participant group reflection after Old Vic Trip to see A Christmas Carol

All participants were also invited to the Pan Summer party in summer 2023, bringing them to a new venue in central London and providing the opportunity to meet participants from other Pan projects, as well as meet the trustees and other Pan staff members. They show great courage and resilience to expand their experience in this way and in coming to new places with new people.

When a photographer came into the space, the Amies Group were asked to create an image that best described their experience of Amies, and these are the images they created:

Participants use writing, dance and drama exercises to consider barriers which people may face in life, and to imagine ways in which these barriers may be overcome. By identifying barriers, they become easier for participants to understand and is important in how they start to imagine better futures for themselves.



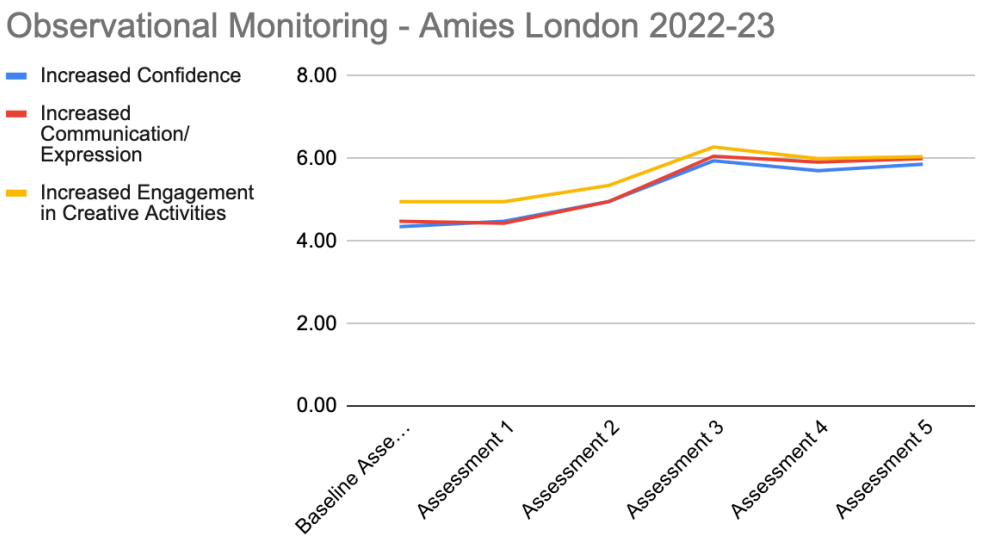
Outcomes

The outcomes focussed on in this report are:

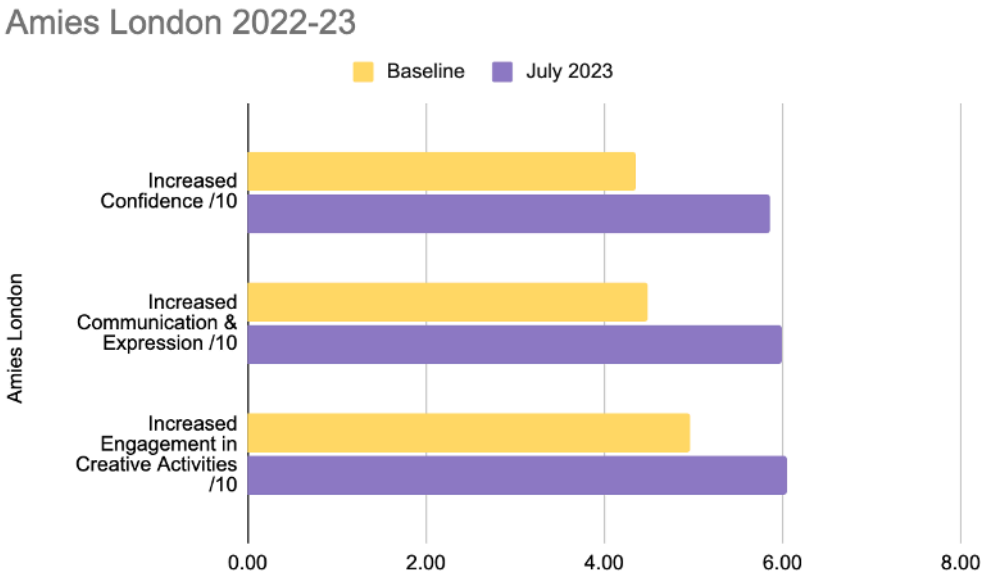
- Participant's Improved Confidence
- Participant's Improved Communication and Expression skills
- Participant's Improved Engagement in Creative Activities

This will be examined firstly on observational monitoring data from staff, led by the Project Director, and secondly through analysis of the various group and 1-2-1 self-reflective activities and interviews.

