



Annual Report

August 2025 – July 2026



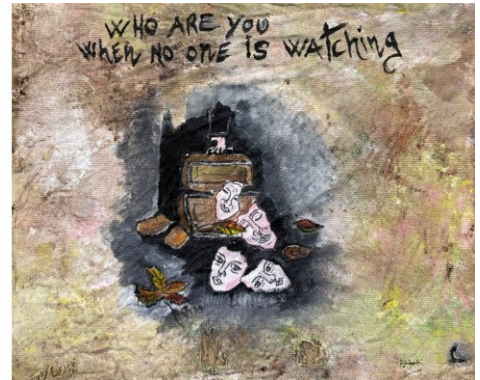
A therapeutic art studio
for asylum seekers and refugees

Dear Friends and Supporters,

We are incredibly grateful for all your support and for the new connections we made this year. Thank you to those who have come to our exhibitions, workshops and gatherings and followed our art-making on digital media and in person. Our community is always buoyed up by your enthusiasm.

Since 2014, New Art Studio has worked to build social connection and mental health recovery through creativity and community, and to rebuild our members' positive view of the self, reestablishing a sense of autonomy and personal worth, and exploring grief.

We support our members wherever they are on their journey of healing and transformation. We integrate art-making with support from qualified art psychotherapists and volunteers using psychological theories, educational models and sociocultural constructs. We aim to build a strong, informed therapeutic community, restoring a sense of care, connection and belonging to our members. We believe non-clinical approaches to art therapy help reduce the stigma around mental health and facilitate practical engagement by providing a bridge into therapy, and a transition into community.



This year has been a process of building and consolidating the changes we adopted last year and this is our second year running the studio two days a week. This expansion of our community has enabled us to welcome new members to our Wednesday art therapy group. The Friday group is peer-led by members who are ready to move away from the therapist-led Wednesday group. Members of the peer-led group continue to support, teach and learn from each other while running the studio together as part of their recovery. In the process, they are building their autonomy, developing skills such as decision-making, planning and managing budgets for the group. In both groups, everyone brings their experiences, talents and skills to the table. Shared values of respect, caring, equitable treatment of one another, and, more specifically, social justice principles are fundamental to both groups.





Our aim is to offer an alternative to mainstream mental health treatment and make health care services accessible for those recovering from trauma and displacement. We focus on creating a caring space where making art together about our shared experiences and concerns brings us closer as a community. Everyone is encouraged to join in, speak openly and make decisions together. This helps everyone share responsibility and feel the strength of belonging and contributing to the community.

This year, our wonderful volunteers, Nicole and Katarina, provided English lessons and group yoga classes, helping members build skills and support their well-being. We also connected with other communities by exhibiting our work and offering art workshops to the public. We attended some amazing social events provided by our community partners – some familiar from previous projects and some new.

This is a very special place to me because mental health professionals are always around if I need them, and everyone in the group brings their own story that they can share or tell through art-making. You can make the ugliest picture and feel good because it's true. Life has two faces, good and bad.

August 2025 to July 2026 Key Stats

- 70 support sessions delivered
- 332 hours of therapeutic support
- 21 Members supported
- 8 external visits
- 2 exhibitions of Members' work
- £59,834 secured to ensure services are free to Members, including lunches, art materials and travel expenses



Here are some wonderful events we were involved in throughout the year that we would love to share with you!



We participated in the community event Threads of Home, organised by [Haven Coffee](#), bringing refugee entrepreneurs, local artists and organisations working with refugees together for a community festival celebrating food, art, culture and creativity. At this event, our members proudly showed their work and engaged the public with art workshops and great conversations. Some members took on the challenge of participating in events such as stand-up comedy workshops for asylum seekers and refugees, while others took opportunities to work with Haven Coffee at their hospitality events. Thanks, Usman, the Haven Coffee director, for always thinking about us and inviting us to dare to do something different, which has been very inspiring and life-changing for some of our members!

A well-organised festival and a very interesting place. It was our community away together with other communities was important especially in a climate that is hostile to us. It didn't matter where you are from or the colour of your skin. I felt welcomed and equal to using space.



