Future Project Report

October 2023 to June 2024

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Future is a weekly drama workshop held in Croydon College for their Year 11 ESOL class (15-16 year olds). The sessions provide a comfortable and non-judgmental space for the young people to explore their creativity, build their confidence, improve their English and grow their friendships with each other.

Some of the issues the participants might face:

Language: All of the participants are learning English as an additional language. This can make it harder for them to communicate.

Mental Health: A lot of them fled deprived conditions in home countries, were separated from families and undertook dangerous journeys to get to the UK. A lot of them have little to no family in the UK. This often leads to mental health issues.

Stability: They have to cope with numerous foster placements/supported living environments where communication with workers and families is a barrier. They are moved to different locations making it difficult for them to settle in an area and create positive bonds.

The ESOL students at Croydon College are isolated from the rest of the school, being on a different floor, not able to interact with the general student population. Their learning is focused on English language and maths, with very few creative outlets. The students come from all over the world and so are unlikely to share a language with other members of the group. All of this can be very isolating and demoralising. Through Pan's Future sessions, the participants are able to be creative, playful and to build deeper connections with each other. This leads 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.

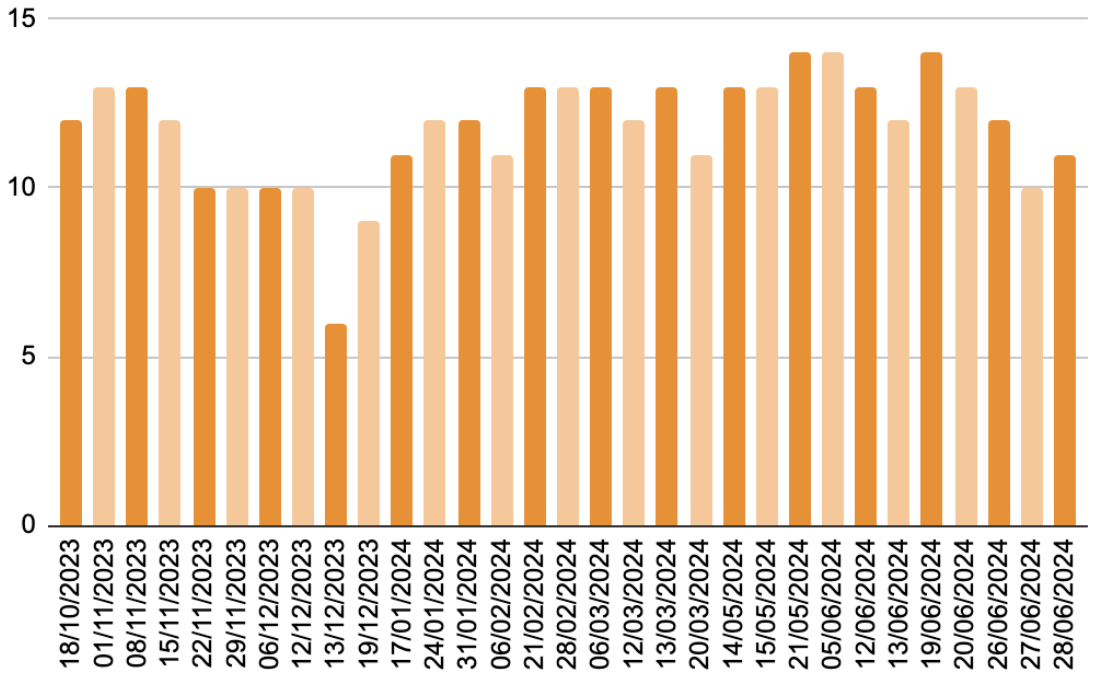
Throughout the Year

Sessions:

- We delivered 31 regular sessions, once a week, during term time (18/10/23 to 28/06/24), on Wednesdays between 10 and 11:30am in Croydon College. For the final term, we ran two sessions a week on the run up to the final performance.
- We provided creative sessions for a total of 16 participants, with over 90% of these participants attending 5 or more sessions. The students that did not attend for the majority of the year either moved school or were excluded.
- The group had three performances, one at the end of each term. These were performed to the participant's family and care workers as well as other students and teachers from Croydon College.
- In all we delivered 547.5 participant hours of workshops.