Observational Monitoring



The trend over time shows that some participants started to face barriers in 2023 which affected their confidence, communication and engagement. The overall trend showed an increase across the board.



Jan 2022-Jul 2023	No of participants
Confidence increased	71%
Confidence sustained	25%
Confidence reduced	4%
Communication increased	75%
Communication sustained	21%
Communication reduced	4%
Engagement increased	71%
Engagement sustained	25%
Engagement reduced	4%

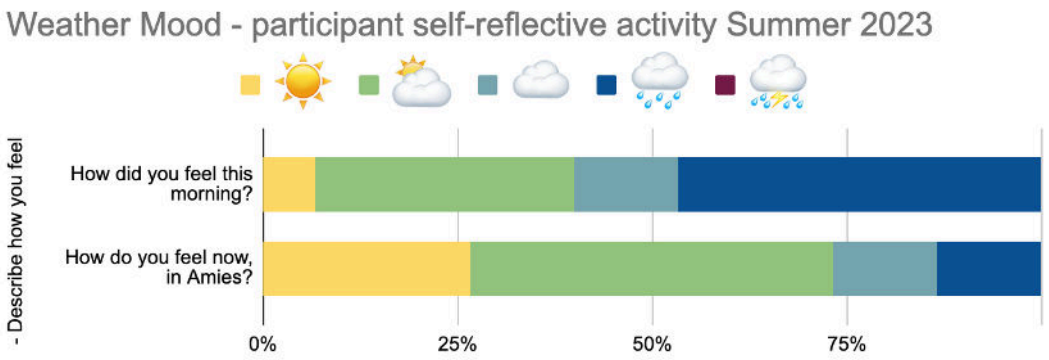
The team reflects that participants having ownership and taking charge of something shows a bigger increase in confidence, such as peer volunteering. Taking the lead for example in the physical warm ups, or speaking in front of the group during the names exercises or reading the group agreement each week provides participants with experience of public speaking, gives participants the experience of leading a group and promotes confidence and leadership which can be used in other aspects of life. Staff also comment that taking time to speak to and acknowledge participants individually is really important to help them to grow in confidence.

Forming friendships within the group improves participants' consistency of attendance, and both play a big factor in improving communication. Staff also notice that over time participants show a demonstrable improvement in empathy and working as part of a team, supporting each other to thrive.

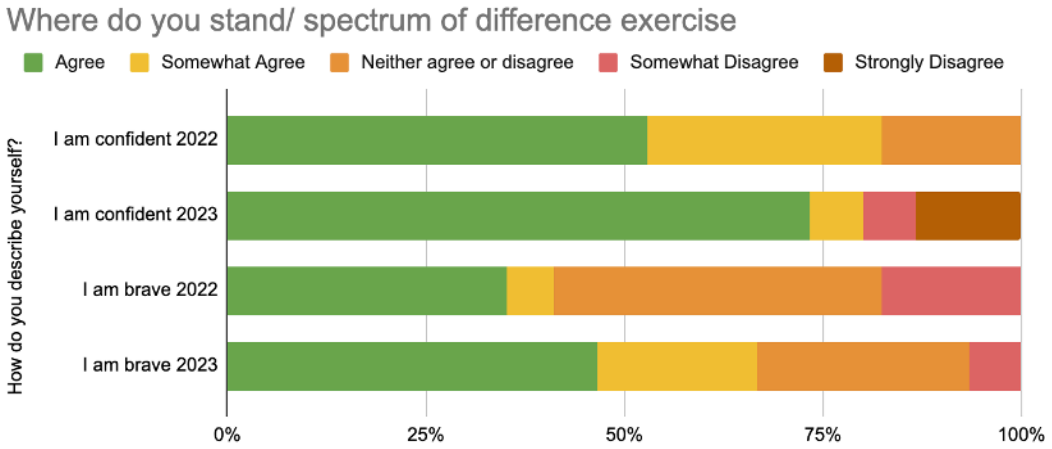
Consistency and doing the same things each week and allowing them to get better at them provides a sense of achievement and growth. Participants understand that it’s a safe space which increases their confidence and engagement as they feel able to be themselves. The use of play is highly effective in allowing participants the emotional freedom to find themselves again.

