Future Project Report

September 2024 to July 2025

Prepared by Emmeline Holwell, Project Manager

Future is a weekly drama workshop held in Croydon College for their Year 11 ESOL class (15-16 year olds). The ESOL class is composed of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. The teachers of the class also suspected that some of the young people may have experiences of trafficking.

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. This year a second class was added, due to new students starting in January. We ran sessions for both groups.

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. We saw these issues strongly this year, as some participants would use physicality when they didn't have the language, resulting in some conflict, with cultural differences exacerbating this.
- Poor 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, channel their physicality in positive ways 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.

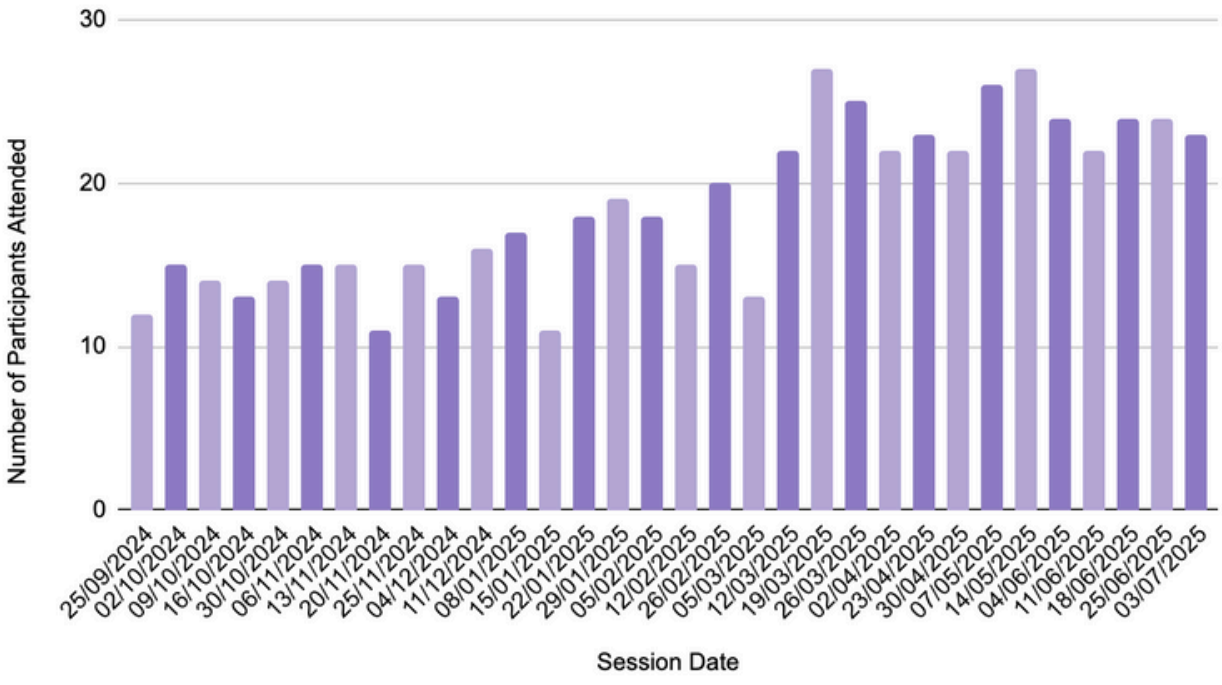
Throughout the Year

Sessions:

- We delivered **49 regular sessions**, once a week, during term time (25/09/24 to 03/07/25), on Wednesdays at 10.30am-12pm and 12.45-2pm at Croydon College.
- We provided sessions for a total of **28 participants**, with 96% of these participants attending 5 or more sessions.
- The participants performed to a class from the SEND department of Croydon College in December. The performance was composed of four scenes devised by different groups of the participants and finished with a group dance.
- In all we delivered **826.5 participant hours** of workshops.

