
EVALUATION AND IMPACT REPORT 2023

BRISTOL
REFUGEE
FESTIVAL



Table of Contents

- 01 Introduction
- 02 Overview
- 04 The Last Three Years
- 07 The 2022 – 2023 Programme
- 18 Learning and Recommendations



Introduction

We are delighted to be able to share this year's annual evaluation and impact report with you, which serves as a testament to the remarkable accomplishments of our dedicated team, ambassadors and volunteers over the past year. There have been many challenges presented during the last three years, including the constraints posed by COVID-19 and the persistent hostile rhetoric from our government and certain media outlets towards those seeking sanctuary. However, we are always moved and slightly overwhelmed with the willingness of the people we meet to challenge the current narrative and show Bristol as a welcoming and inclusive city, ready to embrace and celebrate its new arrivals.

Our community outreach programme has developed rapidly since its inception three years ago and this year we saw a huge expansion in the numbers of communities and individuals involved in our activities throughout the year, which included engagement activities, workshops, cultural calendar events, training and more. Our annual Festival in June was hugely successful with communities all over Bristol coming together to celebrate the theme of 'Compassion' with us and it was a joy to once again host our flagship event in Queen Square, following a 3 year hiatus.

We were very pleased to welcome new members to our Board of Directors, who bring a range of skills and knowledge, including lived experience as refugees and asylum seekers. The further development of our ambassador programme has also been hugely important in ensuring that the voice of refugees and asylum seekers is at the centre of our work as we continue towards our goal of having a refugee-led organisation.

A heartfelt thank you to the core team, ambassadors, volunteers and freelancers for their hard work and resilience and thank you to all our funders, partners and our board for their continued support.

Jules Olsen - Festival Director & **Fatuma Mohamud** - Chair



Bristol Refugee Festival

Vision



Bristol Refugee Festival's vision is that refugees and asylum seekers feel welcome, valued and confident to celebrate and share their culture, skills and knowledge in their local community and beyond.

Mission



Bristol Refugee Festival's mission is to support and facilitate newly arrived and settled communities to come together in celebration of inclusion and diversity, through a year-round programme of events, with an annual cross art-form Festival at its core.

Values



Celebration: Celebrating and embracing our differences whilst recognising our similarities.

Inclusion: Valuing all voices and the sharing of culture, skills and knowledge.

Collaboration: Building strong relationships with individuals and organisations whilst working towards a shared goal.

Integrity: Ensuring the community we serve is always at the heart of all our work.

Respect: Believing we are all equal and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Programme

Bristol Refugee Festival (BRF) coordinates a collaborative year-round programme of arts, cultural and educational events, celebrating and valuing the contribution of refugees and asylum seekers to our communities.

BRF connects with people in open and inclusive ways through creative activities that cut across barriers such as language, gender, age and background, by ensuring opportunities to have fun together and thereby feel connected:

"When we see other cultures perform you feel connected spiritually, learn how to dance, the connection is so good, so strong."

(Audience Survey, Queens Square Event, 2023)

To this end the team develops bespoke events through co-creation with specific communities and in response to different contexts. By sharing creative skills and knowledge, people have opportunities to learn about each other's cultures, so that people from different backgrounds can connect. Arts and cultural activities enable refugees and asylum seekers to articulate their experiences to a wider community. By encompassing a wide-range of cultural interests, such as food, dance, music, fashion and sport, people can share important details of their cultural identities, nurturing greater understanding between people from different backgrounds.

As the programme has developed there has been more involvement from refugee and asylum seekers using their skills and knowledge to co-create or lead activity, creating spaces where refugees and asylum seekers are not only welcome, but actively participating:

"I feel more confident public speaking and organising activities and inviting other people, and if you want to organise an event for asylum seekers you need to make them part of the planning and talk to them. Asylum seekers need a little time and space away from their situation - if we organise something in a local community, and give asylum seekers certain duties in the event, this can give them motivation."

(BRF Ambassador, Interview, 11 Oct 23)

The BRF programme is strategically developed to realise the following aims:

- To celebrate and value the contribution of refugees and asylum seekers.*
- To ensure that refugees and asylum seekers know that they are welcome in their local community hubs and spaces that matter to communities.*
- To enable host communities to have the confidence and knowledge to engage with refugee and asylum seekers in their area, enabling them to create places of welcome and inclusion.*
- To bring local residents and refugees and asylum seekers together and build strong relationships in and across communities.*
- To enable refugees and asylum seekers to be more effectively engaged and support them to become more active members of their community.*
- To reduce loneliness and isolation.*

Evaluation Approach and Process

The BRF evaluation process nurtures ongoing opportunities for reflection. It is also an important tool for professional development and for making explicit everyone's sense of what they have experienced, and the impact it has had for them. This year, opportunities for reflection have expanded through training in evaluation and sense making for BRF Ambassadors, and trainees from the Creative talent development strand of the programme. This training has helped to equip volunteers and Ambassadors to have active roles in shaping questions and interviewing audiences.

Roles developed within evaluation also included photo documentation:

"Thank you very much for opportunity to be your photographer on the Festival! I am so happy to be a small piece of this huge event! It was amazing! Let me express our gratitude from all Ukrainian girls who were on the Festival. All of us have children, and we were absolutely happy that our children had fun the whole day! Thank you for this."

(Zhenya, photographer, Testimonial, 2023)

This approach ensures that different perspectives of events and evidence are voiced, allowing for a plurality of perspectives to inform the learning that will inform future work as well as the content of this report.