Breathing and self care exercises are used each week and can support the participants to look after their physical and mental health outside of sessions by knowing how to access a feeling of joy that can be replicated in other areas of life through music, movement and song.

Participant Self reflection



Participants describe a clear improvement in their mood as a result of coming to Amies sessions.



Participants describe an overall trend of increased confidence and bravery as a result of coming to Amies sessions. Of the Participants who described themselves ‘somewhat disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ in this exercise are in 2 cases newly referred in the last couple of months, so have not had the benefit of feeling more confident yet as a result of the project. However 1 of the other respondents had identified themself as highly confident when they arrived, but staff perceive this as a defence mechanism, and only now through increased trust have they found the ability to say that they in fact don’t feel very confident. This is a key example of the nuance present in this work, especially when asking participants with trauma backgrounds to be self reflective.

Outcome: Improved Confidence (participant self-reflection)

> *"Formerly I was shy, now I meet many different people. We are socialising, having funny jokes and playing."*
>
> *"When I came, I had no confidence, I didn't know how to perform or speak. I have improved my skills and confidence. I am a different person. I can dance now! Before I was shy. We have great discipline, it's a very friendly place and things are very nice. I appreciate it"*
>
> *"First time I don't have confidence, I don't speak english, like, scared or something like that. I'm number one now. I have full confidence now."*
>
> *"Thank you Adwoa and everyone in this room. Without everyone here, I'm not ME. I'm realising myself now, I'm growing, growing brighter and growing in confidence to express myself. I'm grateful as a person for what you do to bring me into reality."*

Participating in Amies London has proven to be a transformative experience, particularly in terms of boosting participants' confidence. Through their involvement, individuals have been able to overcome shyness and embrace newfound self-assurance. They have discovered the joy of socialising and engaging with others, allowing them to break free from their previous inhibitions. The supportive and disciplined environment within the group has played a crucial role in fostering personal growth and skill development. As a result, participants have found themselves more willing to take risks and explore their creative potential. This newfound confidence extends beyond the realm of performance, positively impacting other aspects of their lives. Amies serves as a catalyst for self-discovery and empowers individuals to express themselves authentically and boldly.

Outcome: Improved communication/expression skills (participant self-reflection)

> *"I feel shy, much, before - in speaking English. Now I have confidence. If someone says something I don't understand I say, 'excuse me, please repeat'"*
>
> *"When I look at our connection, I think of how nice it is we are sharing food and the space. It's impossible sometimes when we are outside to connect. It's teaching me how to connect to each other. Thank you so much for this time. I'm lonely at home, I need company, Thank you all."*
>
> *"I'm very happy. I'm enjoying it. I can talk more now, I was shy before. I don't know how to explain it but, it's in my heart. I'm expressing it."*
>
> *"My English is improvement. I don't give up and now my English is up because I come here"*

When asked, 93% of Amies London participants said that being in Amies Improved their communication. Participating in the drama group has significantly improved communication and expression skills. Members now feel more confident speaking English, willingly seeking clarification when needed. The group's connection has taught them the importance of connecting with others and provided much-needed companionship. Overcoming shyness, participants now express themselves more freely. Not giving up, they have witnessed noticeable improvements in their English proficiency. The Amies group has a profound transformative impact on communication, confidence, connection, and personal growth.