Attendance:

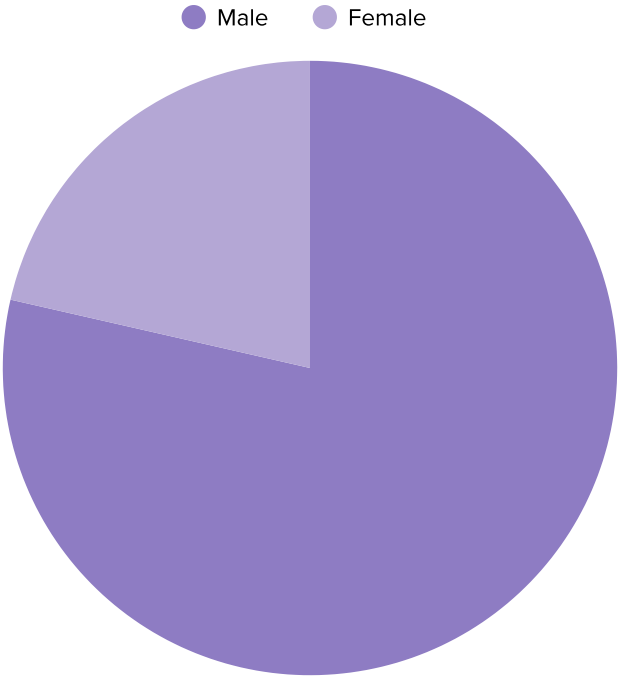
- Attendance was consistent across the year, as the sessions are imbedded in their schooling.
- The initial class had 13 students, who we worked with from September to January as a single group.
- A second ESOL 15-16 class was added in January, as new students joined the College. 2 new students started in January, with a further 8 students joining in March, another student joined in April and then the final student joined in May.
- The college split the participants into the two classes based on their English level. As a response, we started doing two slightly shorter sessions, one for each class. The first sessions in this format was on 22/01/25.
- 3 participants were excluded permanently from the school in May after being part of a violent incident. The violent behaviour was not present in our sessions.



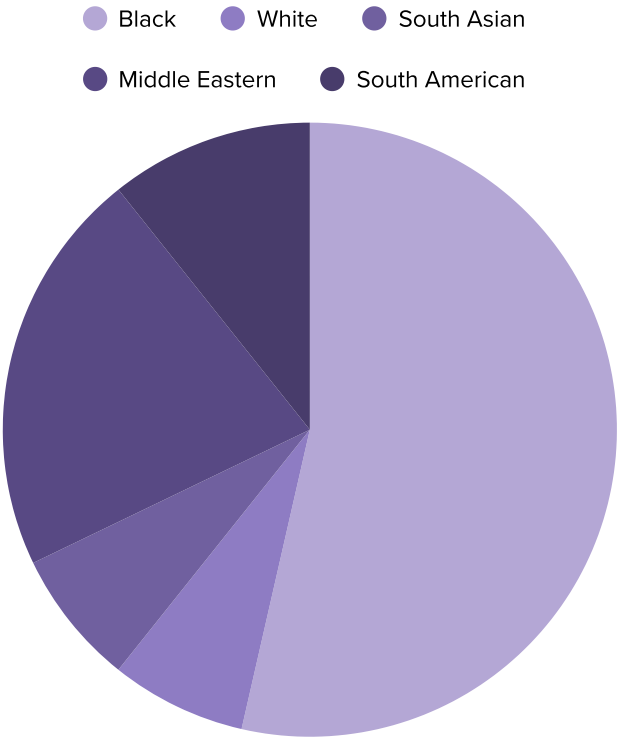
Participant Attendance September 2024 - July 2025

Participant Demographic Breakdown

- The majority of the participants are male (80%), this reflects the demographic data of young refugees and migrants coming to the UK currently.



- The ethnic breakdown of the group is 54% Black, 7% White, 7% South Asian, 21% Middle Eastern and 11% South American. The majority of the participants this year were from Sudan and South Sudan, which again reflects the demographics of young refugees in the UK at the moment.



Project Overview

As our second year being embedded within the curriculum of the ESOL classes of Croydon College, we entered with more of an understanding of how the sessions would be received. We expected to meet a certain level of reluctance from the students, as they were not choosing to be there in the same way they would for our other projects. However, we faced greater levels of disengagement this year than we did the previous year. The teachers let us know quite far into the year that many of the students had not been in any formal schooling before coming to Croydon College.

