

Fortune Project Report

September 2023 to July 2024

Prepared by Emmeline Holwell (Project Manager)

Fortune is a weekly creative session for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers under 25 years old. The sessions provide a comfortable and non-judgmental space for the young people to explore their creativity, build their confidence, improve their English and find community. Each session provides an opportunity for them to grow and reach a stage where they can confidently create and deliver performances to the general public and mentor new members who join the group.

Young refugees and asylum seekers in the UK currently have to deal with many hurdles and difficulties, including complicated application processes, long waits for asylum approval, insecure housing, financial difficulties, language barriers and poor mental health. Despite the UK's commitments to human rights, the hostile environment policy has exacerbated these challenges, fostering a climate of suspicion and fear that impedes refugees' ability to rebuild their lives. This is exemplified by the former Conservative Government's Rwanda Bill, which the UK's Supreme Court found would breach international and UK law.

The support that Pan offers to these groups through our Fortune sessions helps them find community, builds their confidence, improves their English and shows them that the UK government's hostile environment does not reflect the views of many UK residents. Our participants come to Fortune because it is fun, they can meet new friends, they can learn new skills, they can share a meal and their creativity is encouraged and nurtured. All of these factors contribute to our participants having a positive self-identity and a sense of belonging, which ultimately helps with integrating, overcoming prejudice and seeing new life paths opening up.



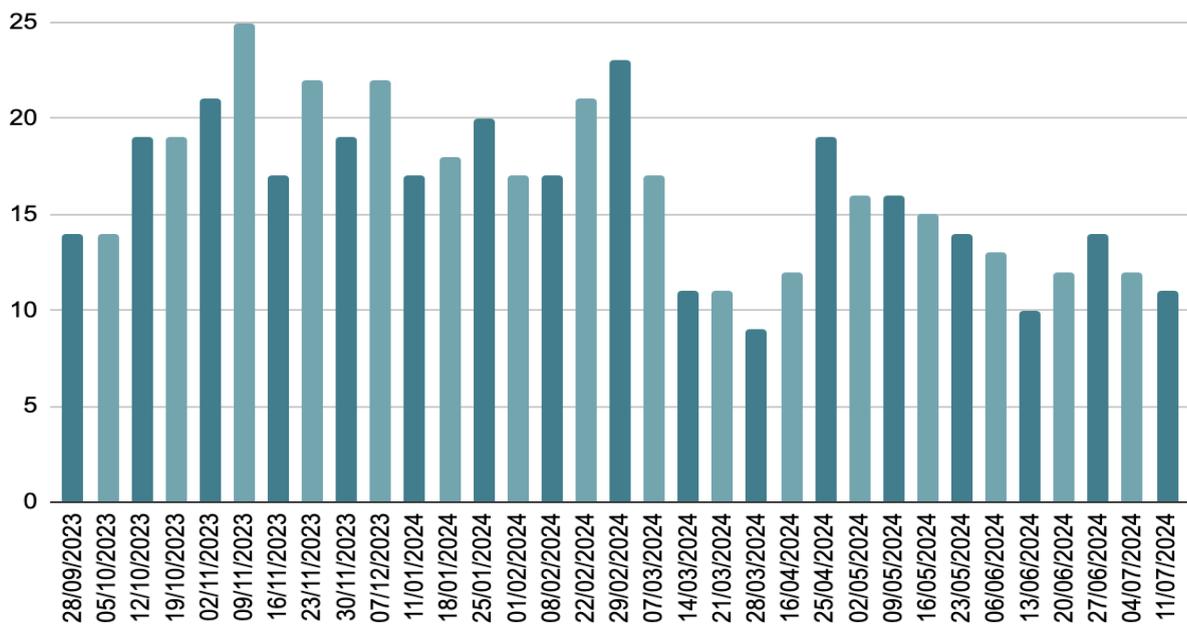
Throughout the Year

Sessions:

- We delivered 31 regular sessions, once a week, during term time (28/09/23 to 11/07/24), on Thursdays between 6 and 9pm at the Old Diorama Arts Centre.
- We provided creative sessions for a total of 62 participants, with over 50% of these participants attending 5 or more sessions.
- The group had one trip to a theatre and performed one show at the Little Angel Theatre in place of regular sessions.
- In all we delivered 1340 participant hours of workshops.

Attendance:

- Fortune retained some participants from the previous year, but the majority of participants were new.
- The team ran three taster sessions at West London College in early September, with many new participants coming from these sessions.
- Quite a few new participants learned about Fortune via word of mouth/being brought by their friends.
- There was a noticeable decrease in attendance during Ramadan, as a lot of our new participants are muslim and the sessions coincided with sundown.
- There was also a drop off in attendance at the end of June due to exams.