Outcome: Increased engagement in creative activities (participant self-reflection)

> *"When I go home I tell people it's like we are children here with all the fun we have laughing and playing!"*
>
> *"People out there think we (as migrants) have nothing to offer, but here we are doing this. Adwoa has accepted me, thank you. And look at us now. More people should come and see us."*
>
> *"I never feel alone when I come to this group"*
> *"I feel happy. I forget everything when I come here"*
>
> *"I like the people. I come here, I feel comfortable and then no more stress, I come here- I feel better. For me, that's good. They make you a little bit good, happy. You see different faces, different friends, play, laugh, it's happy."*
>
> *"I tell myself, my god, thank you, I see family here. That day, I'm happy. I enjoyed that day, I go home and I'm sleeping A LOT. Because it was my first time coming to a group. Since coming to this country, since coming to the safehouse, it's my first time in a group."*

These quotes demonstrate the increased engagement in creative activities within the drama group. Participants describe the joyful and playful atmosphere, emphasising the sense of belonging and acceptance they feel. Being part of the group helps them forget their worries and find happiness. The supportive environment alleviates stress and provides a sense of comfort, as well as supporting participants to challenge the misconception that migrants have 'nothing to offer', focussing on the acceptance they have received and the progress they have made within the group. Amies acts as a source of happiness and a means of escaping from life's challenges. Participants find comfort, stress relief, and a sense of improvement when they are surrounded by like-minded individuals. The group provides a supportive environment that fosters a sense of family, creating a memorable experience and a newfound appreciation for the power of group dynamics. Amies offers participants a space to connect, thrive, and find solace.

Participants appreciate the outings such as the trips to the Old Vic, which further enhance their engagement in creative activities. The physical warm ups have especially shown an additional outcome, which is increased physical fitness, body positivity and participants report better sleep.

Participant Case Study 1

When S first joined she was very timid and not confident about speaking in English. Within the first few weeks she had a major panic attack outside the session due to seeing someone she thought was her former abusive husband who she is in hiding from. However, she returned to the session the following week, and the team supported her with the police report and her recovery from that. She still suffers with panic attacks, but always returns to session, citing it as one of the ways she copes with her stress.

A keen baker who often brings food to share during sessions, she's completed a baking course, and is now doing a chef's course where she teaches people her recipes. She describes that she couldn't do that without the support of the Amies groups. She imagines that she is in

the room where the sessions occur when she is delivering her instructions on her course. She has a dream of opening her own bakery and since we met her is starting to imagine the real possibility of that. The team have signposted her towards the Sophie Hayes employability course as a stepping stone to the Hera Entrepreneurship course. She continues to attend ESOL courses alongside her culinary course.

Recently in a session she did a piece of narration for the story box, and she was suddenly vocal and present, eloquent. She was grateful for the opportunity to do that, and said “I couldn’t believe I could do that, thank you for the opportunity to do that.”
When she arrives and greets the other participants, she’s a hugger. She describes that it’s the only time in her life now that she experiences positive touch, and is grateful for the community and friendships she has built in sessions.

"First time I came it was a party, the Amies team gave me a lot of love and support. I lost the love and support from my family a long time ago. I know now I can get that here. I had some big problems with a few things, and the staff at Amies helped me, that's the only reason that I'm 'still here'. After that first time, the staff told the friend I had come with to 'please bring her next time' and I thought 'it's so nice that people like me here, and care that they would like to see me again'. The first time I brought a cake to share, everyone appreciated it so much, it was so nice. Before I was here, I was in a prison. A prison, and I was not appreciated. Noone thanked me for food, or for anything, but now I feel so appreciated. Thank you."

This participant has been invited to be a Peer Volunteer for the Amies London sessions 2023-24, as she has shown such growth and development.

Participant Case Study 2
When F arrived she was very withdrawn and seemed to not understand a lot of what was happening in sessions. She wouldn’t engage and was not present in the sessions. Her processing seemed slow, and often she seemed to have very little ability to connect with those around her. Her spoken English was basic, she couldn’t construct a sentence, and when speaking she’d lose the thread of what she was saying. She was frustrated that she couldn’t understand and that we couldn’t understand there.
Over time F really benefited from the games and dancing especially, bringing up her confidence away from the need for speaking and listening. Her ability to concentrate, focus, her processing, her reflexes and flexibility have all increased.
She is a dedicated member of the group and is getting more and more engaged.
She is very proud of her newfound confidence in spoken English. She is attending ESOL college and tells staff that she has 4 English teachers and she really loves and appreciates the space to practise in Amies.

