

MUSIC ACTION INTERNATIONAL

YOUTH MUSIC EVALUATION REPORT 2023

SALLY FORT

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INTRODUCTION

Music Action International (MAI) have a long-standing reputation for co-creating programmes with refugee, asylum seeking and Roma people through music, to help heal trauma, bring positivity, build community, and share joy.

In 2020 they received funding from **Youth Music** for:

- 1) A second round of their **Harmonise** schools programme, helping displaced children and young people feel happier and more at home in the UK.
- 2) A new **Summer Camp** project, to offer relief and enjoyment to young refugees/asylum seekers, recently arrived from refugee camps in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 3) A new strand of working with 16-25 year-olds arriving in the UK often without other friends or family. **Everyday People** helps teens and young adults to relieve some of the stress in their lives by coming together to create and perform new, original music.
- 4) **Training** for diverse and refugee and Roma musicians, and the professional development of teachers, to develop this work with children and young people.

At the same time as the work should have started, the covid pandemic resulted in lockdown. This added to the upheaval in the lives of people moving around the globe and forced a pivot in the original plans MAI had made. None the less, they persisted with resilience and determination to ensure Harmonise, Everyday People, Summer Camp and the sector development could still be realised to the best of their abilities.

This evaluation report provides a summary of the three-year programme bringing these four strands together. More information about each programme, including songs and videos of the work created and performed, are shared on MAI's website <https://www.musicaction.org/why-we-exist/>

Note: Music Action International uses the phrase Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Roma people, and its abbreviation RAS, throughout its documentation, to reflect the language used by funders and decision makers. These terms are therefore used in this report. However, MAI and the author understand the limitations of these terms and as much as possible, use more inclusive language.

AIMS OF THE PROGRAMME

The Youth Music funding (now named the Catalyser Fund) was provided to sustain work, scale-up delivery, or create change in sector practice co-creating children and young people who face barriers to make, learn or earn in music, and aims to make music activity more inclusive so everyone can access it.

The programme works towards three priority and two secondary outcomes as follows:

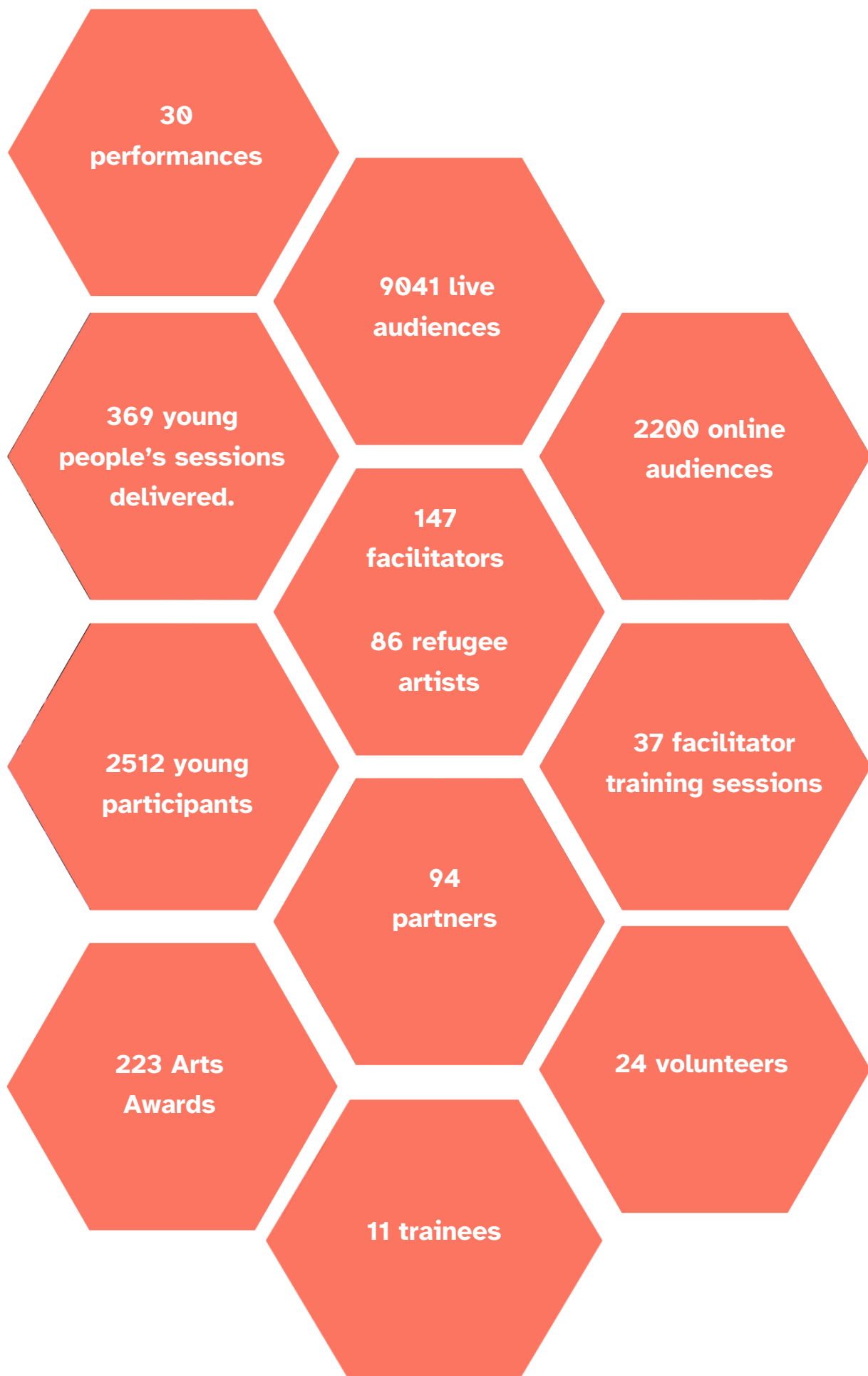
PRIORITY OUTCOMES

- **1. PERSONAL RESILIENCE.** Reduce trauma and isolation, increasing social and educational engagement among young RAS, and increase the well-being, personal, social and emotional development of all participants in challenging circumstances.
- **2. MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT.** Improve young people's singing, rhythm, creative and performance skills, inspiring and enabling them to sing, play, create and perform in a collaborative and supportive, empathetic way within and outside sessions, both during and after the project.
- **3. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.** Develop a specialised and diverse musician workforce, particularly working with young people and musicians from a refugee/Roma background, through high-quality training, mentoring, employment and CPD opportunities.

SECONDARY OUTCOMES

- **A. SOCIAL IMPROVEMENT.** Increase empathy, awareness and understanding of RAS and people from diverse backgrounds within schools and local communities through high-quality, uplifting celebrations of music, language and stories.
- **B. SECTOR DEVELOPMENT.** Influence the sector on a national level by increasing the capacity of teachers, music/ arts students, music professionals, support workers and partners to use MAI's methodology beyond the project.