Attendance:

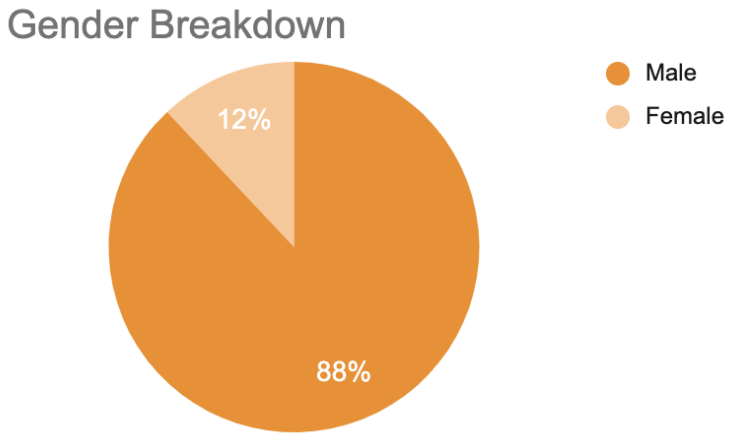
- As the sessions were being run in Croydon College, our attendance depended on the attendance to the college.
- One participant moved school and another participant was excluded for actions in another class.
- Three participants joined in the second term, due to joining the College in January.
- There were participants who did not consistently attend College due to extenuating circumstances at home.
- Attendance went down a little in June due to exams.



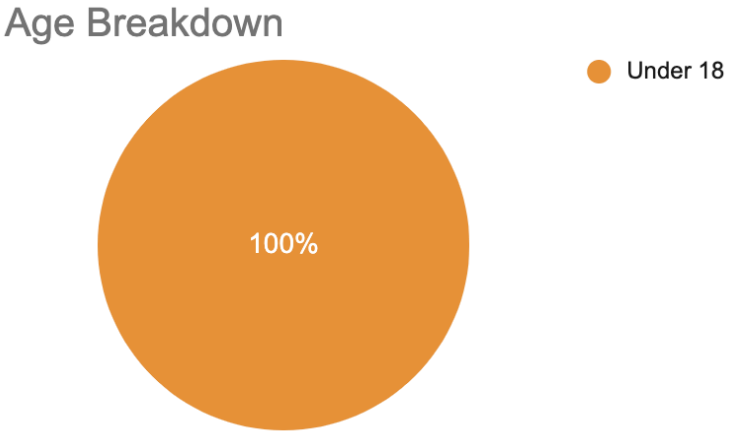
Participant Attendance October - June 2024

Participant Demographic Breakdown

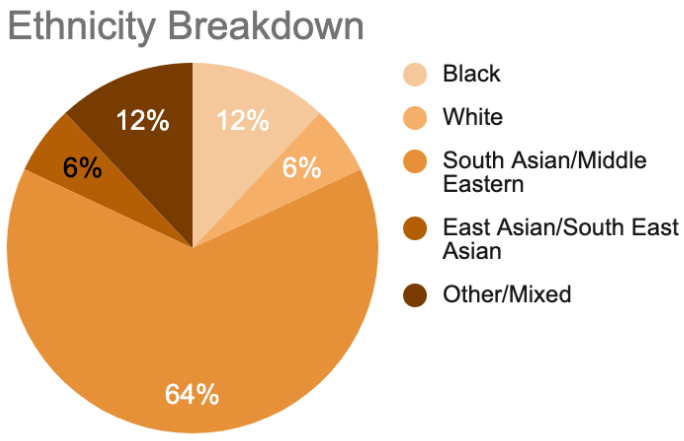
- The majority of the participants are male (88%), which reflects the demographic of young migrants coming to the UK.