There were a couple of students who never fully engaged with our work, preferring to work on their English studies in the sessions instead. We suspect this is due to them not wanting to engage in things they didn't see as serious. These participants show the limitation of only spending a year with these participants (or even less so for half of the participants we worked with this year). We see this in our other work, but with time we are able to 'break through their shells' and show them the value of our work, where we then see them thrive in the space.

There was also discord present in the class that was not present last year. Last year's class definitely had distinct friend groups that were influenced by shared cultures and languages, as you would expect, but the whole class got on well. This year there was a distinct tension between a few students, which resulted in violence and then permanent exclusion. The energy in the group did change after this happened.

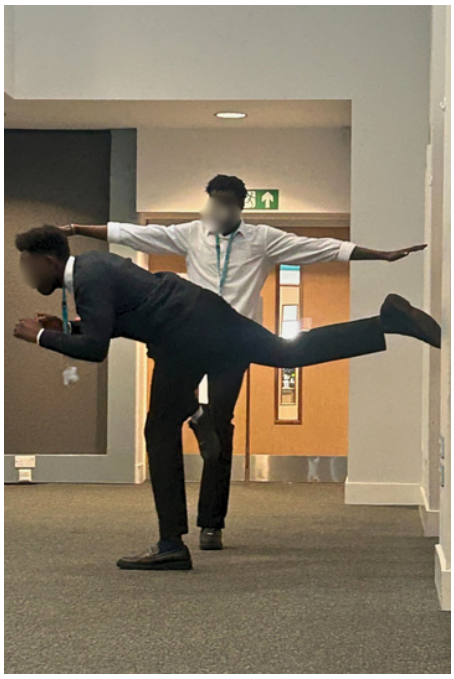
Our work was also affected by having to change the artist facilitators working on the project due to financial constraints. Pan's Artistic Director, John Martin, stepped in to lead the sessions in January, ensuring the project was able to continue. In March, he was joined by Kavyan Yahyapour, one of our Peer Facilitators working on our Fortune project, who has lived experience. The participants responded really positively to working with someone with similar experiences to them and Kavyan really thrived in this role.

The final disruption came in the introduction of all of the new students. This happened over two months, with several students being moved between the classes as everyone settled in and the levels of English were established. The separation by ability also affected the work, as there were no longer participants with more understanding in one group who'd be able to lead by example, something that is effective in our other work. The result is that the group with higher levels of English were able to connect with each other more, responded to our work better and seemed happier in general. All but one of the girls were put in this group, which also affected the dynamics.

Despite these complications, we observed great progress in the participants across the year, with the majority of the participants being more open, expressive and communicative. When conducting the end of year evaluation, all but one participant said they enjoyed the sessions (the one participant using the opportunity to stand out and embody a character, which showed great progress!).

The year really reinforced the need for our work. The young people in these classes are not presented with many opportunities to be creative, or embrace playfulness, which we know improve confidence, mental health and help build social connections.

Project Overview Continued



The first term began well, with the participants excited by the work. We had the benefit of being able to use a large hall for many of these initial sessions, which really helped with flow and engagement and separated the sessions from their usual classes. We focused on games in this period, with name games being really helpful as we noticed a lot of the participants had not learned each other's names. A game of Grandma's Footsteps was run early on where the participants had to pick up a prop on their way to the end. The participants naturally engaged with the props, wearing them, or acting with them and adopting characters, it was wonderful to see their creativity shine through.

The first term ended with a performance to a SEND class from the College. The participants had been working on improvised scenes across the term in groups, culminating in four scenes, with a danced finale. All the participants performed with confidence, despite initial reluctance. One participant had not been able to attend college for a few weeks due to issues at home, but was able to attend the performance, and they happily slotted into a scene with minimal preparation and performed confidently.

The second term was when John stepped in to facilitate the project. He observed that many of the participants were still reluctant to express themselves in front of the group and that they were not yet confident with English. He asked the group how they were comfortable expressing themselves and it was agreed that emojis were effective. John then created emoji masks, with various emotions. He would then ask the participants to wear the masks and physically embody the emotion represented. This activity was a breakthrough for many of the participants, the masks helping them feel comfortable being more physically expressive than they had before. Others were acting characters in a way they never had before. The masks allowed the participants to feel free in a way we hadn't yet seen.