Comments captured on paper leaves at Celebrating Sanctuary, Queen Square 2023

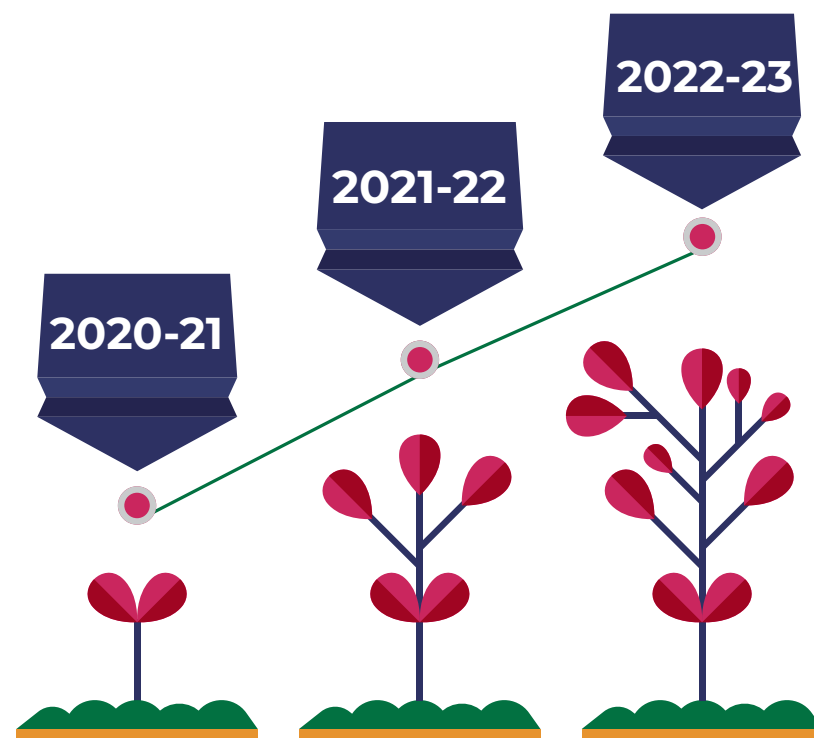
The Last Three Years

Summary Findings and Programme Development

In 2020 BRF received Lottery funding to develop a community engagement programme.

Since then Bristol Refugee Festival has evolved in various ways. It has done so organically, through ongoing reflection on the challenges of a shifting context and a nimble and responsive team who have been able to strategically imagine and realise alternatives to their usual programme.

The number of people experiencing the festival has increased significantly over the last three years.



Attendances

802

2,092

6,196

Refugees & asylum seekers

332

496

983

Between 2020 and 2021 the festival team conceptualised and developed ways of working in response to the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic and consequent restrictions. Learning from this time highlighted the value of smaller, more intimate events, as were necessitated through lockdown restrictions.

Feedback indicated that these events proved to be valuable spaces, as people were more likely to make meaningful connections with each other than they might at large scale events:

"I know that the limit of 30 people was a shame in some ways, but it actually made it easy to talk to others. If it has been a mass event at Queen's Square, I'm not sure I would have made the same connections."

(Attendee, WWM/CS Survey, 2021)

Bristol Refugee Festival built on this learning by establishing a year-long programme and developing the main festival, which now incorporates a series of small, intimate, hyperlocal events.

This expansion has led to an increase in the geographic spread of the festival, with activities and events across Bristol and spreading beyond the official Bristol City boundaries into South Gloucestershire and North Somerset, with attendees from other areas in the Southwest.

[This Community Film](#), highlights the development of BRF's community based work, made in collaboration with our refugee ambassadors, was produced during the 2021-2022 programme and shown at the AGM and annual Celebration in Dec 2022.

Events in some of these areas and in the city centre, for example at Arnolfini, have been key to engaging newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers who have been placed in hotels. Some of the hotel locations contribute to the isolation of these individuals:

"They're stuck in hotels far away from support agencies, with some people isolated in places like Avonmouth and Weston-Super Mare, with little contact with their own language group."

(Interview, Bristol 24/7, July 2023)

These people have become directly involved in the festival in a range of positive ways, for example, by attending the launch and becoming more familiar with BRF ambassadors:

"The launch was well organised, all the refugees and asylum seekers who were invited from hotels came to the launch, so there were a lot of people, which was great. This helped establish a connection for the ambassador."

(Sense making session, July 2023)

During 2022 it became increasingly apparent that people also missed the opportunity that a larger central event presented bringing people together to celebrate and increase visibility of refugees and asylum seekers in a central public space:

“I did hear people say they really miss Queens Square. Understand the motivations for doing things differently but it is so important for people to feel welcome and included in the City Centre and in a very public space. I do feel something is lost by not having that.”
(Event Organisers Feedback, 2022)

It has been recognised that people come from beyond Bristol to this central event, extending the audience further:

“Seeing refugees and asylum seekers from outside Bristol coming to Bristol for events, like Dovetail and Queen Square... One person came from Wiltshire and brought some other people with them and they made a connection with some people from Bristol, making Bristol seem like somewhere they could go in future.”
(Sense making session, July 2023)

This is clearly of great significance as it promises to extend the networks and connectivity for refugees and asylum seekers living in less diverse neighbourhoods than those that can be found in Bristol.



Ambassador Programme

The development of BRF's Ambassador programme has been key to the success of the last 3 years. Refugee and asylum seekers are recruited to be a voice for their communities, encourage participation from others, be ambassadors for BRF and are involved in all aspects of the planning and delivery of the programme.

They are given a wide range of opportunities through which to develop diverse skills which makes a significant difference to the individual:

"Public speaking at Queen Square and with pre-recorded message at planning meeting, SARI training, event management training, helped plan the launch.

It motivates us... and helps knowing more about the society that we live in, and meeting people who are supportive toward asylum seekers."