A SUMMARY OF DELIVERY



ABOUT HARMONISE



“Refugee and asylum seeker children have been through so much to escape conflict or persecution and arrive in the UK, but often that is not the end of their difficult experiences. Imagine having to leave your home, friends, and family behind for fear of your life. You may have witnessed unbearable things in the war-zone that was your home and finally reach safety in another country. Children and teachers in your school don’t understand what you have been through and hear only bad things about refugees. You feel alone and helpless and want to tell them what they hear is not true, but how? Music Action International have developed Harmonise: a school programme inspiring empathy between refugees and people from all backgrounds.” Music Action International website

Harmonise is MAI’s core schools programme. Usually working with Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils and their teachers, teams of three or four MAI creative facilitators work over ten sessions in a school leading into a performance in school. Together as part of a larger cohort of schools, they take pride in coming together to perform their work at prestigious venues like the South Bank Centre or Bridgewater Hall. Smaller five session projects, and one-off taster days are also offered as part of the programme. Through games, music sharing and music making, groups of children from many countries and cultures bond and strengthen the local community for one another by working together to write a new, original song that reflects their interests and feelings. The emphasis is on play, creativity and cultural understanding. Music as a process and a tool for togetherness matters every bit as much as musical products and outputs.

ABOUT EVERYDAY PEOPLE



“Teenage refugees often arrive in the UK without family or friends, having survived armed conflict and endured a horrific and dangerous journey to get here. Therapeutic, creative music sessions provide relief from daily stresses caused by their traumatic experiences, and encourages friendships with other young people. In partnership with the British Red Cross, Brighter Sound and Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, groups who have never played music before, spread awareness, joy and happiness through performances across the UK including the Royal Festival Hall and Band on the Wall. The project name was chosen by the young people, taken from the song Everyday People by Sly and the Family Stone, the first major multi-racial, mixed-gender band in rock history. The song is one of Sly Stone’s pleas for peace and equality between differing races and social groups, a major theme and focus for both the band and for the young people we work with.” Music Action International website

Everyday People was a new cross-region recording project, featuring artists British-Iraqi rapper Lowkey, Josephine Oniyama and BBC Folk singer 2021 and 2022, Rioghnach Connolly with traumatised young refugees and asylum seekers, aged 18-25. Work with young people in schools, and adults in social and informal situations, had been proven to have a strong impact in their communities. However, there was a gap for young people too old for school, and younger than those joining other programmes. Everyday People aims to fill that gap. Designed to offer 18-25 year olds newly arriving in the country, often with no friends or family close by and living in heightened states of stress, a chance to meet others, socialize, and enjoy some time together making music. Participants were recruited through online and in-person sessions in drop-in centres across

Greater London and Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and a few locations across Europe. Through studio sessions and remote audio recordings, participants' creations were captured by music producers Evans, aka KellyShayne Boi (a young refugee and former participant), and Kensaye (professional producer and facilitator). Two original music videos were created by Matt Kowalczyk (refugee heritage) and Omar Baroud. The EP was released on International Human Rights Day, with support from Ninja Tune/Big Dada, published on Bandcamp and Spotify. Further work was delivered towards Refugee Week with online, studio sessions & video creation with Compass Collective, British Red Cross, Refugee Youth and Horizons. For now, the priority has been testing the concept in small numbers across Manchester and London.

These partnerships are ongoing, as well as a new partnership developed with Manchester College, creating and recording new music with teenage refugees and asylum seekers.

ABOUT SUMMER CAMP



“The Covid-19 pandemic and the UK media’s sudden, and often negative, focus on refugees, has acutely affected our programme’s participants. While our ability to reach them has been limited, the slight relaxation of restrictions gave us a narrow opportunity to deliver a project with young refugees living in North West London. *Newman College* provided us with a venue where *Syria Summer Camp* could safely go ahead over two weeks.” Music Action International website

Summer Camp is for young refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Most have been living in refugee camps and will likely be experiencing the effects of trauma (insomnia, hyperactive or withdrawn, nightmares, flashbacks). Many will be learning English and facing culture shock from being in a completely new environment with new rules. The project took place in a London college where ten facilitators worked with young people over twelve sessions across two weeks. By discussing what the young people wanted to say about friends, family, community, home and their surroundings, the facilitators helped them use music, rap and film making to create a new original song and video which they watched together as a celebration of their freedom of expression and new friendships.

PRIORITY OUTCOME 1: PERSONAL RESILIENCE

Reduce trauma and isolation, increasing social and educational engagement among young RAS, and increase the well-being, personal, social and emotional development of all participants in challenging circumstances.

The children and young people MAI worked with in these programmes clearly felt better about life thanks to these projects.

Wellbeing measurements showed that by the end of pupils' involvement in Harmonise:

- **Children rated their wellbeing more highly across all five wellbeing indicators at the end of the project compared to when it started.¹**

Those who

- **felt better about themselves by the end of the project increased by 33%²**
- **felt more confident increased by 31%³**
- **felt they were living their best lives increased by 30%⁴**

"I'm proud, cause it's my culture" Ethiopian Participant, Harmonise

"The project made me forget about the stress of SATS" Harmonise participant.

"We learned never to give up" Harmonise participant.

"I feel free to like to be the way I want to be. It was really really lovely." Everyday People participant.

"The project really makes you want to impress yourself! I was happy! I was nervous too!" Everyday People participant.

"Before I was feeling not good. But I look forward to music now." Everyday People participant.

"Songs make us feel relaxed." Harmonise participant.

"We learned how to do things as a team." Harmonise participant.

"I felt very lonely at the start (of lockdown). It's so nice to be with people, even if only on phone" Everyday People participant.

¹ See Wellbeing Scale, Appendix 2.

² Op cit.

³ Op cit.

⁴ See Wellbeing Ladder, Appendix 2.

*“The song is about love, and how strong we are together!
There was love in everything! No matter where we come
from there's still the same thing. Everything connected!”*

Though delivery has returned almost to normal after the covid pandemic, it is important to highlight the role online sessions during lockdown had on wellbeing, especially for the Everyday People programme. The project developed into a hybrid model of online and face to face activity, and gained momentum through the online EP. Through this, it provided a useful bridge connecting people with new friends during lockdown and beyond. Being able to engage online when new in the country, with little to no infrastructure or support network, helped participants feel less alone.

“I felt very lonely at the start (of lockdown). It's so nice to be with people, even if only on phone.”

The spirit of the project can be felt and seen in this excerpt (right) from the group's original song, *Special and Rare*⁵.

From facilitator feedback there are several ‘magic ingredients’ in creating this wellbeing.

1. Working with children / young people's own language.

Young people hearing their own language, and seeing it play a role in songwriting for all their peers, helped them feel valued and genuinely cared for.

2. Making time for everyone's contributions.

Sometimes pacing the sessions and fitting everything into the time available is tough. But in the 30 session observations facilitators provided, something that stood out to them was how much participants wanted to contribute, that shier or more reticent ones took longer to warm up to this, and how encouraging participants are of one another. It was a key part of people feeling proud of themselves, and it can't be rushed.

3. Being participant led, or at least co-constructed.

The same 30 observations and feedback about the summer camp also showed that participants often physically show, rather than say, what direction they want to take their music making in. They can be quite determined or passionate about a particular contribution or experiment, and this desire to show rather than tell was true regardless of language or cultural heritage. This pro-activeness surprised and impressed facilitators.