When the second class was introduced, the progress changed somewhat. Most of the new class did not know us, so were skeptical of the work, one participant saying that she found the session 'so boring'. However, this quickly changed as trust was built. The group had great cohesion, and would often make each other laugh whilst improvising. John introduced an exercise where there were two boxes, one contained something good, the other something bad. The participants had some really interesting and illuminating responses, with the reluctant participant mentioned above saying that the good box contained a motorcycle and the bad box contained the ocean.

John made sure to have the same session plan for both groups, which reinforced how much understanding English effects engagement. The first class slowed their progress without other participants who could guide them. They were also most effected by the behavioural issues and exclusions, with most sessions having to start with raising their mood and energy levels. We also did not have access to the large hall for most of the second term and all of the third term, which did not help with engagement.

However, the sessions were still clearly having a positive effect. One session began with the teacher letting John know that the participants were a little stressed as they had a speaking exam the next day. John adjusted the session to be focused on role play that would help them in the exam. The teacher fed back that this had been incredibly helpful.

We finished the final term by having both groups together for one big evaluation session. It was lovely to see how many participants had loved the sessions. When presented with a scale of 'oh no', 'OK' and 'good' for how the participants felt about the sessions, a few participants asked for a 'fantastic' option. The year ended with their graduation, where three participants gave a speech about how wonderful the year had been.

External Partnerships, Funders & Supporters

Partnerships:

We continued our partnership with Croydon College's ESOL department this working year. This began in 2022 when taster sessions were held in the College to recruit for the project which, at that time, was being run after school in Quakers House in Croydon. Participant numbers for the project were hard to maintain due to an abundance of similar work in the area, so the decision was made to move the sessions into the College.

We formed a relationship with Holly Mifflin, one of the 2 teachers in the department. She was eager for us to start the sessions as the participants were isolated from the rest of the College and had limited access to any creative pursuits. This is our second full year of being embedded in the classes, with the College eager to continue our partnership. The head of ESOL, Sherry Dougan, said of our sessions that they "[have] massively increased [the participants'] confidence".

Funders:

The project was funded by contributions from Aesop and our Strategic Development allocation.

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Next Steps:

We will continue our partnership with Croydon College for this project. If funds become available, we would love to expand our work to either sessions with the 17-18 year old ESOL class, or an after school session at the College to build on our work from the in school sessions, similar to our work with Beachcroft AP Academy.

We will be welcoming trainees to Future in the next year from our Emerge programme. Emerge gives former Pan participants the opportunity to be trained in facilitation.

Sherry Dougan, Head of ESOL at Croydon College, speaking at this year's Graduation

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

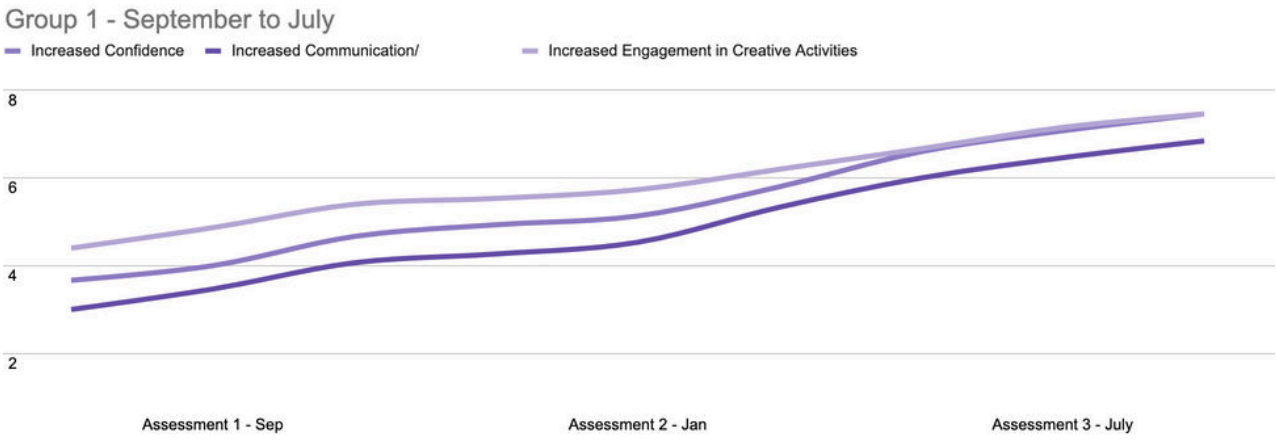
A baseline assessment is taken of each individual participant when they first attend the project, with further assessments taking place each month. At the end of each term, participants are asked for their feedback and to share their experiences of the project. Case studies for a few participants are also written at the end of the project.