(BRF Ambassador, Interview, 11 Oct 23)

Meeting different people has been highlighted as one of the key benefits, not least because of the difference that these connections then make for the Ambassadors:

"Meeting new people, from different organisations, also people from different cultures.... which helps us learn about different people's circumstances, including people that I wouldn't have had the chance to have met before. Bristol is a diversity of many different cultures, if I hadn't worked with BRF I wouldn't have met many of these people in these different circumstances. Speaking with other asylum seekers helps learn about the different problems they face."

(BRF Ambassador, Interview, 11 Oct 23)

Meeting and working with new people leads ambassadors to feel more confident about talking to different people:

"I feel more confident about speaking to other Ukrainians now because having information to share helps me to talk to more people."

(BRF Ambassador, Interview, 18 Oct 23)

Ultimately BRF makes a significant difference for Ambassadors in terms of establishing and growing a sense of belonging and the potential there is to contribute to a more cohesive sense of community, through supporting others:

"If you live in a place, you have to be a part of that place to feel belongingness, the more you speak the more you share and the more you get back, like advice. The trust BRF have built with us helps to speak out and speak about our problems and get help."

(BRF Ambassador, Interview, 11 Oct 23).

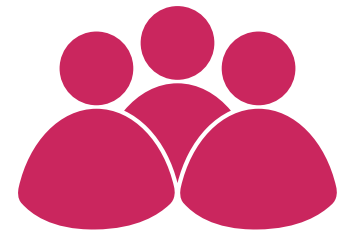


Ambassadors and team, Weston-Super-Mare, 2023

The 2022 – 2023 Programme

At a glance

This year the year-round programme included 42 different events and activities



6,192 total attendees

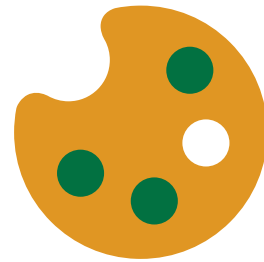
983 refugees and asylum Seekers

3,800 attendees at Celebrating Sanctuary Local and central events

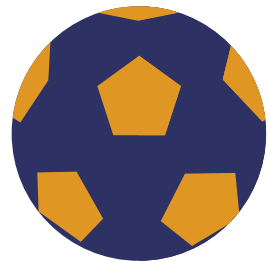


39 partners

10 ambassadors



202 engaged in creative workshops



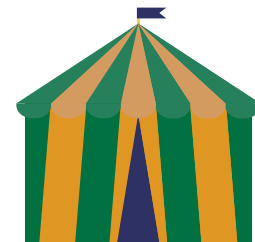
185 attended sporting events



20 refugee artists and performers



12 events produced by refugees and asylum seekers



10 refugee craft and food traders

welcome chats - community and cultural celebrations - information

workshops - planning and networking meetings - book launch - picnics

theatre & creative workshops - art & craft sessions - football - tournament

music & dance - trade fairs & stalls - poetry - film - feasts & cookery classes

language classes - Celebrating Sanctuary events

The Main Festival Programme in June was informed by the theme of 'Compassion,' inviting people to widen their circle and embrace everyone in their community.



CELEBRATING SANCTUARY/CONCERTS/SPORTS ACTIVITIES/ART AND CRAFT WORKSHOPS/
EXHIBITIONS/DANCE EVENTS/FOOD FEASTS/TRADE FAIRS/FILM SCREENINGS AND MORE



For more information about our events
and translations visit
www.bristolrefugeefestival.org
Or scan the QR code

BristolRefugeeFestival

bristolrefugeefestival

ALL
WELCOME



Ukrainian performance, Celebrate With Me, Page Park, 2023



Afghan Peace Feast, Festival, 2023



Football Tournament, Wesport, 2023



Filwood Community Picnic, Festival, 2023



Festival Launch, 2023

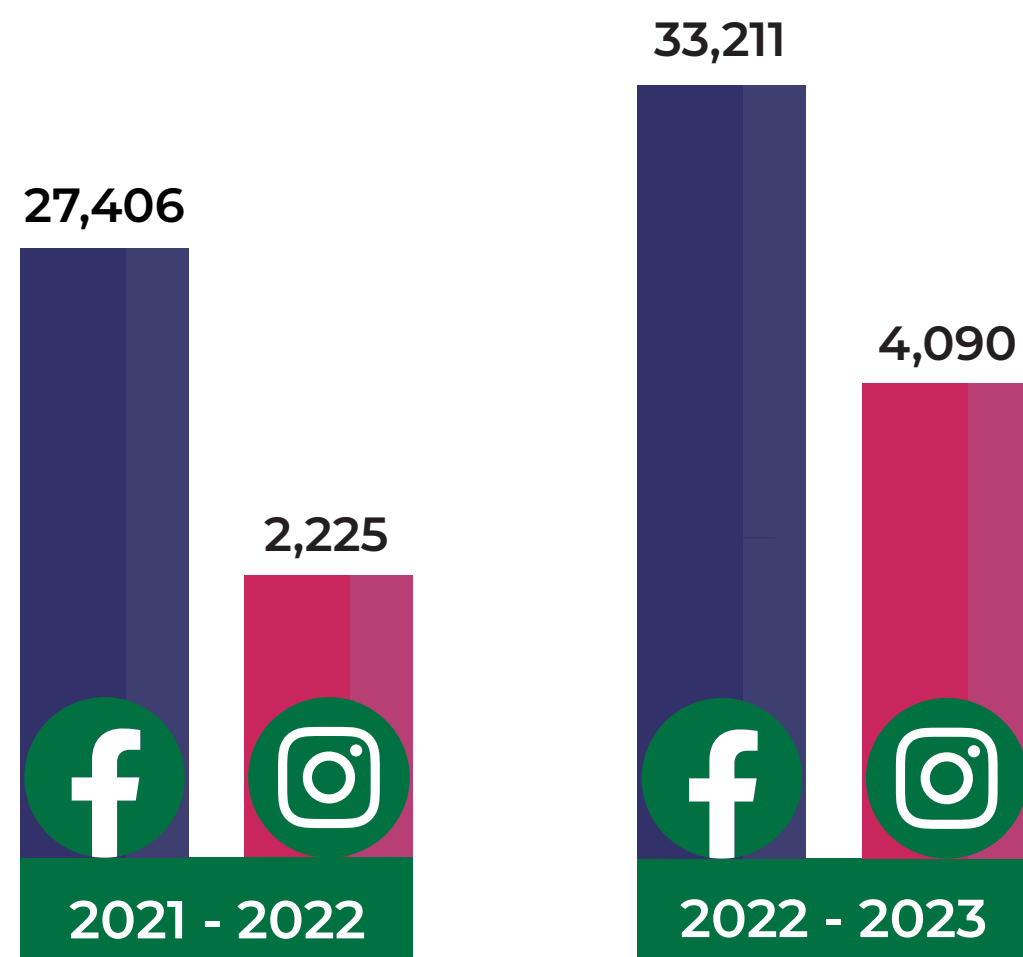
The Difference made by Bristol Refugee Festival