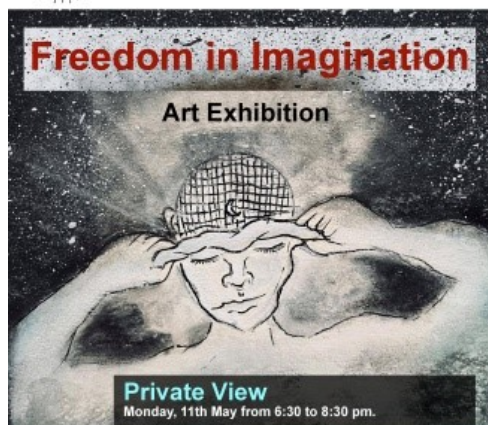
Island of Neighbours is a collaborative textile patchwork project that explores themes of identity, belonging and community through fabric and stitching. Studio members created their own piece of textile art, which were then sewn together to create a banner, reflecting different experiences, backgrounds and personal stories. This wonderful series of workshops was led by art student Evie Lingwood, who explored the idea based on a speech by the former Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, who said, '*without strong migration rules, we risk becoming an island of strangers*'. The project was named *Island of Neighbours*, which proposes an alternative vision of belonging, care and community. Through acts of repairing, mending and weaving, the project explores how creative practices can intervene in political climates, creating a symbolic 're-stitching' of a fragmented social fabric.

Everybody had a go, trying different things, tapping into culture, being personal, taking ownership of memories that are powerful for healing





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Donations:



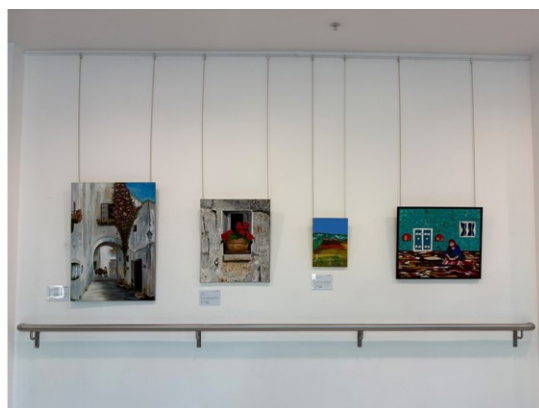
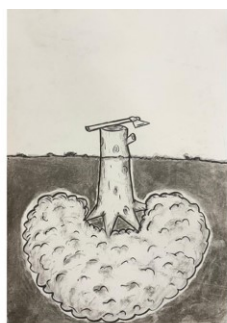
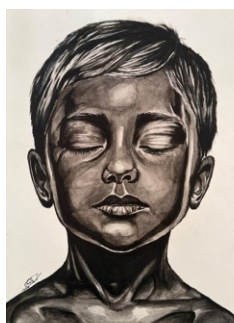
A perfect way to start the week, with a beautiful garden view, drinks and snacks, as well as raffle tickets with lovely prizes. Please join us at this fundraising event to celebrate creativity and resilience through solidarity.

The exhibition will run until 26th May 2025 at Lauderdale House Highgate Hill, Waterlow Park, London N5 5HG. Close to both Archway and Highgate Village. The 210, 263, 310 and 143 bus routes stop just outside the gates.

In the Spring, we hosted an exhibition and fundraising event at Lauderdale House called Freedom in Imagination to celebrate our members' creativity and resilience. This was also our first time doing a raffle. OH boy, that was something else! It created such a buzz at the event. Thank you to all our supporters for the great raffle donations and for coming to support us and creating such a lively atmosphere. We met some incredible people and artists who are making a difference in the community through their work, and our members had a great time showing and talking about their work and contributions. This event demonstrated our commitment and determination to keep going, no matter how hard it sometimes gets, in the fight for community spaces.

Talking to people, you get more new ideas about making art and have new experiences of yourself, which gives me more confidence.

It was my first time being part of something big and putting myself out there, showing myself. It's exciting and frightening.



COURAGE!

We had an exciting opportunity to explore the Refugee Week theme of **Courage** by exhibiting at The Street Gallery, University College Hospital. We were part of the Creative Health project at the UCLH NHS Foundation Trust, creating a friendly, positive space for patients, visitors and staff. Our paintings were on show for a month in the main entrance to the hospital.