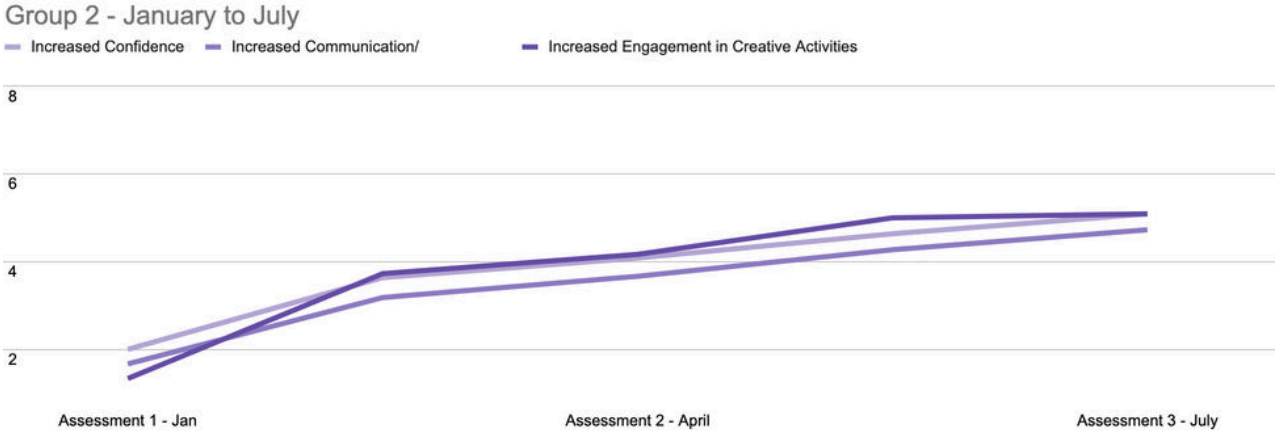
The variety of evaluation methods allows the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The weekly staff monitoring allows the team to see small changes in an individual participant's progress, as well as identifying any additional needs a participant might have. Participants have a wide range 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 are two graphs showing the average progress of all of the participants across the year. The first is for 'Group 1' - the participants who we worked with from September to July - the second is for 'Group 2' - the participants who we worked with from January to July.

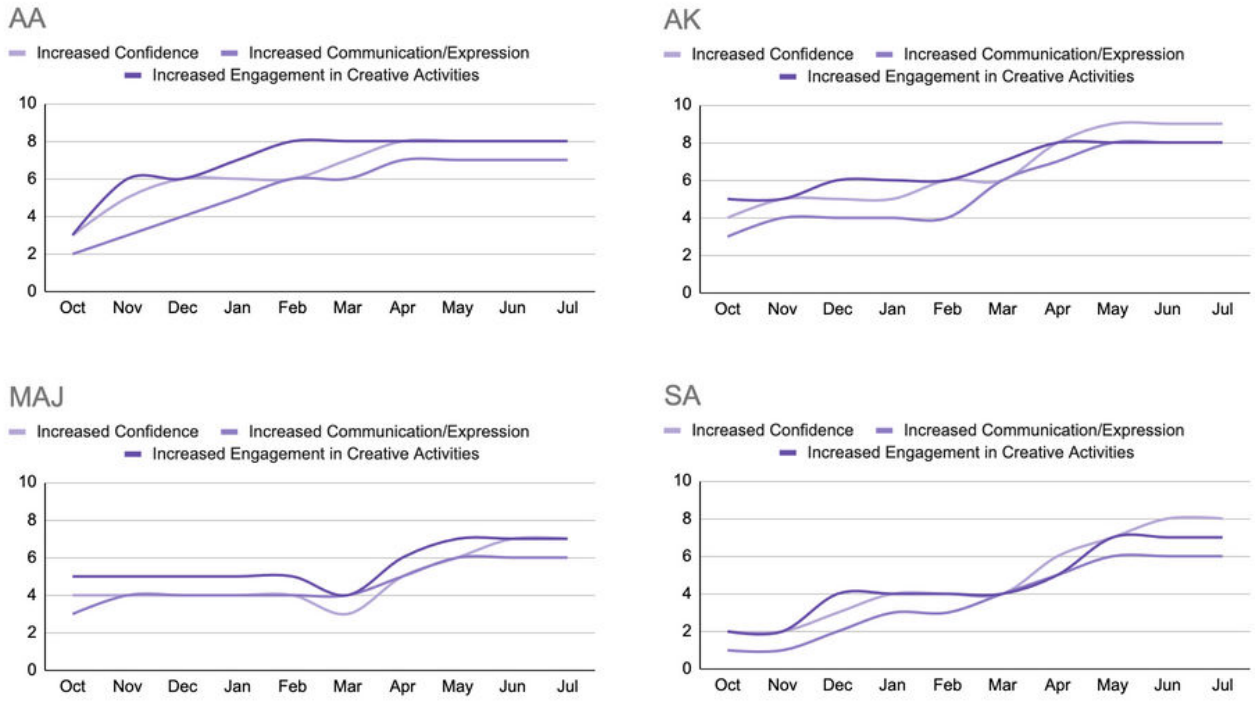
There was noticeable improvement across the year for all three categories that we measure.