The aims of the BRF programme are met through a range of opportunities for people to engage, as participants and audiences and also through co-creative and leadership roles for refugees and asylum seekers and wider communities. This approach leads to a wide and bespoke programme through which a diversity of people is engaged.

This section of the report presents evidence and learning regarding the different aims of the programme and how these were met through all relevant strands of the programme events and activities.

Social media use has increased significantly this year, raising the visibility of the event and the profile of refugee and asylum seekers' talents and contributions considerably. For example, from September 2022 to September 2023, there has been an increase in followers for Facebook by 226 to 3,253 and for Instagram by 389 to 1,756.

The reach on Facebook for 22-23 was 33,211, compared to 27,406 for 2021-22. For Instagram the reach has increased from 2,225 to 4,090.



Press and publicity have also helped to increase the visibility of events, amplifying the difference made by BRF and sharing the valuable contributions being made by refugees and asylum seekers. For example, the following detail was widely distributed through the **Bristol Post What's on News**.

"This year's flagship event has a diverse international line-up of musicians including the Mozambican rapper MoYah who has performed on BBC One and uses his own experience of war and displacement to uplift audiences and promote a message of love and unity. Bristol based Alphonse Daudet Touna from Cameroon will be performing with his band, Hélélé and playing the Balafon."

Bristol's B24/7 shared news about the Celebrating Sanctuary event in Staple Hill. The **BBC** has also covered events such as the performance by the Dovetail Orchestra.

This sort of press coverage is significant because it articulates something of the rationale for BRF's work to a much wider audience than could ever attend events, thereby helping to achieve the aims of the programme by influencing perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers.



Dovetail Orchestra's first performance at 2023 festival, covered by BBC news

AIM: Celebrating and valuing the contribution of refugees and asylum seekers.

The BRF programme is succeeding in achieving this aim and is increasingly effective at doing so through ensuring greater involvement of people with lived experience:

“Every year it (the festival) is improving and more people with lived experience are involved and leading on projects.”

(Refugee participant at 2023 programme launch)

This year, more than ever, refugees and asylum seekers have developed different skills and roles as leaders, producers, ambassadors, performers, evaluators, spokespeople and filmmakers.

At the South West Strategic Meeting in March, for example, Ambassadors played a key part in the day; talking, giving presentations and being involved in table discussions. This was welcomed by delegates when asked what they found most valuable:

“Hearing lived experiences and opinions of refugees.”

“Networking, also hearing lived experience and ideas for encouraging refugee leadership.”

(Delegate feedback - strategic meeting 2023)

Refugees have also been literally centre stage at a wide range of events, including at Celebrating Sanctuary in Queen Square festival, and the BRF team has also recognised how positive the experience has been for these performers:

“The whole line up at Queen square was refugees.”

“It was great to see how excited the performers were before they went on stage, doing something they really love and sharing that with other people, was really positive.”

(Sense Making session, July 2023)

The audience has also been aware of the value of the opportunity for refugees and asylum seekers to showcase their talents:

“It’s amazing, it’s such a wonderful opportunity for all the refugees... to show their talent and network together.”

(Audience Feedback, Queens Square, 2023)

The Queen Square event was also incredibly beneficial for volunteers working on the day, whose contributions were valued by everyone, including the volunteers themselves:

“I am very thankful I got to be part of the team for this event, I enjoyed every minute of it! It was truly a highlight of the year. And it was so great to be working with such brilliant people.”

(Volunteer at Queens Square event, 2023.)

Its visibility in a central location and the fact that people might ‘stumble upon’ the event. In this way it can raise the profile of refugee and asylum seeker talents and nurture greater celebration of difference across a wider audience than local events might allow.

Smaller, local events have also been valuable, for volunteers and for the team, as spaces to showcase and celebrate the skills and talents of, and contributions made by, refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, the team is now able to expand on opportunities presented through networks being expanded and solidified during smaller local events, for example:

“It was nice to meet so many people I didn’t know, who are performers or involved in different ways, I invited the girls at Page Park to perform at a Ukrainian event.”

(Sense Making session, July 2023)



Nicaraguan dancers, Queen Square 2023

AIM: Refugees and asylum seekers know that they are welcome in their local community hubs and spaces that matter to communities.

BRF’s Celebrating Sanctuary Local programme, takes place across a wide range of localities, ensuring that people living in those different areas feel welcome in the community hubs and other spaces that matter. Similarly, the Cultural Calendar strand of the programme extends the sense of welcome through platforming cultural celebrations in local spaces.