- All of the participants are in the same class in College, so 100% of them are under 18.



- The ethnic breakdown of the group is 12% Black, 6% White, 64% South Asian/Middle Eastern, 6% East Asian/South East Asian with the remaining 12% being other or mixed ethnicities.



Project Overview

Despite Pan having a great deal of experience working within schools, working with an ESOL class in a school environment felt like a new challenge for the team. Having the sessions be part of their school day rather than being an optional evening activity did change the relationship between the facilitators and the participants. We also had to be aware of the existing relationships between the teachers and the students and to not let these dynamics affect how we ran the sessions.

Maddie and Pippa had directed out of school Future sessions for the previous year. Due to many different offerings for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Croydon, we found it difficult to maintain consistent attendance. After Maddie and Pippa met with Croydon College, they identified a need for in school enrichment for their ESOL students. We then moved our Future project to be run in Croydon College.

There was initial reluctance from the participants in the first session. A lot of the participants had not engaged in drama activities before. They did not want to look silly in front of their peers. Whilst this is common for teenagers, there were definite cultural motivations for this. There was an interesting difference between this group and the other projects that Pan runs. There were participants who were more willing to create and act in scenes than to play the games. I attribute this to the participants' ability to control how they are presenting themselves to others when they are creating a scene. However, even after a few sessions, this reluctance loosened up, and the group started to really enjoy the games.

Once this initial reluctance had lifted, the participants seemed to really enjoy the sessions. They were able to take a break from their stressful school days and focus on play and creativity. They loved the games, especially 'Ninja', which they would request. But they also loved having the freedom to create whatever they wanted to and became eager to share these ideas with the group.

The group created three performances across the year, one at the end of each term. The initial performance was attended by some of the participant's family members and carers. The second performance was to two classes of SEN students. The final performance was at their graduation to their peers, teachers and families and carers. The growth in ideas, confidence and comfort on stage was a joy to behold. Whilst initially reluctant to perform in front of others, by the final performance the participants were eager to show their scenes as well as three participants wanting to share their traditional dancing. The complexity in the scenes also grew. The group started with tableaus in their initial performance, but their final performance had fully realised stories and dialogue. Multiple participants also got on stage by themselves to introduce the scenes, showing a confidence in speaking English that they did not have at the beginning of the year. The final performance at their graduation was a perfect showing of how they have grown throughout the year.

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 Co-Project Directors, as well as observations from the sessions, using the Pan project objectives to measure the success of the project which are:

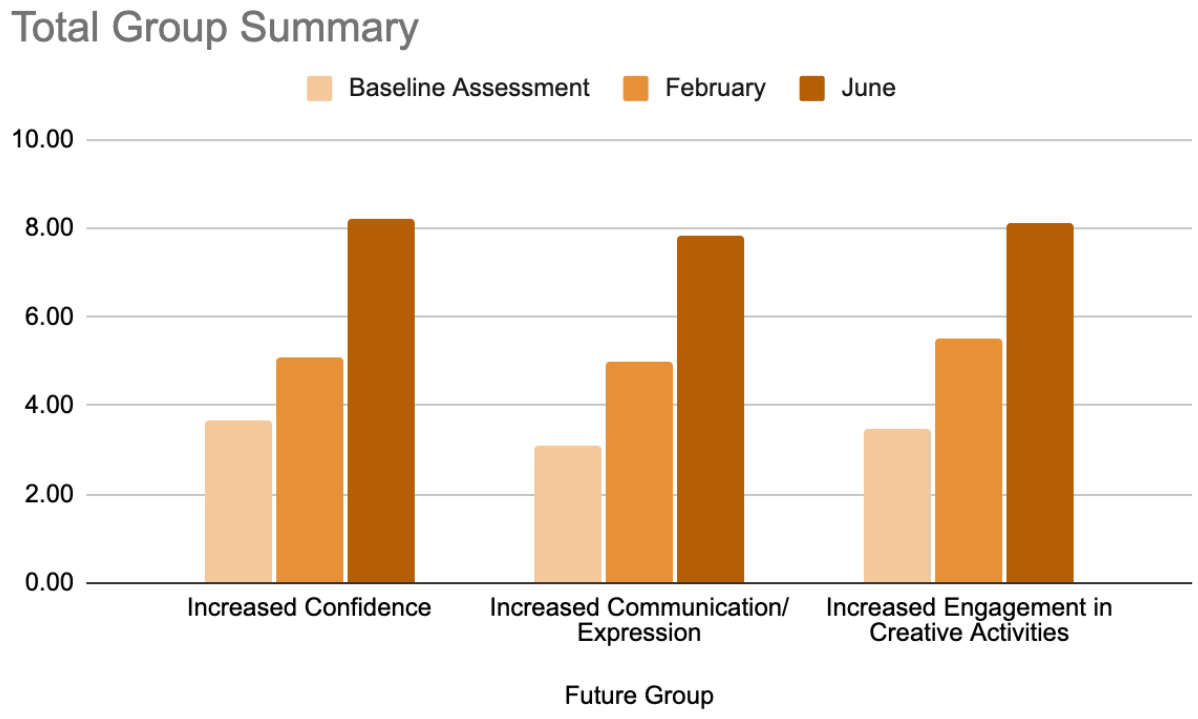
- Improved confidence
- Improved communication/expression skills
- Increased engagement in creative activities

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.

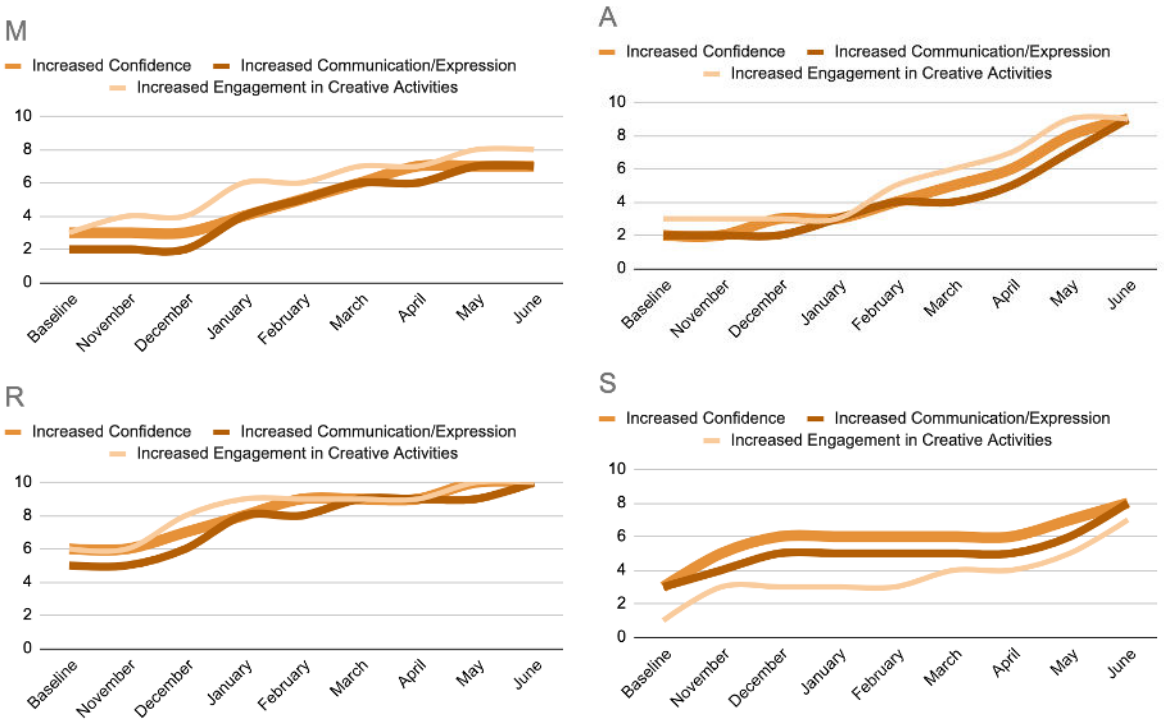
There are some limitations to our evaluation methods, including written and spoken language barriers, experiences of trauma resulting in a loss of agency in participants expressing their feelings and participants responding to questions with what they 'think you want to hear'. The goal is that the variety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