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.

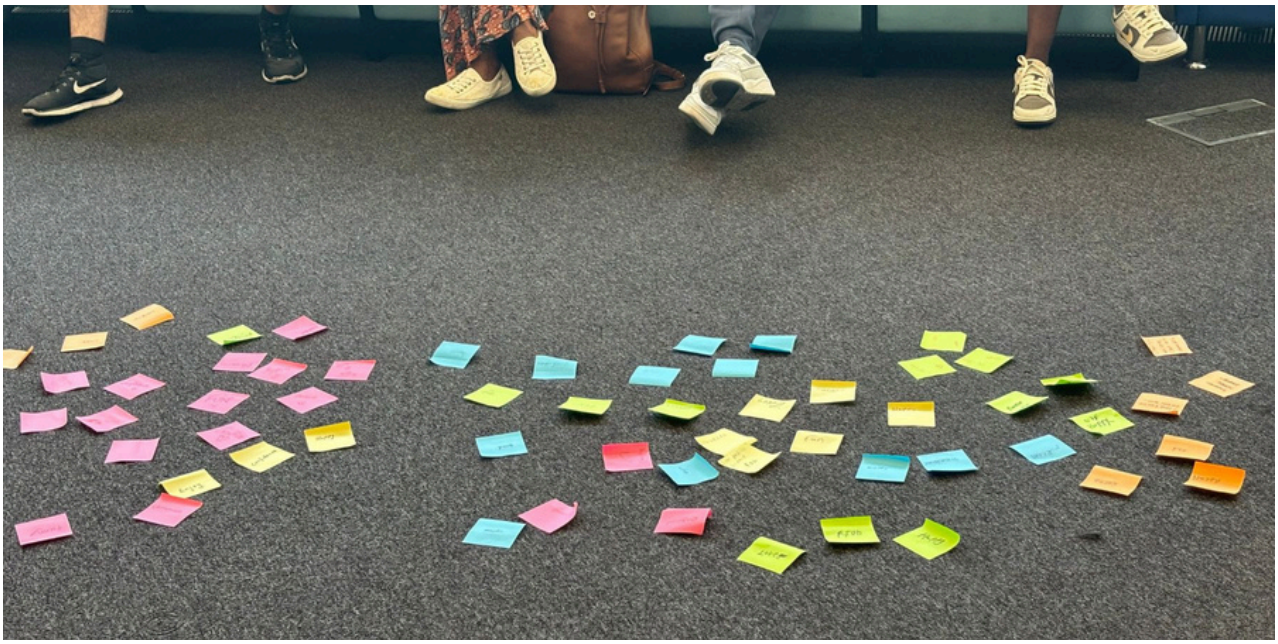
Key Words

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 energising and have enjoyed playing the games and learning acting. Their lead teacher, Holly Mifflin, said the following about the project and participants:

"*Watching you across the year, you have all become more confident. You have been learning through speaking. I have loved seeing you all smile and make good memories in drama. M*'s confidence in speaking and talking to people has grown. Seeing you guys understand drama and what it can give you is great.*"



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

- "*It is so easy in the masks - I am not shy.*"
- "*Drama makes your emotions good and makes you confident.*"
- "*J* got more confident.*" - a participant about another student in the class.
- "*You have all become more confident.*" - teacher
- 7 participants reported that they had gained confidence in particular in the evaluation exercise.