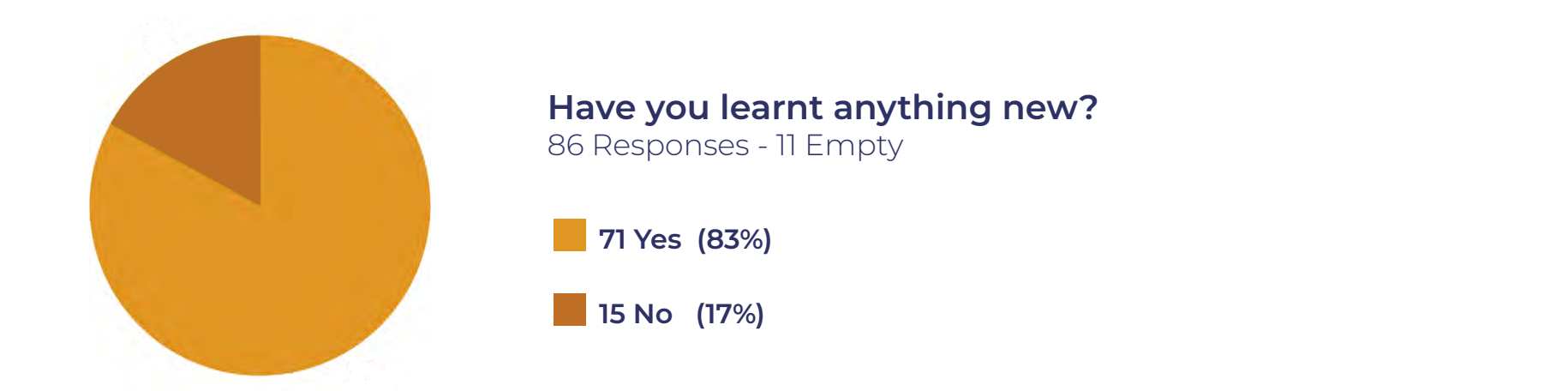
- **Community Picnic - Filwood Park**
- **Celebrate with Me - Page Park**
- **Taste of Sudan - St Werburghs Community Centre**
- **Community Celebration with Bristol4Tibet - St Werburghs Community Centre**
- **Central America Cultural Celebration - Eastville Park**
- **Eritrean Peace Feast - Easton Family Centre**
- **Southmead Festival - Greenway Centre**

These events help to nurture a greater sense of being welcomed as they are valuable opportunities for communities to develop greater awareness and understanding of different cultural experiences, for example, when asked about what they had learnt at the Community Celebration with Bristol4Tibet, the following replies are indicative of the majority:

“Learnt about Tibet.”
“About Tibetan culture history and dance.”
“I enjoyed the music and the dancing I really found the culture amazing and I want to help tell more people about it.”

Such events promote better understanding as to why people seek sanctuary, ultimately working towards people feeling welcomed by informed and aware communities.

As further evidence, when asked if they had learnt something new at BRF events, 83% of people said yes, as shown in the diagram below.



As shown in the quotes above, most of this learning has been about the cultural and social experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, indicating that host communities have become more informed about those experiences. This can help refugees and asylum seekers to overcome feelings of being ‘lost’ as their experiences are more likely to be understood. Furthermore, at events like the Queen Square people are able to make real connections in real life, which are understood to be far more beneficial than digital connections:

“It’s amazing how much positive energy you get from real contact, in one hour compared to how little you might achieve scrolling on your phone.”
(Sense Making session, July 2023)

Making together, using music, craft or other cultural forms, is commonly commented upon as a bonding experience:

“The women’s craft event at Arnolfini was a lovely, serene environment, with a calm atmosphere and conversations going on.”
(Sense Making session, July 2023)

Friendly, relaxed and creative spaces are key to the effectiveness of BRF events:

“At Malcolm X, the mindful arts event was really peaceful, quiet and nice. You could be doing something and chat at the same time, which takes the pressure off of starting a conversation. Drawing and doing crafts helps switch on a different part of your brain.” *(Sense Making session, July 2023)*

When attendees were asked if they had been to an event like this before, almost half of the event audience members and participants said no, suggesting that people may be more comfortable attending BRF events than others.

“People were friendly and nice - very supportive”
(Participant, Launch 2023)

AIM: Host communities having the confidence and knowledge to engage with refugee and asylum seekers in their area, enabling them to create places of welcome and inclusion.

BRF realises this aim through several strategies:

- Welcome chats
- Workshops, toolkits and inspiration
- Co-creation of local events
- Sustainability

1. Welcome chats

The engagement team organises an informal 'chat' in a local community hub, inviting a range of people from that community about creating a welcoming and inclusive space.

2. Workshops, toolkits and inspiration

BRF hosts workshops, to inform practice across a wider range of organisations. At the 'Creating Spaces of Welcome' workshop, Bristol Refugee Festival brought together organisations, people from local communities and refugees and asylum seekers, to explore how local spaces can be more welcoming to the full spectrum of people in the community. From this BRF have produced resources to support organisations to become Spaces of Welcome, such as the following info-flyer:

BRF has also produced toolkits to support communities, organisations and schools to plan and deliver their own Celebrating Sanctuary events through BRF's resources, Celebrating Sanctuary Local Toolkit and Celebrating Sanctuary Toolkit for Schools. All resources are available on [BRF's website](https://www.bristolrefugeefestival.org), along with videos and pictures.

COMMUNITY HUBS
CREATING SPACES OF WELCOME
FOR REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS

OUR VISION
Refugees and asylum seekers feel welcome, valued and confident to celebrate and share their culture, skills and knowledge in their local community and beyond.