Individual Participant Evaluations

Below is a sample of individual participant growth in our key areas across the year.



All participants increased in all three areas across the year.

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.

Key Outcomes

The general feedback from participants about Future is that they find the sessions fun and have enjoyed learning acting. Their lead teacher, Holly Mifflin, said the following about the project:

> *"I have had the pleasure of working with Pan's drama company for the last academic year. They have come in on a weekly basis and they have worked with a group of our most vulnerable students. Pan have done fantastic work with them. They've created a safe space for them, where our students could explore, through the genre of drama, communication skills and gaining confidence, especially in English. These workshops have also created a great social experience for our students and it really helped the class bond. They definitely established firmer friendships groups due to the work they did through drama with Pan. All of the staff were very communicative, supportive and really went out of their way to help our students. They had such dedication and passion, it's quite inspirational really. I've got a bit of a history with drama and it was so lovely to have reinforced the fact that drama is such a powerful tool for learning, especially with students from other countries. It gave them the freedom to express themselves, some of our students didn't have the ability to do that in their first country. The work that Pan did was phenomenal."*

Feedback from the participants and teachers has made it clear that there has been good growth within Pan's three key objectives, as shown below.

Improved Confidence: Participant feedback

"*The different thing about me is my attitude, mentality. I do different activities, my life is much busier.*"

"*We learn how to act.*"

"*In the performances tomorrow, if we all do one good thing, it will be better than before.*"

"*I felt very happy. I'm so happy.*"

"*As their teacher it has been wonderful seeing their confidence grow.*" - Year 11 Teacher

"*From how Pan Arts have worked with the students, it has massively increased their confidence. To be able to get up and perform in front of other people and in front of their peers, they did so with confidence and they*

clearly enjoyed doing so. I think for this age group, anything that's going to increase their confidence and also being able to use their English is only a positive thing." - Head of ESOL

Improved Communication/Expression: Participant feedback

"*I've noticed their English is so much better. I didn't hear sentences, now I hear sentences.*" - Year 11 Teacher

In response to 'Has your English improved?' - "*Maybe, 50/50*."

In response to 'What was your inspiration for your scene?' - "*I had a deep thought about that, I had many ideas, I think that one will work well. I had another idea where we know what the future is going to be, but I thought this one would work better.*"

Increased Engagement in Creative Activities: Participant feedback

"*I like my group, it's funny and I have my friends with me.*"

"*I like drama because you can act whenever you like. I feel happy when I do that.*"

"*I like drama, sometimes I feel happy. I like stories.*"

"*It's fun. We have fun, we makes things, have different ideas. We have so much fun.*"

"*The plays. You can make a lot of characters and play as them. You can fill in for other roles. I like doing that.*"

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

"*More serious stories. We always take the fun way, I want to make it serious.*"

"*Acting.*"

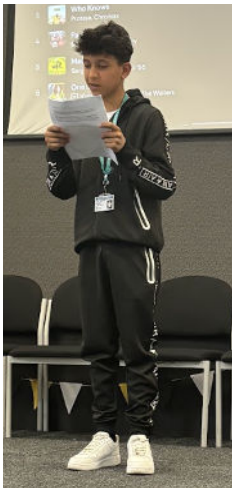
"*Dancing.*"

"*I want more games.*"

The participants used the following words to describe Fortune; "*cool, funny, good, fun, happy, nice, games, stories*".

