



Dovetail Orchestra: The impact of a community music group for refugees in Bristol

2025



Most refugees have endured harrowing experiences in their homeland, while travelling to the UK and once they're here.

Research has shown that many refugees experience poor mental health as a result.

Dovetail Orchestra is a community music group for adult refugees and local musicians based in Bristol.

It aims to create a welcoming space, foster social connections, and support musical learning.

The orchestra began with a pilot phase in 2022, after which it was officially established as a charity.

What was the aim of the project?

We wanted to explore members' experience and understanding of the orchestra.

Had being involved benefitted their wellbeing?

What did we do?

We interviewed and ran focus groups with those involved in Dovetail Orchestra.

We tried to make it easy to participate by offering different ways of taking part.

We also made sure that people who spoke other languages were supported to contribute.

In total, we ran two focus groups with 18 and interviewed 15 orchestra members. Of these 33 people, 22 were refugees.



What did we learn?

Participants were motivated by a love of music and culture. They expressed a desire to play music and expand their music knowledge and abilities. Being part of a diverse group made up of members from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds was also important.

Locally-based musicians also expressed a desire to show solidarity with the refugee community.



Participants described Dovetail as a diverse and dynamic community of like-minded people. Diversity was considered an asset, even though it could present challenges for the music-making process.

Refugee members also valued the learning opportunities presented through the orchestra and having access to instruments.

Being involved boosted self-confidence and a sense of achievement.

All participants described the positive impact being part of Dovetail had on their mental health.



Members helped each other in other ways, for example by writing letters of support for asylum applications.

The influence of being part of the Dovetail community went far beyond the orchestra itself. It gave a sense of empowerment and wellbeing in other aspects of members' lives.

Refugee participants were reimbursed for their travel expenses to rehearsals and performances. Even so, paying these expenses was a barrier to those going through the asylum seeking process.

Find out more about this project

Visit the project page at:

arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/dovetail-orchestra/



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