WHAT DO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS USE COMMUNITY HUBS FOR?
Community spaces exist to welcome all members of the community. Here are some things that refugees and asylum seekers would like to do in a space of welcome:

- Feel comfortable and seek support
- Participate, regardless of age, background or ability
- Contribute to their community by sharing skills and knowledge
- Confidently share a sense of belonging by connecting and building relationships

HOW TO MAKE A SPACE FEEL WELCOMING TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

- PERSONAL WELCOME: smile, verbal greeting, friendly, taking time, making an effort
- WARMTH: laughter, humour
- CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: creating a sense of familiarity and belonging through colour, tablecloths, music, decor
- CLARITY & ACCESSIBILITY: clear signposting, information in a variety of languages, child- and disability-friendly
- SKILL & CULTURE SHARING: self development and two-way sharing opportunities, activities for different interests and abilities, resources e.g. dictionaries, books, toys

TOPS TIPS FOR SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE SHARING

- Cook together
- Invite refugees and asylum seekers to celebrate an important cultural date
- Find out what people and their families are interested in
- Start a language exchange
- Invite refugees and asylum seekers to hold/join creative workshops

These are great for breaking down barriers and help individuals feel welcomed, accepted, and part of the community.

TOP TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS TO PARTICIPATE

- Think about language; use visual aids, design activities that don't need language
- Ask what they need
- Show them they are valued
- Build trust and confidence
- Consistency of messaging

NEXT STEPS!

1. Evaluate your welcome and interactions
2. Make your space visually reflect the diversity of your community
3. Create opportunities for participation and two-way sharing
4. Get your team on board!

www.bristolrefugeefestival.org



BRF AGM, Greenway Centre, 2021

3. Co-creation of local events

BRF works alongside local organisations to evolve events as part of the year-long programme and / or as part of the - main festival.

“Congratulations on the festival, so many beautiful and nurturing events happening. It is lovely to see our communities come together, I am really happy we got to have an event at the centre it was a lovely day. Many thanks for another amazing festival!”

(Host St Werburghs Community event 2023)

This supports these hyperlocal hubs to create spaces of welcome through directly experiencing the BRF process and approach.

4. Sustainability

BRF also works to address this aim in sustainable ways, by influencing and inspiring people working at Community hubs, working with them over a period of time, to become 'Spaces of Welcome' and have confidence to continue the work through modelling their own events. Refer to following case study.

CASE STUDY

Interviews with a resident (refugee background) and the community development manager, at the Greenway Centre in Southmead have highlighted the value of BRF's work, for the community, the hub and refugees and asylum seekers. BRF have worked with the community over the last 3 years, helping them establish their community hub as a 'space of welcome' for the whole community.

Lucille Smith, the Community Development Manager for Southmead Development Trust (SDT) has explained that:

"It has made the established local community more aware of the more newly arrived and they are keen to get to know them. I hope it has made our space (The Greenway Centre) more welcoming, it has certainly made us aware of ways we may not have been welcoming in the past."



Dancers, Southmead Festival, 2023

Lucille goes on to explain why the work has been effective: Has working with BRF led you to understand more about the experiences of RAS?

"Yes, meeting RAS at events, meetings and training has been illuminating".

Do you now feel more confident about engaging RAS?

"Yes, with the support of BRF."

Furthermore, Lucille explains how this also raises the profile of the local area through challenging the stereotypes there are of its residents:

"I feel like this has been the most important part of my work in Southmead. Southmead has a reputation for being rough, and not very diverse, inclusive or welcoming. But local residents have been delighted to welcome the newly arrived, curious and enthusiastic to share. They just didn't have the opportunity to do it before."

These comments are reinforced through feedback from a resident involved in organising the events at the Greenway Centre:

"I live in this area for 13 years, but by organising the first refugee week in the area has made me more connected to the area... Refugee week for me has enabled the start of the celebration in the Southmead area for the first time and introduced our culture to local people and helped build better cohesion in Southmead."

(Muna Talha, BRF RAS Participant, Interview October 2023)

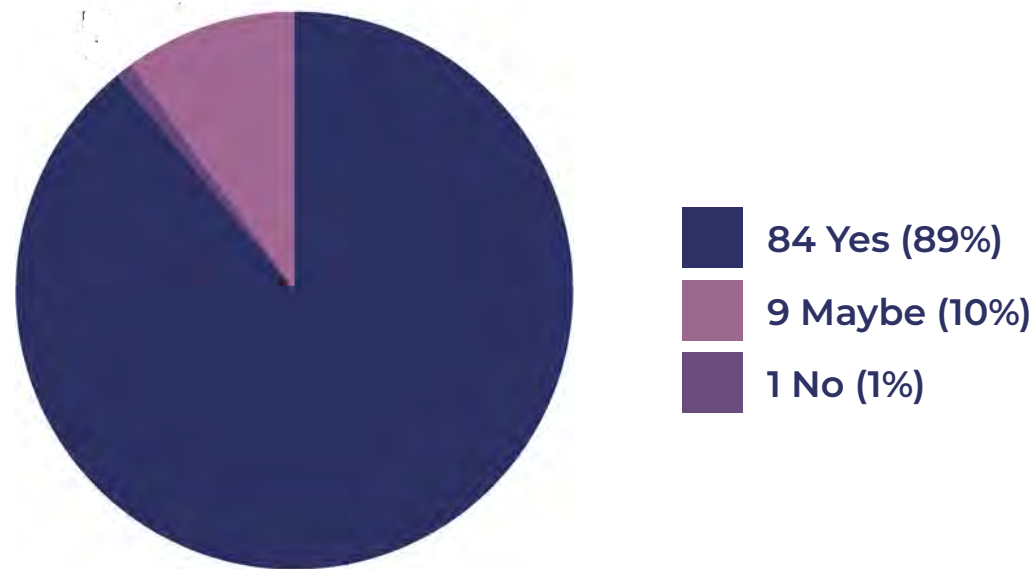
Muna goes on to outline how the connection she has established through BRF now influences how welcome she feels in the centre:

"Yes because of the above - I did not feel welcome in Greenway centre, however Vandna has helped me feel more connected by introducing me to Lucille Smith which has helped me feel welcomed into the centre."