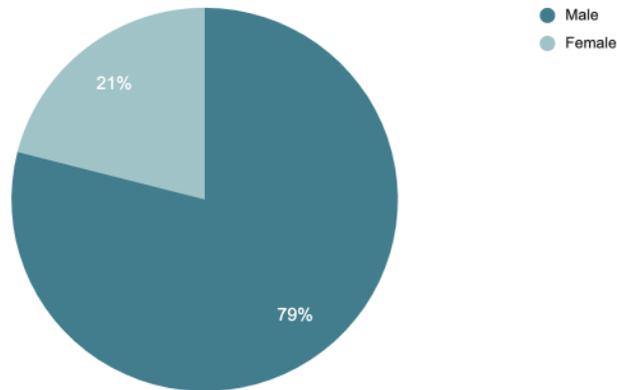


Participant Attendance September - July 2024

Participant Demographic Breakdown

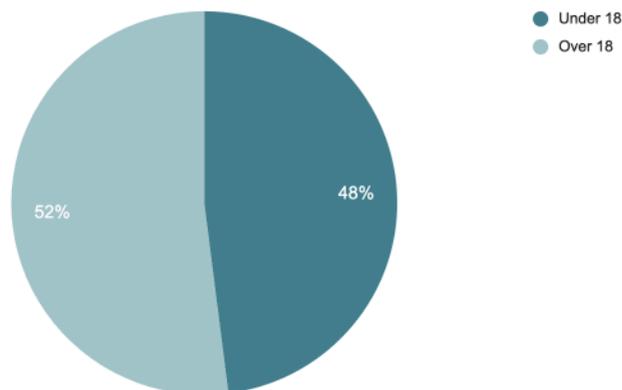
- The majority of the participants are male (79%), which reflects the demographic of young migrants coming to the UK.

Gender Breakdown



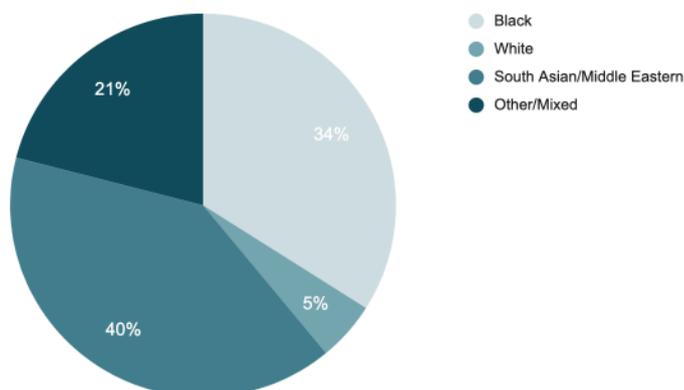
- Many of the participants are in college, with a little over 50% being over 18.

Age Breakdown



- The ethnic breakdown of the group is 34% Black, 5% White, 20% South Asian/Middle Eastern with the remaining 21% being other or mixed ethnicities.

Ethnicity Breakdown



- Many of the participants are friends outside of the sessions, and they have brought friends along who have become regular participants.

Project Overview

The project started with half the group being participants who had attended the previous year and the other half being recruited from taster sessions at West London College. There was a definite lack of cohesion and integration between these groups that took some time to break down, with there still being some participants who have trouble interacting with people outside of their language group at the end of the year. This meant that the first term of the project was focused on games and improvisation exercises, to help build these bonds. We noticed that the participants responded well to competitive games, with natural leaders emerging in the groups. The first term had a lot of fluctuations in attendance, with many participants trying Fortune for a few sessions before deciding if it suited them. We also had consistent lateness throughout the year, which for some sessions ended up being very disruptive.

The second term had more consistent attendance, allowing us to start work towards a creative piece for the end of the year. A large group of the new participants had been completely reluctant to participate in any kind of improvisation games. This changed when E, the Project Director, built a session around the idea of communication despite language, where the participants could speak their own languages in the improvisation games. This session concluded with the participants being put into four groups of shared languages, with the task of creating a scene in their own language to present to the rest of the participants. The rest of the participants then guessed what the scene was about from the acting and body language. This was a huge success, with many of the participants comfortably performing in front of the group for the first time. This really signified a turning point for the work of the project.