4. Being flexible.

Facilitator feedback across all the programme strands demonstrate being able to adapt very quickly is essential. Whilst the team has a plan at the start of a session, it quickly takes different turns as participants make their own contributions, and the facilitators read and try and manage / work with the energy and dynamics in the room. This adaptability is a skill and strength in its own right. Facilitator interviews showed it's exactly this adaptability and teamwork that brings joy to their work, because it stokes creativity, inclusivity, playfulness and respect.

Excerpt from *Special and Rare*

(Everyday People)

We are like water
Together we're strong

We are like (the) wind, together we
blow

We are like birds,
Together we'll fly through the sky
We are like family,
Together we will win and thrive

We are like water, fire, wind,
We're pulling through the storm
We're pulling through the storm!!

Strive to your greatness,
Because you're special and rare
You're special and rare
Don't make others tell you what
you have to do
Be confident, strong, you can do it
too.

⁵ Special and Rare, <https://musicactioninternational.bandcamp.com/album/everyday-people> 23.07.23

PRIORITY OUTCOME 2. MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Improve young people’s singing, rhythm, creative and performance skills, inspiring and enabling them to sing, play, create and perform in a collaborative and supportive, empathetic way within and outside sessions, both during and after the project.

Young people’s musical abilities grew throughout their involvement with the projects. For some this was specific skills like songwriting, for others it was growing confidence to share existing skills like playing musical instruments in front of their classmates. Projects also had an impact on participants’ understanding and awareness of music from a range of different countries and cultures in an authentic and meaningful way.

Music development measurements showed that by the end of pupils’ involvement in Harmonise:

- **All five music development indicator scores increased at the end of the project compared to when it started.⁶**
- **49% more pupils enjoyed making music with friends and other people.**
- **Those scoring their music development at very low levels reduced by an average of 110⁷.**
- **223 Arts Awards Discover were achieved.**

“It was a bit messy, the percussion group had rhythms they knew but couldn’t play together. After an hour they did really well, that felt like really good progress.” Summer Camp Facilitator

“I liked learning the body percussion, the stomps and the claps.” Harmonise Participant

“I learned about different languages in different music.” Harmonise Participant

“They learnt how to be songwriters! They left with a greater sense of empathy and understanding. They learnt performance skills/confidence.” Harmonise School Teacher

“I really enjoyed singing in a new language.” Harmonise Participant

“I couldn’t believe it when I heard my voice and what we achieved.” Everyday People Participant

“I liked learning about the new culture and playing the tambourine.” Harmonise Participant

⁶ See Music Development Scores table, Appendix 2.

⁷ Op cit.

Facilitators and teachers noticed the programmes brought out and built on particular social, critical thinking, and language elements in children and young people, including:

1. The potential for shy or quieter participants to **build confidence and challenge themselves** as the weeks go by.
2. Boisterous groups to **settle and engage in a more focused way** as children get further into the project.
3. The capabilities of the children to **learn and remember things quicker than expected**.
4. The **levels of creativity** participants contribute once their confidence and trust is established.
5. The breadth and depth of the **empathy and support** participants show one another.
6. Children and young people's abilities to **really listen** to each other and build on that.
7. The **speed at which participants can build the lyrics** of a song once they are fully engaged.
8. Children and young people's abilities to **consider, critique and be selective** about their individual and group choices.

PRIORITY OUTCOME 3. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Develop a specialised and diverse musician workforce, particularly working with young people and musicians from a refugee/Roma background, through high-quality training, mentoring, employment and CPD opportunities.

37 internal training sessions took place to ensure **11 new trainee facilitators** understood the circumstances they would find themselves in. Understanding the role of trauma, safeguarding, and the importance of individuality, positivity, creativity and equity were part of this induction process. **Training practice then continued** as new facilitators worked alongside more experienced facilitators to deliver sessions. MAI were able to reach new trainees from a refugee background through a new training & mentoring partnership with Curious Minds & CAN. In total the programme provided **147 facilitator contracts, 86 of which went to artists with refugee status**. The development – both the training and the practice – has a clear impact on not just the professional but also the personal lives of these musicians, as highlighted in the case studies below. Working collaboratively, feeling valued individually, encouraging and being encouraged to be creative and playful, finding ways to bond across language barriers, and *using* music (rather than just teaching it) are the characteristics artists identified over and over in what makes a difference to their professional practice and personal wellbeing.

1. Parisa arrived in the UK from Iran in 2019. A violist and violinist, she spent her first year here in lockdown, had her CV translated into English, then began looking for work with orchestras and music organisations. With experience of teaching music education formally in Iran and some voluntary and casual experience teaching music in Manchester, she joined a training and development programme with Curious Minds helping diverse artists understand the English school landscape. Here she shadowed a musician / facilitator who told her about Music Action International. After getting in touch with the company, Parisa was contracted as an assistant facilitator in April 2023, working in a team of three, over ten sessions, as part of the Harmonise project. Harmonise gave Parisa the opportunity to put her new training into professional practice. Importantly, it gave her opportunities to explore very different ways of using music in schools than those she was used to. She had not worked as part of a music team before in the UK, and her experience was more traditional, teaching music theory and technical discipline. Working alongside more experienced facilitators, she learned how to be creative with music, using it as a tool for play, experimentation, and expression. She discovered, by watching her colleagues, games to help break down barriers within a group. She was particularly struck by the skills the team demonstrated in knowing how to talk openly and safely with children, helping them develop creative ways to express themselves. The way the workshops created music and lyrics from the pupils' own contributions was also new, as Parisa had not seen how song writing can happen and be made collaboratively, valuing everyone individually. The project also helped her feel valued as an individual in her own right, when she was invited and felt proud to bring a song from her culture into the activities. This was the first time she had been asked to do so in

her work in the UK. She shared a recording of the work with her friends, family and Persian community, and says, *“They were so happy to know I could share my culture and proud that I could be a voice for them. If I can share another song from Iran in another project, I would be so happy.”*

2. Heider was born in the UK and has dual British and Iraqi nationality. A professional trombone player, he has lived and worked in Palestine, Iraq, Portugal and Scandinavia, worked for the Red Cross, and taught music at universities, conservatoires and in refugee camps. He heard about Music Action International through a friend and contacted them to ask about becoming a facilitator. Having been trained in classical music, for many years his experience was of highly disciplined music environments which demanded perfectionism and perpetuated elitism. Heider describes a very rigid, structured culture with no room for error or space for individuality. Only when he began to work in areas of conflict, and with people living in dire and dangerous conditions, did he slowly realise his own experience had not prepared him to facilitate music in others in ways that would suit or benefit them. When Heider joined Music Action International, he was introduced explicitly to the concept and reality of the trauma people carry with them after such experiences. This awareness forms part of the formal induction process for becoming an MAI facilitator and is a core pillar of the company’s ethos. Only at this time, did Heider have a language and framework for making sense of why his background was at odds with other work he had been doing, even though he had instinctively noticed the mismatch. The approach Harmonise takes, working collaboratively in small teams, seeing people play to their strengths, not having everything done identically, not about learning an instrument or the ‘nuts and bolts’ of music is its strength, Heider believes.