By making such places of welcome commonplace across the city, BRF is also succeeding in bringing people together and building strong relationships in and across communities.

AIM: Bringing local residents and refugees and asylum seekers together, building strong relationships in and across communities.

It is clear from feedback across events that they have been effective at bringing together host communities with refugees and asylum seekers. When participants were asked 'Has this event made you feel more connected to your, or other, communities?' 89% said 'Yes', 10% said 'Maybe' and just 1% said 'No'.



This has been reinforced by a wealth of comments provided on film and in survey responses, for example:

"Feel like you're part of the community, it's local, seeing people as if they are a neighbour."

(Audience Survey, Eastville Park 2023)

"It was really affirming to be in a crowd of so many different backgrounds all dancing together."

(Audience Survey, Queens Square 2023)

Not only do events help foster connectivity between refugees and asylum seekers and the wider community, but they are also an important opportunity for refugees and asylum seekers to meet each other, for example, when asked about the connections made, people engaged have responded by saying:

"Connecting with other migrant women."

(Participant feedback, Theatre Workshop for Women, 2023)

This sense of connectivity leads people to feel like they are part of a family, as has also been evidenced in media coverage this year, for example:

"Diego from El Salvador said he was oppressed in his home country, and coming to the UK 'opened his eyes'. 'When I got here, I realised how big the world is. I got a chance to build bridges and walk those bridges,' he said."

"It's not just a group you play gigs with, you get to be a family."

Some of the specific moments that brought people together have been identified by the team during sense making, which offers up ideas for ways to expand on such success in future:

"Queen Square – there was a great moment at the end with Alphonse performing and all the men from hotels were at the front dancing."

(Sense Making session, July 2023)

It is clear that the BRF programme of events is very successful in bringing local residents and refugees and asylum seekers together and building strong relationships in and across communities.



Audience, Celebrating Sanctuary, Queen Square, 2023

AIM: Refugees and asylum seekers being effectively engaged and supported to become more active members of their community.

BRF works in responsive and bespoke ways to support refugees and asylum seekers to realise their own aims and ambitions, for example:

“For me as an asylum seeker this is the biggest motivation that you are getting all the support that you need to have a successful career. I am delighted and grateful to Bristol Refugee Festival who have always supported me extraordinarily to achieve my goals, understanding my needs and giving me a sense of belongingness. Just recently they helped me raise the money for my accounting course for which I am so grateful.”

(Pooja - [Ambassador Blog](#), February 2023)

One of the direct ways in which BRF realises this aim is through the ambassador strand of the programme, as reported in [Bristol 24/7](#):

“Joel is one of the festival’s ambassadors. After fleeing political unrest in Nicaragua, Joel arrived in Bristol in 2020 during the lockdown, and gained refugee status in the UK earlier this year. He now organises Bristol Refugee Festival’s first Latin American event, uniting communities from the subcontinent who are living in Bristol. Nearly 500 people attended the event last year.”

During this year, an additional Development Training programme strand has provided refugees and asylum seekers with leadership, creative, and development opportunities. These have included the following workshops:

- Event Management
- Artist Development
- Trauma Awareness
- Evaluation Training
- Co-creation Processes



Co-created dance, Southmead Festival, 2023

These workshops and mentorship opportunities were formulated to provide opportunities for RAS to plan, lead and participate in the BRF Festival, providing space for skill development. The Creative Skills Programme also provided support to RAS artists to deliver workshops (and/or undertake professional arts practice opportunities) at community events around the city, through mentoring. Workshops delivered included printmaking, digital art, content creation and filmmaking. All ten BRF ambassadors have taken part in these training opportunities this year. Two Ambassadors fulfilled roles as project coordinators.

Mentoring has led to a wide range of outcomes, including one person being supported to submit an application the British Film Institute’s Voices programme, hosted by Watershed.

This strand of the programme also involved collaboration between 25 artists from host and refugee/asylum seeker communities and four representative organisations/artist, to co-create new works, for Celebrating Sanctuary.

Partner organisation Movema, supported a group of women from Refugee Women of Bristol, to develop, rehearse and perform a dance at the Southmead Festival as part of BRF programme. The workshops were co-facilitated by someone with lived experience of being a refugee, who worked as a paid project coordinator.

The women engaged in this strand of work have articulated the positive differences that the experience has made for them, for example, women from different backgrounds came together and got to know each other:

“They get to know each other more, it was very nice. Each of them are from different backgrounds but when we put them in one group - wow!... Each one represents their own culture, in their clothes from their culture and it was very beautiful.”

(Co-facilitator of Movema workshops and performance, evaluation discussion July 2023.)

The women also valued the opportunity to share their skills and talents:

“It was a great opportunity for me. Love singing and dancing, it was really good for us. It was good to be able to show my talent, so many people watched and said good things about my singing and dancing so it was great. I really enjoyed it and being part of this group.”

(Participant in Movema workshops and performance, evaluation discussion July 2023)

The other key strategy through which this aim is met is supporting refugees and asylum seekers to develop, plan, programme, produce and deliver their own events and workshops. This year BRF has supported refugees and asylum seekers to do this on 12 different occasions. The experience of organising events leads Ambassadors to feel confident about doing this more in future:

“I feel more confident especially about organising the Christmas event coming up, but I didn’t feel confident before.”

(Khrystyna, BRF Ambassador, Interview, 18 Oct 23)

“Bristol Refugee Festival giving opportunity to community like Tibetan community and other minority ethnic group is vital to embrace the inclusive society with multiculturalism”.