The final term faced disruptions due to Ramadan and exam season. Despite this, we had a core group of participants who consistently attended. This term was focused on creating and refining scenes for an eventual sharing. The team worked with the participants to decide on the idea of 'problems teenagers face today' as a starting point for these scenes. A lot of the participants had never performed on stage before, so were nervous about presenting these scenes. However, after the performance, many were eager to perform again.



At the end of the term the group put on their performance of 'The Generation of Now', the culmination of all the work they had done across the year. The play was a showcase of scenes built around the issues that teenagers face today, including social media, drugs and worries about the future. This was held at the Little Angel Theatre to an audience of Pan staff, trustees and friends and family of the participants. Participants reflecting on the performance said *"I feel like myself when I am on stage and when I perform"* & *"You can express yourself and you can just practise*

being confident on the stage".

In April we took the group to see a performance of 'Red Pitch' at Soho Place. The play follows three teenagers in London as they navigate difficult family situations, gentrification and plans for their futures all through the medium of Football. The group were sceptical at first, with many not feeling like theatre is for them. When we arrived, they noticed that one of the actors had been a lead in the Netflix show 'Sex Education', which they found exciting. The group ended up really enjoying the play, and hopefully left with the impression that there is theatre being made for them.



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 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 when they first attend the project, with further assessments taking place each month. At the end of each term, participants are asked for their feedback and to share their experiences of the project. Case studies for a few participants 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. The individual case studies allow a focus on the journey of each participant. Direct feedback from the participants allows us to fully cater to 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.

Below is a graph showing the average progress of all of the participants across the year. There was noticeable improvement across the year for all three categories that we measure.

Total Group Summary



Key Outcomes

The general feedback from participants about Fortune is that they attend to meet new friends, improve their English and work on their acting abilities. Through observation and speaking to the participants, it's clear that these three things have been achieved across the year.

A newer participant with greater levels of English than the majority of the group said that he attended the sessions because he primarily wanted to meet new friends. He achieved his goal as he mentioned that he had been a guest at a family wedding of another participant, along with other members of the group.

The interest in acting has been clear throughout, with two participants attending a public performance from another Pan project this year.

It's clear from observation that ability and confidence in English for the group had grown throughout the year, but many participants also fed back that this was the case.



It's important that we also nurture the participant's wants from our sessions as well as focusing on the key objectives. However, with feedback from the participants, it is clear that there has been good growth within Pan's key objectives, as shown below.

Improved Confidence: Participant feedback

"I got confidence. Now I can control my laughing."

"I made friendships and I met new people."

"I have made a few friends that I wouldn't have met if I didn't come here."

"[I] have confidence to speak in public."

"I got confidence."

"I feel comfortable sharing my ideas."

Improved Communication/Expression: Participant feedback

In response to 'What skills have you learned from Fortune?' *"Vocabulary."*

"I improve my English."

"Talking. My English got better."

"Talking skills."

"Community with people."

"Confidence and speaking loud."

Increased Engagement in Creative Activities: Participant feedback

"E, when do we start back with the acting?"

"I feel like myself when I am on stage when I perform."

"You can express yourself and you can just practise being confident at the stage."

"[I] improved my acting skills."

"Acting without anxiety."

"Being creative and improvisation."

We also asked the participants what they would like to do at Fortune in the future, and they said the following:

"Performance about some issues in this world."

"Acting sessions."

"We want more theatrical activities."

"Doing more games."

"I want more English."

"More live performances."

"We should start vocals."

"Performance on stage."

"Organise more sessions for more practice and teamwork."

The participants used the following words to describe Fortune; *"amazing, beautiful, calm, chill, comfortable, creative, encouraging, enjoyable, entertaining, excellent, exciting, fab, feel-good, friendly, fruitful, fun, funny, good, happy, improvement, incredible, interesting, nice, organised, social, welcoming, wholesome, warm"*.

Artist Facilitators



Fortune's Project Director is Emmanuel Alisigwe. He started as a participant in Pan's Weapon of Choice projects when he was a teenager. He was trained by Pan in our facilitation methods and has subsequently worked on many projects under Pan's Weapon of Choice and Refugee Arts umbrellas, including Building Bridges, a project commissioned by Groundwork to unite refugee and host communities within schools. This is the first year he has directed Fortune completely independently. He has also continued his training and support of Pan's former participants and now Peer Facilitators, Kavyan and Brie, with the goal that they can follow in Emmanuel's footsteps.