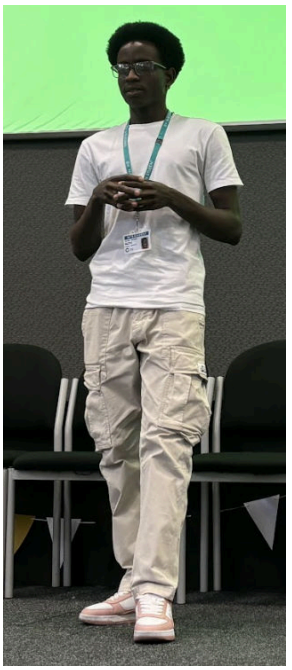
Case Studies

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



'F' was the first person to introduce himself to me when I first visited. He is confident, and will often answer questions and get involved first, with the rest of the group then following. He is confident speaking English, but is clearly still building his vocabulary, but he will ask for clarification if he doesn't understand something, which shows a lot of confidence and security in front of his peers. He is very good with getting the other participants involved with an activity if they are being reluctant. He is great with coming up with ideas when his group won't say anything, but they are often involved around killing/gangsters. This does, however, lead to excellent displays of his acting, which he is brilliant at. I am hoping that this process will help him build his patience and perhaps be open to playing softer/less violent roles. He was certainly able to be more playful as the year progressed. Whilst being outwardly confident, he was clearly shy about appearing silly in front of his peers. By the end of the year he was able to find a balance with this. He would join in with the games and be playful, but would take the acting seriously. He invited his dad to his graduation performance, where he was one of few participants to stand up on stage by himself and read in English. His confidence has grown enormously, and it's wonderful to see that he wants to share this with his family.

'E' joined the group in the second term. Having stronger English skills than the majority of the group did help with his confidence, and he was immediately happy to participate in every element of our sessions. However, starting later than everyone else meant that he was somewhat of an outsider and had to work harder to build friendships. He was confident in engaging with facilitator led exercises, but was a little more shy when working in groups with his peers. He was also reluctant to stand out. By the final term he had shed these insecurities. He wrote a full scene involving time travel, a robot and the potential destruction of mankind alongside another participant. He was tweaking the scene up until the last moment, clearly a perfectionist. He was reluctant to share his scene, not because he didn't want to share his ideas, but because he wanted the scene to be the best it could be. By the graduation performance, he was happy with what he shared.



'A' started the year with a lot less English than the rest of the group. He also did not share another language with any other participant. This initially led to him appearing quite shy in the sessions, as he would not speak up or draw attention to himself. He would, however, fully participate with the sessions and threw himself into each activity. By the second term he seemed to push past a barrier with English and was far more confident speaking in front of the group. This meant that we really got to see 'A' shine. He had a firm friendship group where they would all collaborate on scenes together. From this term he was always happy to perform in front of the group and wider audiences. He was also one of the only participants, when asked to bring in something important to them, diverged from the group and shared something other than a piece of music. He brought in a leaflet for an activity centre that he had been to many times where he could climb and play music. It was lovely that this is something he wanted to share with the group and got the opportunity to do so. By the final performance, he happily stood on stage by himself to deliver a speech. It's been lovely to see his confidence grow.

Conclusion

It's been a wonderful year for Future, filled with creativity, new friendships, and growth.. Our participants have engaged in a diverse range of activities, including playful and competitive games, improvisation exercises and creation of scenes. This culminated in three performances that showcased their talents and creativity. 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.

We didn't know how working within Croydon College would go for Future, but it has been a definite success. It's clear that the students benefited greatly from Pan's work, and provided development that the College could not achieve alone.

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