(Host - Bristol4Tibet 2023)

The festival also helps to realise this aim in a similar way, as it brings people together who have an interest in making contact with and/or being involved in BRF and other support organisations:

“People were also able to find out about other organisations and services that are useful to them and which they have access to.”

(Sense Making session, July 2023)

“At Queen Square when we were setting up with all the ambassadors and volunteers that felt really positive with everyone working together.”

(Sense Making session, July 2023)

However, the wider geographic range of events that now take place make a significant difference to the breadth of impact made by BRF:

“It is good now refugee week is spreading across the city and connecting into new areas which is better for our community.”

(Muna, Sudanese refugee, BRF participant, Interview October 2023)



Tibetan Dance, Queen Square, 2023

AIM: Reducing loneliness and isolation

As has been evidenced extensively in previous sections of this report BRF's events bring people together in ways that counteract loneliness and isolation. The loneliness that people experience upon arriving in this country has also been outlined by people involved, such as BRF Ambassador, Joel Zuniga:

"It's hard when you come to a new country. There are different people, different languages, and different cultures. It's not easy to integrate, but it's not impossible. I learned this lesson through charity and through living with other people."

(Joel in Bristol 24/7, June 2023)

Connectivity that counteracts isolation and loneliness is nurtured through roles such as the Ambassadors, but is also realised through roles in performance. Furthermore, the opportunity to perform and sing together or to be a member of the audience at performances supports refugees and asylum seekers to feel more at home:

"The festival makes us feel like home because it reminds me of my own culture, every dance with different nations, makes us feel good, makes us feel homely, and proud of our culture. Makes feel connected with other people because when we are at home we feel lonely, at the festival all the stress goes away for a moment."

(Audience Survey, Queens Square 2023)

BRF events have been shown to be welcoming and for some people this has made it possible to attend even when they have no one to go with:

"I learnt that I can enjoy turning up alone to an event somewhere I've never been and enjoy myself." (Audience Survey, Festival Launch, 2023)

Ultimately BRF events inform people's understanding and thereby nurture compassion, which can only act to encourage people to be more welcoming to refugees and asylum seekers and to treat people with respect for who they are:

"I think compassion is just being gentle and empathetic with other people and giving them grace to just be who they truly are."

(Audience Feedback, Queens Square, 2023)

By profiling sanctuary and compassion, BRF nurtures empathy and encourages gentleness, encouraging an increased mutual respect and inclusivity.



Eritrean Peace Feast, 2023



Mindful Art Sessions, Festival 2023

Learning and Recommendations

Staff and Board

Capacity is stretched and needs building in order to continue to deliver a high quality programme, cover more areas across the city and surrounding areas and protect staff wellbeing.

- An embedded training and development programme for staff and board would enable increased knowledge, expertise & diversity.
- Increase in the number of staff will increase capacity and knowledge.

Volunteers

Volunteering opportunities are still slightly ad hoc.

- An embedded training & development programme.
- Collaborating with the voluntary sector to maximise benefits for volunteers.
- Work towards establishing a volunteering team and recruiting a coordinator.

Lived experience leadership

This is a key area for us to continue to develop, to realise our aim for becoming a refugee-led organisation.

- Continue to develop our Ambassador programme and opportunities.
- Share more knowledge and improve communication.
- Continue to work on reducing barriers to engagement.
- Work with BRASP towards sector Lived Experience Commitment.

Fundraising

Fundraising and diversification of income is key to the expansion and long term sustainability of the organisation.

- Finalise and implement an income generation strategy.
- Consider recruiting a fundraiser on the team.

Marketing and Communication

This is seen as a significant area for development to widen our reach.

- Clarity of messaging.
- Review of our 'Brand'.
- Better showcasing of our success.
- Strategy for reaching more refugee and asylum seekers.
- Translated events programme.
- Updated website and social media platforms.
- Work towards a Comms and Marketing officer on the team.

Evaluation

- Make volunteer evaluation training sessions earlier and ensure dedicated people collect feedback at a wider variety of events.
- Feedback from partner events is still difficult, develop more creative ways will encourage more feedback, as forms, surveys are not always accessible or popular.
- Ensure video maker and photographer easier to identify at events and seek out training opportunities for them to refine their skills.
- Capture live reactions and reflections from those taking part in events/workshops/performances.
- Build in the development of case studies through gathering specific evidence of the difference BRF makes in different contexts.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all our partners and collaborators including:

Arnolfini
 ACH
 Addictive TV
 Ben and Jerry's
 Borderlands
 Bricks, St Annes House
 Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP)
 Bristol Hospitality Network
 Bristol Refugee Rights
 Bridges for Communities
 Bristol Refugee Artist Collective
 Bristol Old Vic
 Cube Cinema
 Dovetail Orchestra
 Eden Project Communities
 Filwood Park
 Friends of Eastville Park
 LARA
 Movema
 Nest Cafe, Page Park
 Refugee Women of Bristol
 Southmead Development Trust
 Trinity Centre
 St Werburghs Community Centre
 We the Curious
 Wesport

Special thanks to Diego Pena and Zhenya Melesyk for the event photos included in the report.

THANK
YOU!



Staff Team, Queen Square 2023



Eden Communities & Imayla, Children's Area, Queen Square 2023

Community Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSc69Pfelgk>

BRF Resources

<https://www.bristolrefugeefestival.org/be-inspired/>

Article

<https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/flag-ship-event-celebrating-refugees-bristol-8533065>

Article

<https://www.bristol247.com/culture/dance/day-of-celebration-and-dancing-in-staple-hill-to-form-part-of-bristol-refugee-festival/>

Article

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-66108184>

Article

<https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/the-refugee-charities-bridging-borders-in-bristol/>

BRISTOL REFUGEE FESTIVAL



   BristolRefugeeFestival | bristolrefugeefestival.org



Quartet
Community
Foundation



COMMUNITY
FUND