Many of the participants began the year withdrawn, shy about saying their own names, avoiding eye contact and very closed off physically. They would volunteer others to participate in games, but never themselves.

Across the year we saw this change. Participants would leap up to join games and present images. A few participants in particular really built confidence with eye contact, even acting characters in the activity and making an effort to hold eye contact with every single person. By the end of the year, all of the participants were more physically expressive, happy to stretch their arms up and make bold movements, when they would only make small hand gestures before.

Improved Communication/Expression: Participant feedback

- "*It helps me in the way I'm talking and helps with my energy.*"
- "*You have been learning through speaking.*" - teacher
- "*M*'s confidence in speaking and talking to people has grown.*" - teacher
- "*Conversation.*" - feedback in the written evaluation
- "*I'm not always in the mood for drama.*" - a negative sentiment, but shows confidence in their expression
- "*Sometimes I don't like drama, sometimes I don't have the energy. Sometimes it gives me new ideas and sometimes it doesn't.*" - another statement proving confidence in expression.

The participants started the year with low levels of English, as is expected, and having the context of many of them not being in formal education before, communication and expression were low. Many were not confident speaking with us or to each other. They finished the year far more comfortable expressing themselves, even if that meant telling us they didn't want to do an activity. In the final evaluation session all of the participants were happy to tell us how they had found the sessions, using some wonderful words.

Increased Engagement in Creative Activities: Participant feedback

- "*I'm good - today is good we have drama. I love drama.*"
- "*I am good in drama.*"
- "*I am really grateful to have drama classes with you.*"
- "*I like drama.*"
- "*I find drama fantastic.*"
- "*I liked acting as a teacher and playing the Animal Kingdom game.*"
- "*I liked improv with the taxi and the mirror exercise.*"

Engagement with the activities started at an OK level, but went down a little when we lost access to the large hall and when the exclusions happened. However, there was definite progress in individual engagement. Participants became more willing to share their ideas and jump into activities before being encouraged.

Additional Outcomes/Observations:

- Participant G* was called out as a great leader by the other participants. She even suggested a new activity to do to the facilitators.
- The teacher let us know that participant A* wants to study drama. A wonderful development.
- One participant said the following - "*I know you see me, I'm not into drama, but I like to see everyone there.*" This came from one of the initially most shy members of the group. Drama was clearly not his thing, but he always fully participated, encouraged others and was great at sharing his ideas. It was lovely that he felt comfortable enough to express this sentiment.
- We got a great deal of positive feedback about the emoji masks exercise including the following: "*I liked the acting and improvisation with the masks*", "*I liked acting and working with the emoji masks*", "*I liked working with the emotion masks*", "*I liked the emotion games*". "*A* was great with the angry mask*", "*S* good with the angry mask*". This is definitely an exercise we will continue doing, it was incredibly helpful in getting the participants to come out of their shells and act unselfconsciously.

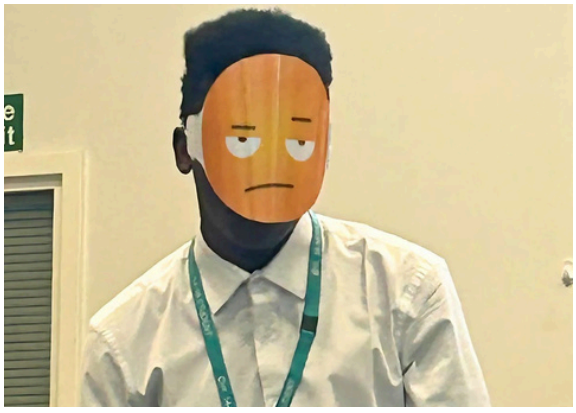
The participants used the following words to describe Future; "Energetic, funny, happy, active, fab, fun, exciting, curious, nice, cool, joyful, progress, creative, memories".