Kavyan started his journey with Pan as a participant in Fortune. He is a refugee from Iran who came to the UK as an unaccompanied minor. His lived experience and spoken languages of Farsi, Arabic and English have been invaluable in supporting our participants. Kavyan has now been a Peer Facilitator for Pan for two years. In his time with Pan he has run sessions independently, actively participated in the planning and evaluation of the sessions, taken responsibility for the monitoring of the project and assisted in the creation and direction of the final performance. We will further develop and train him in the next year as part of our Training of Trainers program, with the goal of him taking on the role of facilitator.



Brie was a participant in Weapon of Choice from the age of 14. Emmanuel has been a facilitator of WoC throughout this period and observed Brie's growth and commitment to Pan. Brie joined Fortune as a Peer Facilitator in May 2023. She had been a Peer Facilitator in WoC from September and was invited to work with Fortune when a facilitator on the project left to travel. She immediately had a great connection with the participants and the other facilitators, with the participants trusting her and being confident around her. Brie has been especially integral to the comfort of the female participants, as the group is majoritively male, making sure their voices and ideas are heard. She has led many games and improvisation exercises, bringing many new ideas to the sessions, especially for building the participant's acting abilities. Like with Kavyan, she will participate in our Training of Trainers Program to further develop her

skills with the aim of becoming a facilitator.

Case Studies

The following are a few case studies of participants, mapping their progress across the year.

'A' started with Fortune from the first session this year, having attended one of the recruitment workshops run in West London College. He initially only attended occasionally, as he had other commitments on Thursday evenings, however, by the second term he had decided to prioritise Fortune. He had always been friendly and willing to participate in activities, but he wasn't immediately putting himself forward to go first in games or improvisation exercises. He also stuck with the people he already knew from college, rather than engaging with new people. However, by the second term, he really came through as a natural leader, welcoming any new participants that would attend. He became incredibly comfortable in sharing his ideas with the group, both creative suggestions and constructive feedback for other participants. He was a strong part of the final performance, where he was one of the only participants to bring his friends along to watch. He was clearly proud of the work he had accomplished this year, as he should be.



'M' also came to Fortune from the workshops at West London College. He generally has a calm, quiet demeanour, but is a very bright and observant individual. In the time 'M' has spent in Fortune he has already progressed leaps and bounds. He is one of the only participants who consistently arrives to the sessions on time. After only a few months in the project, he came to the Project Director at the beginning of a session and told him about a dream he had about a scene he would like to recreate and bring to life at Fortune. When asked, he already knew who out of the group he wanted to play certain roles and immediately got to work trying to utilise all the time he had before we started the session to build on this idea. He uses initiative and knows how to communicate and direct. 'M' is definitely one to watch.

'M' started Fortune in the second term, being brought by a friend. After some inconsistent attendance due to Ramadan, he then became one of our most regular attenders. He was incredibly shy when he started, not speaking much, even in his first language, and only spending time with the people he came with. He would refuse to participate in any improvisation exercises, only playing the games and then observing the other participants act. This all changed when the team ran a session where the participants could act in their own languages. This was the first time 'M' got up in front of the group to act unprompted. From this session, he was suddenly eager to act, becoming the main character in scenes that ended up in the final performance. He became far more confident in his English abilities, comfortably speaking English in front of the whole group. In the final term he invited his own friends to Fortune, clearly being proud of the project and wanting to share it with others. It seems like he now feels ownership over Fortune, which is wonderful, as he has become an integral part of the group.



Conclusion

It's been a wonderful year for Fortune, filled with creativity, new friendships, and growth. We have welcomed many new participants to Pan's work and continued our journey with others. Our participants have engaged in a diverse range of activities, including playful and competitive games, improvisation exercises and creation of scenes. This all culminated in a final performance that showcased their talents and creativity. We also took the group to the Theatre, so they could experience what we were working towards throughout the year. We have seen the participants developing skills in language, improvisation, and acting. Throughout the year, a strong sense of community and teamwork has been built, with all of the participants ending the year feeling like a cohesive group.



The participants were engaged with both the creation process and the acting and performance elements. Moving forward it would be good to identify the strengths of each participant, so they can better thrive in the process of creating a play.

The team are happy with how this year went, with the Project Director wanting to focus on continuing our work with the current group of participants next year. The team would like to work more on the scenes that were created this year, building them up into a full play that can be presented to a larger audience.

We were able to diversify our group this year, having participants with many different experiences and backgrounds. Work still needs to be done on cohesion between the language groups of participants, but there has been a huge improvement since the beginning of the year. We would also like to focus on bringing in more female participants and making sure that the ones that do attend feel comfortable and that they are listened to.

We look forward to another year of Fortune and the joy and development it can bring to young migrants living in London.