“It’s given me a broader view of what music education can do, and how it can be used in round about ways to talk about issues of refugee life. Having different musicians, taking away the emphasis on teaching, but instead working together, seeing different ways of problem solving. It’s not about being perfect, it’s liberating. Music Action International is small, dynamic, it makes the most of who different people are, as humans, with different characteristics. You see the results of the work in a day or two, you feel that straight away. And it’s spilled over into other parts of life now where I appreciate the role trauma and emotion play, so I’m more flexible and patient now because of it.”

Heider’s skills and learning have been recognised by MAI who have now given him a new project co-ordinator role three days a week, where he is enjoying identifying everyone’s different strengths and needs and how the team works around one another to create the best opportunities they can.

3. Kareem is a British-Iraqi hip-hop artist with a well-established and extensive career in the music industry, touring and online streaming. He had not, however, worked in a non-profit community engagement context before. The work has had a profound impact on his own wellbeing, love of working within music, and his creative and communication expertise. He described how the commercial music industry can become formulaic, which kills the joy and spontaneity of music making. He mostly worked solo, raising awareness and campaigning for

political change. In contrast, he says his work with Music Action International is the first time he worked creatively as part of a small team which helped him rediscover his creativity. The bringing together of many individuals is a magic ingredient Kareem noticed in this project. He identified that the variety of musician-facilitators in the room means there's always something or someone that a child will connect to, whatever they have going on inside. And having the pupils add their own contributions, treating everyone as equally valuable early in the project, helps bond the group so they can then progress more quickly. The biggest impact of this activity for Kareem is on his own wellbeing. He can speak articulately about the proven benefits of music on mental health, but the descriptions of how the project affected him are just as compelling.

"It's helped me understand how to communicate across language barriers and how that increases our ability to relate with each other. Everyone adds their own different thing, and it sits well together, bringing a class together, sometimes with ten languages or more in the room, it bonds us. I've seen how the work stimulates people's imagination and keeps things calm and relevant, it's healing. It lifts my morale, removes me from reality and lifts me out of whatever else is going on. It's cultivated a different part of my character. It's improved my rhythm and I go home clapping and singing, and then my little boy joins in. I think I've learned so much more than I've taught in this work."

4. Mas arrived in the UK from Ethiopia five years ago, bringing with him over fifteen years of experience working in circus production and performing arts including theatre and dance. He also plays and composes Ethiopian music and enjoys playing drums and keyboards. He spent time over lockdown teaching himself Western music theory, following the sense he needed to re-establish and prove his credentials here. After joining a training programme with Curious Minds in which he learned about working with the formal curriculum in schools, he was introduced to Music Acton International and interviewed for a music facilitator role. Harmonise was Mas' first professional experience of working in English schools. He found his mix of performance and music skills were especially useful in this project, where the emphasis was on collaboration, enjoyment, creativity and togetherness. He discovered the skills he arrived in the UK with were valued on their own merit as the ideal tools to help inspire, motivate, facilitate games, and stimulate creativity. The most significant impact the work had on Mas was to help him feel valued. He says,

"My perception was that what I had wasn't enough. I thought I'd have to train and get a music degree, to build more qualifications, to be able to prove my worth. But that wasn't so. Working on this project has shown that what I have is enough. It's not about perfection. It's a great opportunity to show what we have. I like flexibility and collaboration. I thought I didn't have a chance, but in Harmonise I see the blending of everything I do, it's like there's no limitations."

Mas now wants to do more of this kind of work and hopes to make it part of a new long-term career.

SECONDARY OUTCOME A. SOCIAL IMPROVEMENT

Increase empathy, awareness and understanding of RAS and people from diverse backgrounds in schools and local communities through high-quality, uplifting celebrations of music, language and stories.

Children, teachers and audiences all **enjoyed** the performances. They found them to be **exciting** events with **contagious joy**. Children within the Harmonise projects clearly became **more aware, understanding and empathetic** of those experiencing refugee and asylum-seeking lives, by **listening** to what their fellow classmates contributed during projects and **learning** about the backgrounds of many of the facilitators leading their work.

Teacher feedback shows they too understand Harmonise projects share awareness with authenticity, but it is unclear how much teachers already knew this, or how much deeper or broader their awareness extended through this work. How much this understanding and empathy rippled outwards into pupils' families and wider community is also unclear. Positive feedback about the experience of attending the performances was gathered from teachers and MAI partners, though this doesn't show what effect that had on them, or their prior knowledge or awareness. Because of Covid there were fewer performances for school communities, so less opportunity to collect audience feedback. However, Harmonise is a continuation of work started several years ago. The delivery model and the atmosphere of the concerts that did take place are much the same as the previous phase. Audience feedback was captured then⁸, and shows that the model does achieve these goals, as comments and rating scores showed that empathy increased in 63% of the audiences, increased awareness in 25%, and increased understanding in 13%.

"The project definitely supported the children's knowledge and understanding of who a refugee is / why people become refugees / the difference between refugees and asylum seekers and introduced them to who the Romas are and their culture. Meeting musicians who are refugees / part of the Roma culture, enhanced their understanding of people from different countries and backgrounds, enabling them to empathise with the plight of others. Some children talked about the injustices they have seen on television / heard about during class discussions / showed empathy towards the plight of the boat people and expressed views on how they and others could help." Harmonise School Teacher

*"Stop wars!"
"We want refugees to be welcome"
"It's not their fault their country is involved in a war!"
"How can we help them?"
"We can tell people not to believe every negative thing they hear about refugees."
Harmonise Participants*

⁸ See Appendix 3: Audience Outcomes, Harmonise 2019

SECONDARY OUTCOME B. SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Influence the sector on a national level by increasing the capacity of teachers, music/ arts students, music professionals, support workers and partners to use our methodology beyond the project.

- ✓ 5 new teacher resource videos created.
- ✓ 600 views of these to date.
- ✓ 58 sector partners worked with on this programme.
- ✓ Teachers identifying the CPD potential, teacher learning, and willingness to buy-in future provision.

"More information or online resources would be great. Some written personal stories would be useful so that we could use them in English sessions. Taster sessions as CPD so that the take up can be increased." Harmonise School Teacher

"As music coordinator, I found the project really empowered staff to perform/teach music more confidently." Harmonise School Teacher

In response to the barriers covid create for engaging with **schools**, MAI developed five online resource videos for teachers to lead in classes themselves. To date there have been 600 views of these videos⁹. Training for teachers took place online, delivered with myHub, and in partnership with Curious Minds (NW Bridge organisation for children and young people in the arts), with whom MAI also worked with training diverse musicians to work in formal education settings.