“I don’t know how to describe this very well. But when I joined, I was shy, I don’t talk much, and I don’t exercise much. Now I have joined Amies my body has changed and when we do the dancing and the singing, I feel like I don’t want to go home. Since I joined here, I’m just happy every day.”

Participant Voice

Participants are given the opportunity to create their own group/agreement contract which is read by participants at the start of every session. As they are keen crafters, participants are invited to have the opportunity to create and decorate this themselves.

When consulting with the participants to discover what could be done better in the project, what they'd like to change, what they feel would benefit them, 3 main themes emerge.

Community Building

The first theme is around community building, and a desire to find more moments for connection. Under their suggestion, the team bought some board games and have noticed that participants arrive earlier to gather and chat before sessions.

"Continue to give us chance to come together."
"I like knitting. Crafts. I'd like that."
"We could have ludo or something whilst we are waiting."
"I think Amies group is encouraging people. It gives positive energy, encouraging activities, more socialising for people. I'm a volunteer here and I'm so happy to have been here 2 years. I feel so good. I'm so lucky to be here. And I engage 2 more things: More confidence, more communication."

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

The second theme is around increased physical and mental wellbeing. The participants really value meditation and mindfulness at the start of sessions, so the staff increased the length of this during each session. The participants also love dancing and movement, so more physical movement has been included into the sessions, right from the warm up throughout the activities.

"We do exercises together...Everytime we come, we do exercise."
"Tuesday I love playing with the ball, dancing, I like the activities."
"On Tuesdays my favourite part is the exercise and dancing"
"Sometimes my body can't do much, but personally I think it's very good because the more you do these exercises the more it helps me in particular kind of stretch out. It helps me to relax better when I get home"
"I also think we need more meditation, because some people are feeling depressed. We do like 15 minutes or something, it's not enough I don't think. We can do more time to improve our feelings. Because more people are getting depressed with their outside everythings, then coming here socialising and talking to each other, it's giving more positive vibes."
"Also, dancing. I remember we danced some time ago. We put music and move around, also helps. "

Wider issues

The third theme is around wider issues facing the participants. They have a need and a desire to be not only listened to and heard, but also understood. Many of them describe at length the processes they are going through with the Home Office and describe the major issues that housing, money, immigration status and isolation are having on them. The team have been seeking more specific training to understand these issues better, and have expanded our signposting network in order to understand the wider sector. Amies staff attended a coffee morning with the Sophie Hayes foundation to network with other organisations supporting female survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.

"I think people that are here, you are helping to make us happy, but they need to know what is going on with the people passing through. You are doing the organisation to make these people happy. We need the organisation to continue to help to care for people like us, the women of Amies."

"Every women here has one thing or another that we carry or need a solution for. Because of the nature of the situation, none of us have any money. Is there any way that Pan can help people like this? What does this connect us to? Does it end here or does it connect us to someone?"

"I'm happy to be joining the group like this. We're not lonely here, you're not thinking about what has happened to you, because now I'm here for long long years and don't have papers. If I'm sat in the room or in the house, I'll be thinking about that, even if I want to do something I'll forget what I'm doing, but when I'm here I'm happy, I'm really happy, I always look forward to coming Tuesday."

"Life is not easy here if you're an asylum seeker. You have to wait a long time for papers, procedures, everything. If you come into this group, it's giving you more positive things, encouraging you, socialising."

In Summary and Suggestions

The main suggestions for developing and improving the group revolve around building upon the strong foundations outlined in this report, and adding to the offer.

There was a tangible benefit to the Old Vic theatre trips, and the team will seek further relationships with the Old Vic, or with a similar organisation.

Whilst it was difficult for the participants to accept the project was closing for them, the group is now going to progress on an academic year model and it's hoped that this will allow greater access to the project, and a feeling of 'graduating' at the end of the year next July.

The participants responded very well to the Old Vic coming in to give workshops and the team will continue to seek out opportunities for guest workshops to happen.