Refugees everywhere need courage every day to take on unknown journeys, learn new languages, navigate new systems, and face an uncertain world. This exhibition showed how art can help us heal and can inspire others by demonstrating how creative activities may help us cope with our own problems and experiences. [Here is a link for more info about this exhibition.](#)

It was very special. Usually, I see sad pictures in a happy place. We saw happy, positive, colourful pictures in a sad place. For the first time, I could see what we are doing in the studio and how it was helpful for my and others' mental health. If I'd seen those pictures when I was in the hospital, I would have felt more hopeful.





The wonderful Linda, from [Global Generation](#), invited our members and wider community on board the Floating Garden for a celebratory drink and hot food as part of Refugee Week. This was a chance to thank our hard-working Trustees for all the support they've given us over many years, as well as our friends and supporters, and the amazing Camden Borough of Sanctuary organisations. Thank you, Linda, with whom we have enjoyed working on many projects in the past, for organising this for us. Being on the boat at King's Cross on a sunny day was so perfect. We held some quiet ceremonies of letting go into the old river, as well as poetry readings, while Janie and Darlene from the amazing Refugee Community Kitchen served us all nourishing, delicious meals. It was absolutely amazing to be supported by such great local communities and the incredible people who work in them. We are so happy with our move to Camden!

I never had that kind of party before – it was amazing. The food was so nice. We have so many good memories with Linda.



The [Choose Love](#) organisation curated an immersive audio-visual installation on the South Bank featuring art created by refugees worldwide, in partnership with refugee-led organisations and community groups. Alongside the art, the composer Jon Hopkins' original score, in collaboration with Brian Eno, explored themes of home, safety and belonging.

This was a wonderful project for New Art Studio artists to be part of alongside other organisations. It celebrated the strength and resilience of people seeking sanctuary through painting, sound and visual design. Please check the [South Bank Centre website](#) for more info about the event.

It was like a dream. I couldn't believe I was seeing my image in the theatre. I was surprised by how big it was. It made me feel big.

I didn't like that image before, but the more I look at it, the better it makes me feel. Feeling appreciated by others helped me feel better about myself, too.

* * *



This year, we have worked closely with other community leaders, professionals from other fields, and various organisations to support our approach to holistic growth, wellness, therapy and transformation. We believe connecting with others helps us grow as a community and brings people together through shared resources and creativity. Here are some more activities that helped our members create new experiences and connections.



In Art Therapy, art materials are tools for engagement, expression and processing. Clay has long been a significant resource. It is a sensory material that helps soothe the nervous system and works well with trauma survivors in creating a grounding experience of the here and now.

Artist and neuroscientist Victor P and his partner Maria, an art therapist, invited us to Victor's Clay Studio to show how he transforms waste clay from London construction sites into an art resource, reducing landfill waste and sparking community-

driven creativity. We had a great outing learning about clay and sharing the creative space with other artists. At the end of the day, we all went home feeling calm. Clay works!

It was my first time using clay. I loved everything about it, especially the smell of the clay and how relaxing it was for me.



[Mike's Table](#) has been an incredible supporter and community partner, hosting social events that promote inclusion around a shared table, with amazing food made by professional chefs for people who could never usually enjoy such a restaurant experience. The great hosts ensure that no one feels left behind in conversation.

Our members love taking part in these social gatherings, which help with easing social anxiety and foster inclusion for people from all backgrounds and abilities. Louise, the founder of Mike's Table, created a special event called Art Afternoon Tea, where one of our members offered a watercolour workshop to their 18 guests. This was a fantastic opportunity for our members to build confidence and develop leadership and teaching skills in a supportive social setting.

[Here is a wonderful article about this event.](#) We can't thank Louise and her team enough for such great support and the opportunity for our members.

I never knew I could do this. It was so exciting to show everyone how art can connect us all. Everyone made artwork. I was so proud to share and give something back to others to remember and enjoy.