Partnership was key to influencing the wider sector. At least 58 partnerships helped achieve this. From schools, colleges, community groups, music venues, arts organisations, refugee charities, online platforms, local and national media, and more. For instance, key partners for Everyday People include: Refugee Youth (APOW), British Red Cross and new partners Manchester Settlement and Compass Collective. For schools, partnerships with Salusbury World, myHub Manchester, and Salford EMTAS signpost or refer people into MAI's programmes for children and young people and help with pastoral support. Newman Catholic College's new arrivals team are informal partners in the delivery of the annual Summer Camp. Imperial War Museum, Migration Matters and Counterpoints Arts supported with online events.

In exchange, partners benefit from MAI's skills, expertise, capacity, resources and opportunities they cannot provide directly to their communities themselves. MAI are now increasingly recognised as experts in the field, and are approached by high profile organisations for input, collaboration and comment; from Manchester International Festival with Harmonise, to BBC Symphony Orchestra with Everyday People.

⁹ Teaching resources: <https://www.musicaction.org/music-resources/>

CHALLENGES & LEARNING

- 1. COVID.** The past three years have been difficult for everyone, and Music Action International is no exception. Covid not only halted delivery, but there were extra factors in how it affected this programme, compared to many others.
Firstly, the programme is heavily weighted towards school provision, with Harmonise being such a big part of the work. When the rest of the country was able to start getting back to activities it had before lockdown, schools were not. They were restricted by government from extra projects, trips and visits for at least a further term. After that, many teachers and children continued to experience periods of sickness, making staff cover / ratios difficult, and in general schools then focused on regaining some of the lost ground in pupils' curriculum learning. Schools are still not where they were pre-pandemic. This limited how much delivery could take place with schools and had an impact on when and how the children's work could be shared with wider communities. Secondly, the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on marginalised people including refugees and asylum seekers. Facilitators suffered from long covid and heightened anxiety, and people who might otherwise be participants were less willing or able to come forward – or simply weren't accessing the support services that might usually signpost them onto MAI's programmes.
Despite challenges with recruitment and staffing, MAI demonstrated incredible resilience to still deliver and achieve as much as they possibly could.
- 2. GROUP DYNAMICS.** Facilitators frequently highlighted the difficulties in managing group dynamics, both in schools and in informal projects. Boisterous energy was a recurring theme which at times, took them away from what they were there to do. In many cases, there was little the facilitators could do about this other than what they are already doing – in just being empathetic and managing as best they can. There will always be a variety of personalities and energy levels in a room. Working with children and young people necessitates this, as does working with young people who have experienced trauma. Being in a team helps, since it enables flexibility and backup, and facilitators are understanding, but find it understandably frustrating at times.
- 3. TRICKY PARTNERSHIPS.** MAI have many strong, supportive, collaborative and positive partners. Occasionally though, they become involved with organisations who don't take the time to think about how they can best collaborate, or what it takes to get the best possible experiences and results for everyone. This can make the work hard and potentially retraumatizing for facilitators. It can be draining and risks parachuting in and out of communities, adding to experiences of exploitation and alienation, through no fault of MAI's.

4. **ABSENT TEACHERS / GROUP LEADERS.** Again, this doesn't happen often, but there are times when teachers or other staff expected to be supporting and managing their participants during sessions are either not present, or disappear part way through. All facilitators receive safeguarding training but staff leaving the space has a direct impact on group dynamics in the room (see item 2 above), which in turn affects the experience and progress for everyone involved.
5. **ADAPTABILITY.** The need for facilitators to be flexible and respond quickly to change has already been mentioned. Fortunately, MAI recruits and trains facilitators with this in mind, and for the most part the team rise to this challenge well. It can have an impact on the progress of the project and the energy it takes to run the sessions, and it does become frustrating for facilitators at times. Again, this is where being in a team is especially helpful.
6. **PRE-PLANNING.** When asked how projects can be improved, facilitators always ask for more time in advance to plan together, and for shared resources like videos, lyrics and music in advance, in a shared online folder. Pre-planning is part of their contracts, but perhaps what could be clearer, is that *they* have the permission and responsibility for this rather than waiting for someone else to arrange it.
7. **DATA COLLECTION.** A clear framework for data collection is now in place, but gathering reliable information from the right people, asking the right questions, and collecting at the right opportunity in the right ways has been a challenge. Some of this is because covid has limited the opportunities to do this. Some is because a large pool of facilitators are having to be trained to do this in a uniform and consistent way. Some are better than others at this, and it is also possible that cultural differences get in the way of this. Facilitators have taken to audio recordings and inputting data on their phones well, so the challenge is mainly getting the right questions asked (i.e. about outcomes and impact not just quality of experience) of all the right people (including teachers as well as pupils) in consistent ways. There are also challenges around collecting audience feedback which needs further work.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt this programme helped children, young people, diverse and refugee artists and musicians feel joy, celebration, community, support and genuinely understand they are valued and matter in this country. It has brought out people's resilience, empathy, creativity, play, confidence, trust, and adaptability. It offers space for children and young people from all cultures to listen and hear one another, to share ideas and make something together bigger and better than any of them could create alone.

Musical skills have been uncovered, learned, grown and shared. Highlights included learning songs in new languages or hearing and sharing songs in the native languages of refugees and asylum-seeking children and young people. Incorporating movement has helped channel the energies of more dynamic participants, who have learned how music can help excite or calm them. They have learned how to reflect on and purposefully select the words they put together to make lyrics. Their achievements have been formally recognised through Arts Awards.

Facilitators from refugee and diverse backgrounds have been trained, mentored and have supported and shadowed others, to learn more about how to get the best from children and young people – refugee, asylum seeker, or otherwise – through music. Working with Music Action International has freed them from some long-standing limiting beliefs about how music and musicianship 'should' be, provided opportunities they didn't think they would get, brought them joy, and improved their relationships inside and outside of work. It has helped them better appreciate and practice their flexibility, creativity, play, communication and collaboration. It has changed how they view their self-worth and professionalism in this country and helped them feel better prepared for other work going forward.

The programme has helped teachers develop skills and confidence for working with music in the future, and demonstrated the value of MAI's approach, creating more appetite for partnerships, opportunities and resources.

All of this was achieved in spite of the programme starting just as the country went into lockdown. This affected what was possible, but MAI were determined to overcome as many barriers as possible to carry on in some way. There have been other challenges, such as partnerships that didn't quite flourish as hoped, and some difficult situations for facilitators to manage. There is a clear passion, spirit and resilience in the organisation to find ways through any obstacle. It is hard work, sometimes frustrating, but the staff and facilitators are to be commended on the results of their commitment and the sheer joy they generate among some incredibly difficult and dark spaces.

Going forward, MAI are keen to put what they have learned on this programme into action. They have just been awarded National Portfolio Organisation status with Arts Council England. With this comes funding to strengthen their organisation, increase the scale and capacity of their work, and expand into new parts of the country. In the next two years this enables them to:

- Adapt and continue their facilitator recruitment and training.
- Keep blending online and in person activity and adding in video across their wider programme.
- Take summer camp style activity to a refugee holiday programme in Brighton, one in Brent in partnership with Springboard Academy, another in a Hillingdon hotel; with more summer activities throughout Brighton, Manchester and London.
- Offer winter holiday programmes again in Brent and Brighton.
- Continue Everyday People throughout London, working with Red Cross and Roundhouse, and in Manchester with partners All4One and Manchester College.
- Continue Harmonise in London and Manchester
- And work with the Ukrainian Saturday School in Manchester.