Case Studies

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

M* started the year as very physically closed off. He was polite and respectful with us and the staff, but wouldn't engage with any activity fully. He would do what was asked, but not with enthusiasm, like he didn't want to be rude, but wasn't getting anything from it. He would often volunteer other participants to go first, instead of participating himself. This could be because of wanting to appear masculine or not silly, with possible cultural influences leading to this. However, he started to come alive in activities where he could hide behind a character. He had a breakthrough with the emoji masks activities, where he embodied a sad, old man. He then carried this into other character work, where he would come out of himself whenever he could obviously be somebody else. This cover seemed to help him with his self consciousness around looking silly. There was a definite change in his physicality across the year, where initially in stretches and war ups he would hardly move his arms from his body, doing actions with wrist flicks, often looking down and not making eye contact. He still had some physical reluctance by the end of the year, but he would move his body more obviously and openly. He also came alive in the eye contact game, where he played a character when walking around the circle, but did make eye contact with every person, often having jokey reactions to looking at them.
This was in stark contrast to a lot of the rest of the group, who found making eye contact hard, let alone building on the activity with acting. In our final evaluation he was the only participant to say that he had not enjoyed or benefited from the sessions, which let him be in the limelight for those moments and casting himself as Mr Negative, showing more confidence than others who didn't want to say anything at all. As someone who started the year never wanting to be the focus or noticed by others, consciously placing himself away from the group and answering questions in an individual way shows such a growth in confidence. He got more confident in what he could do and what he didn't want to do. Despite him saying he didn't enjoy the work, he came up to Kavyan after his graduation and asked if he was returning next year, showing not in words that he did appreciate Pan's time with him.

T* joined us midway through the year. She appeared contained and confident, even aloof. Her English was relatively good. Drama was, it seemed, alien to her. In her first session we were using the emoji masks which had been enjoyed by everyone. When asked to wear one she was hesitant and in feedback said "It's boring". As she made friends with the other girls, who enjoyed drama sessions, she seemed to like them more. In an exercise of what she would most and like least to find in a box she offered an insight with: Like most = motorbike, Like least = the ocean. There was a lot of trust in saying this. She progressed quickly enjoying strong roles as characters like teachers and by the end was the conversation leader in her group preparing a scene. And a strong smile always erupted afterwards. In the evaluation she headed straight for the "Fantastic" area, to describe her feelings for the drama sessions.



G* was the only girl in our first class. Witnessing her growth in confidence and English-speaking ability throughout the year has been remarkable, especially considering she was the only girl among all the participants. Over time, she became comfortable expressing herself in front of others, something that didn't come easily at first but developed naturally through the sessions. From the very beginning to the end of the program, her level of engagement remained consistently high. She participated and completed the exercises with willingness and effort. In my view, she started with little to no English, but over the term, her ability to communicate improved significantly.

Conclusion

As Holly remarked, it was a difficult group this year. But they were great characters too and worth the effort. There were many disruptions this year, but it ended in a positive way with clear progress in all the participants. We successfully reworked the project into two sessions for the different groups and Kavyan was successful introduced as a facilitator, his lived experience resonating with the participants. A lot of this year was working on the building blocks with the participants. They were physically restrained, uncomfortable saying their own names, many unable to make any kind of eye contact. The participants left the project more confident, more comfortable in their own bodies and with each other and more vocally expressive.

In the next year we will continue the work in Croydon College with Holly's new 15-16 year old ESOL class. If there are two classes in that age group, we will continue the same structure we used this year. It is clear the work is needed and effective in this context.

Is finances allow, we would love to expand the work within the College. The teachers have requested that we run sessions with the 16-18 year old class since we started working with the College two years ago, which we have not been able to fund thus far. We would also like to run after school sessions in the College for the participants who particularly enjoy and engage with the sessions, allowing them a more focused environment to thrive in. With our other project for young refugees and migrants, Fortune, moving to Vauxhall with the opening of Pan's own centre, we may have the option of inviting some of next year's participants to that project, as it will be easier to travel to from Croydon.

Overall, this year has been incredibly rewarding, watching the group grow as individuals and together as a group.

We look forward to another year of Future and the joy and development it can bring to the young people.