The stand-up comedy show [Laff-Uchino](#), organised by Haven Cafe, a social enterprise that works with refugees and asylum seekers, has been a great course for our members interested in using humour as an art form to work through life's adversity. Thank you, Usman, for this opportunity and for all the workshops that prepared our brave members to share a stage with UK comedy giants such as Nish Kumar, Ed Gamble and others. Humour can be very healing but isn't often associated with asylum seekers and refugees. Some say that it is imagination, courage and a sense of humour that makes life worth living, and we 100%

agree! It was truly incredible to witness one of our members on stage before an audience of 500 people!

People had been asking me for autographs and to perform again. It was mad. I felt so much better seeing my friends in the front row cheering me on and being so proud of me.



The National Theatre invited us to join a puppetry workshop and see the play War Horse. For many members, this was their first time going to the theatre. It was so exciting to be part of that experience.

Ashleigh Cheadle, the show's assistant puppetry director, led the workshop. She showed us how the goose puppet from the show works and taught us how to make and practice with our own paper puppets. It was absolutely incredible and so much fun!

I learned about puppetry and saw theatre for the first time. It was very different from anything I had seen before. It was very emotional for me to experience this. I almost cried. It was such a beautiful story, performance and workshop.





This year has been challenging as divisions in the world only seem to increase, and the work of people using community spaces has been overshadowed by the politics of fear, often directed at some of the most dispossessed members of our society. This year, we poured a lot of our energy into building a strong community where people can feel psychologically safe, so they can continue building their lives with courage, hope and a sense of belonging. Thank you all so much for supporting our project and helping make a difference in people's lives.



A Studio Member's Journey

Zoran was referred to NAS by his GP surgery and has attended a therapist-led art therapy group on Wednesdays for almost three years. Recently, he became homeless while waiting for the Home Office to decide on his asylum application. This affected him deeply and he would often fall asleep during group discussions. It was hard for him to talk about his art-making and the hopelessness it expressed, as well as the feelings of shame associated with homelessness. Zoran decided to move from the Wednesday group to the peer-led group on Friday to focus on improving his art skills and learning new techniques with peer support. He began painting realistic pictures with oils, which are very different from his earlier free-style work. He became eager to learn, practice and discover new abilities, which gradually helped him build self-discipline and focus, as well as a sense of purpose. He openly asked others for help, while deciding whether to accept or decline support, depending on his needs. This helped create a sense of freedom and autonomy, given how little control he had over his life outside the studio. The peer-led group helped him build a new relationship with his art and artistic identity, moving beyond the social stereotypes and judgement attached to being an asylum seeker and to homelessness. By focusing on art skills and techniques, the group helped him cope with the difficulties of the life he was facing through building his self-esteem and personal strength, his vitality and sense of capability. Completing art projects and finding purpose helped him rediscover a sense of belonging and hope. He gradually took on more responsibility by opening and closing the studio, as well as other tasks to help keep the studio running. The group didn't need to discuss Zoran's homelessness directly, but it provided the resourcefulness and resilience needed to build belief in his worth and abilities. Both groups understood this and supported him through his challenges at his own pace. In turn, this helped him cope with the uncertainty about his future with more courage. The healing aspects of art-making in both groups come from doing and making, trying and failing, experimenting and succeeding, alongside others.*

** Name changed to protect the member's privacy.*



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of Sanctuary**



We could never do it without our wonderful charity, community partners and New Art Studio staff:

Mike's Table, Haven Cafe, Creative Health UCLH, National Theatre, Choose Love, Refugee Community Kitchen, Global Generation, Lauderdale House

Team

Jasmin Topalusic – Director / Lead Art Psychotherapist
Ruanna Brook – Deputy Director / Lead Art Psychotherapist
Leidy Moreno – Art Psychotherapist
Maria Gomes – Art Psychotherapy Volunteer
Nicole McPeake – English Teacher Volunteer
Katarina Benakovic – Yoga Teacher Volunteer
Valentina Krajnovic – Supervisor, UKCP registered
Tim Burley – Development Officer
David Rix – Tech and Design Support

Trustees

Katharine Wynne (Chair of Trustees)
Katharine Edwards
Siobhan O'Connell
Evie Lingwood
Funmibi Ogunlesi

New Art Studio is a registered charity No. 1192463

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