MAI's value is being acknowledged in other exciting ways as the spotlight on them over this time starts to grow their profile further. Invitations to perform with and for the BBC; congratulations from large music venues such as the Bridgewater Hall and Royal Festival Hall; requests from partnerships with strategic regional organisations like Curious Minds or on national and international projects with Manchester International Festival, as well as new collaborations with online platforms and national refugee charities, all show that the arts, education and international aid sectors value what MAI has to offer.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Brief

The brief for this end point summary evaluation was to gather the data collected by the MAI team across the four strands, and interview a selection of the facilitators involved, to identify the impact and learning from this Youth Music funded programme.

Data Available

A range of qualitative and quantitative data is collected across all MAI's programmes, usually combining feedback and experiences from the perspectives of participants, facilitators, school or group leaders, and where possible from audiences and the wider community.

For **Harmonise**, MAI used the Youth Music evaluation toolkit's wellbeing ladder, wellbeing scales and music development scales, combined with audio recordings, feedback sheets, observation sheets and statistical monitoring. In total this includes:

- Wellbeing ladder: 135 pupils from 5 schools at the start and 119 from 6 schools at the end.
- Wellbeing scales: 135 pupils from 6 schools at the start and 137 from 5 schools at the end.
- Music Development scales: 156 pupils from 6 schools at the start, 168 from 7 schools at the end.
- Audio recordings of pupils and facilitators' feedback at 5 schools.
- Teacher feedback forms: from 5 schools.
- Observation sheets: 26 observations documented over 3 schools.
- Collection of quotes and anecdotes across Manchester and London schools / performances.
- Statistical monitoring of delivery and participation.

For **Everyday People**, data includes:

- Observation sheets: 4 observations documented over 5 sessions.
- Statistical monitoring of delivery and participation.
- Collection of general quotes and anecdotes.
- EP of music available online¹⁰

For **Summer Camp**, data includes:

- Statistical monitoring of delivery and participation.
- Facilitator feedback forms from 4 artists over two weeks.
- Collection of general quotes and anecdotes.
- Recording of music created.

In addition:

- Four in-dept facilitator interviews
- Five project interim and funder reports

¹⁰ See Appendix 4, Online Resources.

Data Limitations

An evaluation framework underpins all of MAI's work, though with increasingly national reach, a large pool of project facilitators, and a community of participants with many different communication and language variations, it can be hard to gather consistent data collection.

For Harmonise, though scores were not collected from every group, across the project, in terms of statistical reliability, most samples represented a 99% confidence level that results were accurate give or take 5%. Even the smaller sample represents a 95% confidence level of accuracy + or - 5.5%. So in general those quantifiable results are a very reliable indication of the project.

Data from the wider community such as families and audiences was more difficult. Covid meant the full programme of sharing events was impossible, so there were far fewer opportunities to collect audience / wider community feedback. The performance venues administrate the bookings of schools, so MAI does not have direct access to contact details and cannot ask for follow-up feedback. Nor does MAI have the capacity or expertise to collect data from audiences leaving the auditorium - most of which are rushing out of the building to leave anyway.

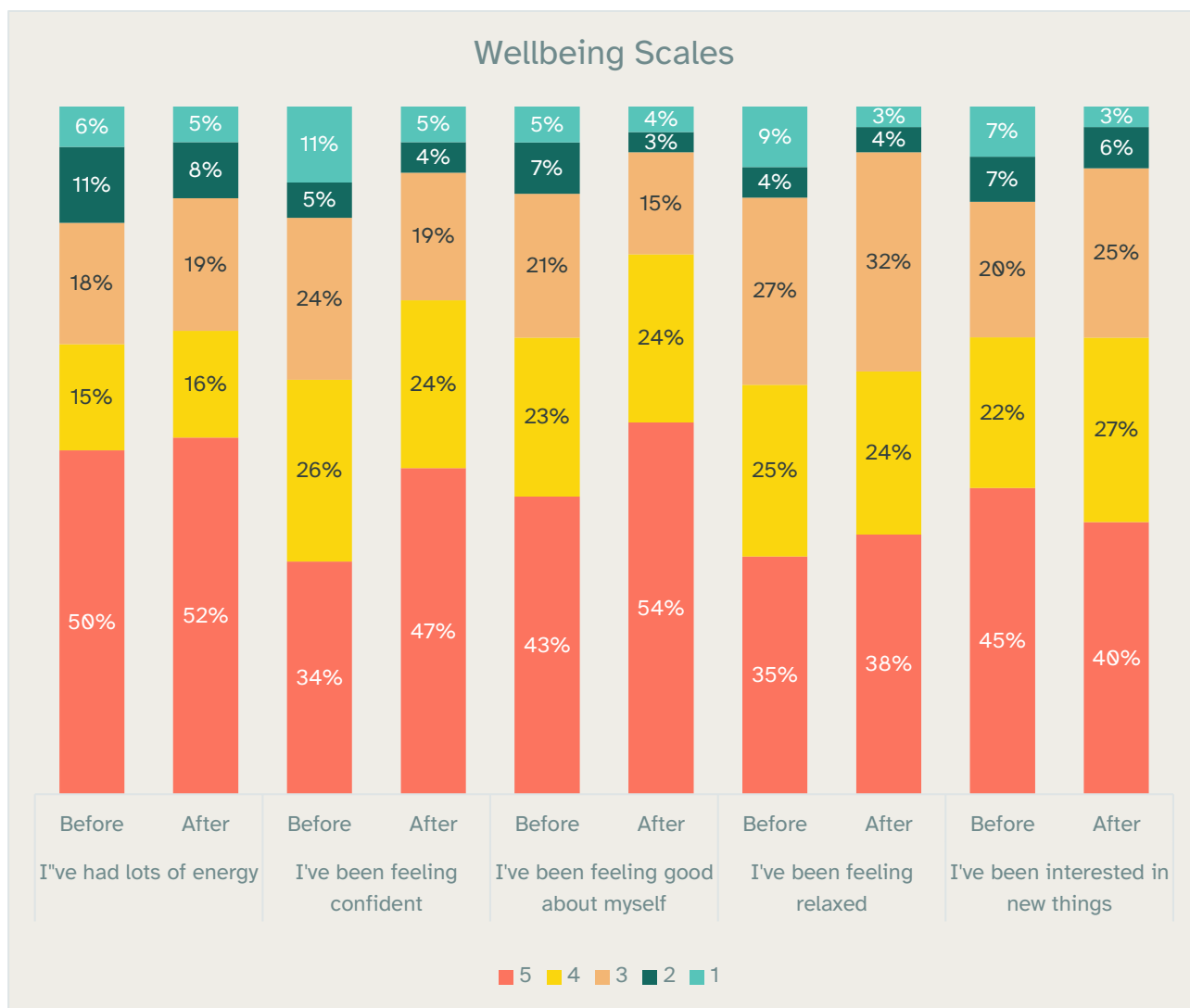
Information about Everyday People comes from the MAI core team, the music created, and the facilitators. Data collection barriers include the fact much of the work happened online during the pandemic, with no new adaptations of evaluation tools available at the time. In addition, most participants being brand new in the country had little or no spoken or written English language.

For the Summer Camp, data collection was minimal too. Facilitators ended up being short staffed at times, and with less help from teachers than had been anticipated, so their full focus was on delivery and managing the young people. Data is therefore mainly participation monitoring and facilitator feedback about processes.

APPENDIX 2: YOUTH MUSIC MEASUREMENT SCALES

Youth Music wellbeing scales, wellbeing ladder, and music development scales were used to collect start and end point scores from pupils. The results are as follows.

Wellbeing Scale. Pupils were asked to say how much they agreed or not (on a 5 point scale: 5 being high / 1 being low) with wellbeing statements and scores were averaged out.



Analysis:

% Differences in start - end scores	Scored 4-5	scored 1-2
I've had lots of energy	4%	-38%
I've been feeling confident	33%	-67%
I've been feeling good about myself	31%	-89%
I've been feeling relaxed	4%	-82%
I've been interested in new things	12%	-68%
ALL	17% ¹	-69% ²

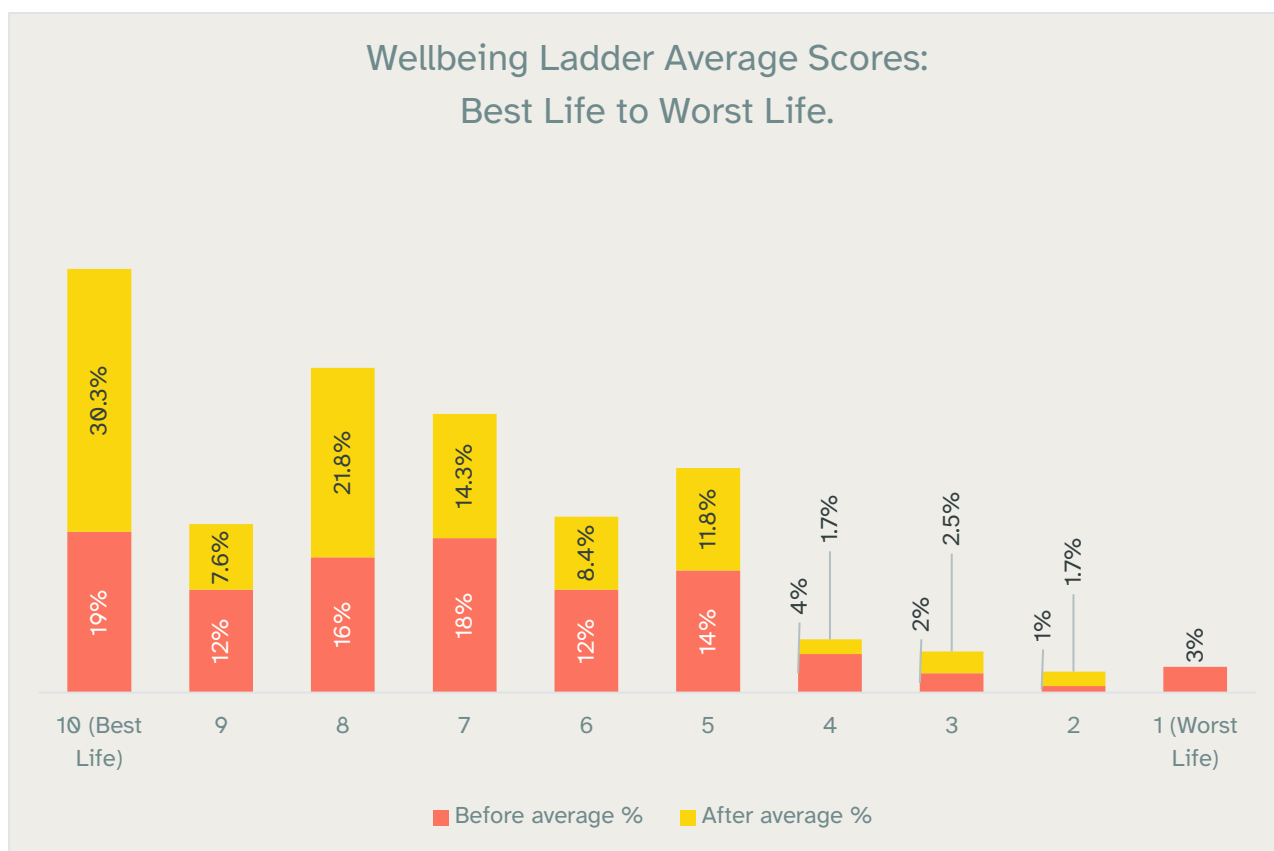
¹ Overall, high scores (4 or 5) increased by an average of 17%

² Overall, low scores (1-2) decreased by an average of 69%

* Statements in **bold** saw the greatest increase in high scores

Wellbeing Ladders:

Pupils were asked to mark on a 10-point ladder where they were feeling, between living their best life (10) and living their worst life (1). These scores were averaged out to give the results below.



Analysis:

Scored	before	after	difference	% difference
10	18.5%	30.3%	11.7%	63% ¹
8 to 10	45.9%	59.7%	13.7%	30% ²
1	3.0%	0.0%	-3.0%	-100% ³
1 to 3	5.9%	4.2%	-1.7%	-29% ⁴

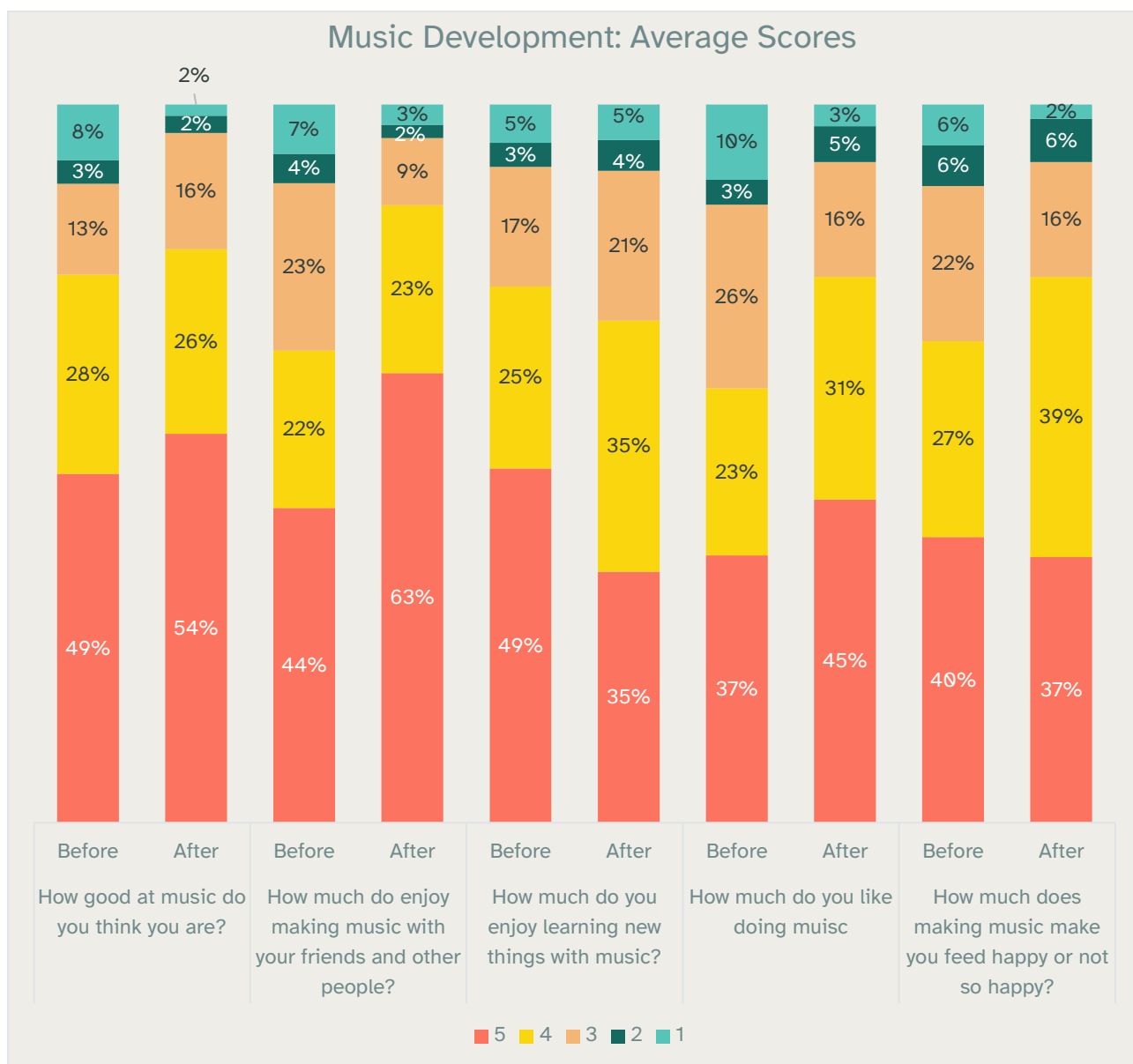
¹ Overall, highest score possible (10) increased by 63%

² High scores more generally (8-10) increased by an average of 30%

³ Overall, the lowest score (1) decreased by 100%

⁴ Low scores more generally (1-3) decreased by an average of 29%

Music Development Scores: Pupils were asked to rate themselves in response to five music development questions (on a 5-point scale: 5 being high / 1 being low). Scores were averaged out.



Analysis:

% Differences in start - end scores	Scored 4-5	scored 1-2
<i>How good at music do you think you are?</i>	4%	-107%
How much do enjoy making music with your friends and other people?	49%	-114%
How much do you enjoy learning new things with music?	9%	21%
<i>How much do you like doing music</i>	2%	-109%
How much does making music make you feel happy or not so happy?	2%	-34%
ALL	13% ¹	-69% ²

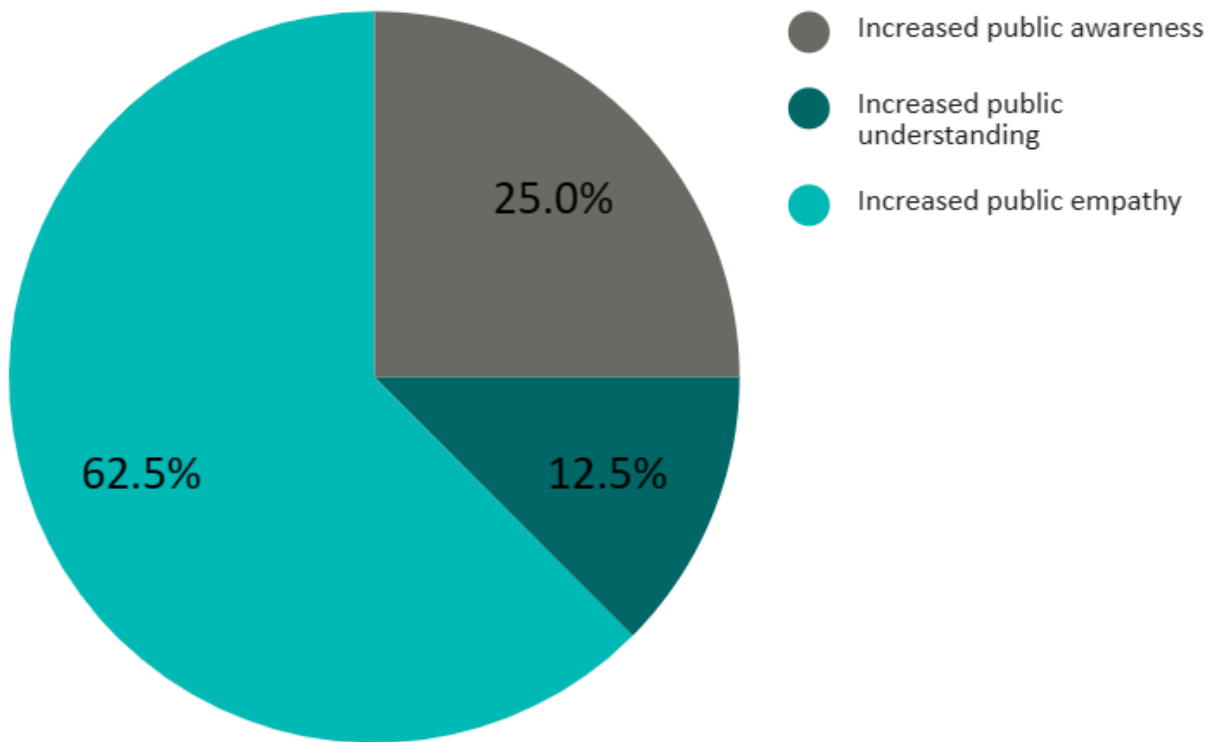
¹ Overall, high scores (4 or 5) increased by an average of 13%

² Overall, low scores (1-2) decreased by an average of 69%

* Statements in **bold** saw the greatest increase in high scores

APPENDIX 3: AUDIENCE OUTCOMES, HARMONISE 2019

Outcomes represented in comments



APPENDIX 4: ONLINE REFERENCES

HARMONISE

Project webpage <http://www.musicaction.org/harmonise/>

SYRIA SUMMER CAMP

Project webpage <https://www.musicaction.org/ssc/>

'This is Me' <https://soundcloud.com/musicactionint/this-is-me>

EVERYDAY PEOPLE

Project webpage

<http://www.musicaction.org/everyday-people/>

Everyday People EP project trailer, feat Lowkey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSDYDLe7mRc>

Everyday People & The BBC Symphony Orchestra

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p05ncjdk>

Everyday People EP on Bandcamp

<https://musicactioninternational.bandcamp.com/>

Big Dada Online Feature

<https://bigdada.com/editorial-view/10>