
En-Acting Solidarity with Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Case Study of Compass Collective

Author(s): Ellen Frances Wagstaff

Email: efw7@kent.ac.ukSource: *Brief Encounters*, Vol. 1 No. 9 (October 2025), pp. 1–15.URL: <http://briefencounters-journal.co.uk/article/id/223>DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24134/be.223>

This article examines how participatory performance practice can foster solidarity with young refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Discussing two projects undertaken by London-based charity Compass Collective, *Dream to Screen* (2023) and *The Freedom Academy* (2025), it explores how solidarity can be embedded both within creative workshops and in the broader support structures that sustain them. Drawing on ethnographic observation and reflective analysis, the article highlights how Compass Collective foster agency, bravery, and belonging, centralising participant voices, and providing comprehensive wraparound support. By focusing on a UK organisation not yet examined in academic literature, this study contributes to emerging scholarship on solidarity in participatory practices, offering insights into specific approaches and structures that could be replicated by other companies or practitioners seeking to work ethically and effectively with refugee and migrant communities.

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Introduction

In the last year, the UK has seen a 17% increase in asylum claims.¹ This brings a further rise in the number of displaced young people now living in the country, many of whom are unaccompanied minors without adult guardianship or secure housing.² Upon arrival, many of these young people are made to feel unwelcome and may experience feelings of loneliness and disconnectedness.³ These feelings might be understood more broadly as “ethical loneliness”, a concept described by Jill Stauffer as the feeling of being ignored or abandoned by those who have the power to help, compounded by the experience of not being heard.⁴ This ethical loneliness is more profound than simple isolation, and can result in long-lasting emotional harm.⁵ If we are to mitigate this harm for young refugees and asylum seekers, we must engage in acts of solidarity to counteract ethical loneliness through acts of unity, care, and attentive listening.⁶

While recent years have seen large-scale public demonstrations of solidarity in response to war and conflict (e.g., to the wars in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan and to the women’s life freedom protests in Iran),⁷ these collective actions do not always translate into the kinds of interpersonal care that address ethical loneliness on an individual level. To consider how solidarity might be enacted more personally, we must turn to micro-gestures, or relational, intersubjective acts through which care and recognition

¹ How many people claim asylum in the UK? (no date a) GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025/how-many-people-claim-asylum-in-the-uk> [Accessed: 02 July 2025].

² Kate Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth: Solidarity, Interruption and Precarity* (doctoral thesis, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, 2024); Leah Gayer, in conversation with Ellen Wagstaff, in person, October 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness: The Injustice of Not Being Heard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Réka Polonyi and Katerina Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities or Solidarities Performed: The “With”*, Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 29.3 (2024), pp. 415–21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2024.2376841>; James Thompson, ‘Care Aesthetics: For artful care and careful art’, Taylor & Francis (2022); Anne Smith, ‘Maximizing empowerment in applied theatre with refugees and migrants in the United Kingdom: Facilitation shaped by an ethic of care’, Journal of Arts and Communities 6:2–3, (2014) pp.177–188 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/jaac.6.2-3.177_1.

⁷ Polonyi and Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities*.

are expressed between individuals.⁸ Building on Kate Duffy-Syedi's work exploring how representations of unaccompanied minor refugees might be challenged through theatre practices that encourage authorship and self-representation,⁹ I argue that participatory performance practice can play a vital role in addressing ethical loneliness through such acts of relational solidarity.

Through a case study of two recent projects carried out by Compass Collective, a UK-based arts charity working with young refugees and asylum seekers, I investigate how solidarity is practiced on a relational level in their work. I examine how solidarity was not only fostered within the creative space, but also how it was evidenced through a wider commitment to the physical and psychological well-being of young refugees and migrants. I begin by examining the practical approaches taken within Compass Collective's creative workshops, considering how they centralised participants' voices, fostered agency and bravery, and supported complex emotions and transitions. I then extend the discussion to consider what took place "behind the scenes" to support enjoyment, creativity and learning for the young people taking part in their projects.

The practices of Compass Collective were underpinned by a dedication to the lives and wellbeing of the young people involved; Compass (as they are colloquially known) notably continue to practice this dedication beyond creative workshop settings. Rather than treating participants as temporary project beneficiaries, the charity cultivate an ongoing sense of belonging and active contribution. Individuals have an active say in how the charity is run, and every young person who attends a project becomes a member of the "Compass Community" — a relationship that continues even after the project ends. This long-term commitment challenges the short-term, extractive tendencies of some socially engaged arts practices, which may unintentionally reinforce feelings of abandonment once creative activity concludes.¹⁰ By centring long-term care and responsiveness, Compass Collective offer a model of participatory practice grounded in solidarity, one that not only enables young people to author and share their stories but also ensures that they are consistently heard, recognised, and supported beyond the life of a single project.

Overall, I argue that this model can be productively replicated by other companies and practitioners seeking to enact solidarity with refugee youth in participatory arts contexts. I further hope that this case study can provide a valuable insight into the role of performance in addressing ethical loneliness; developing our understanding of how

⁸ Kate Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*; Polonyi and Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities*.

⁹ Kate Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*.

¹⁰ Polonyi and Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities*.

we might use the arts to help newly arrived young people feel heard within systems that often silence them, and at home within environments that may otherwise feel hostile.¹¹

Methodology and Positionality

The insights presented in this case study stem from participant observation carried out during two collaborative projects. The first, *Dream to Screen*, took place over one week in October 2023 at Somerset House and Theatre Deli in London. This project served as a culmination of the Compass Ambassador Programme, a twelve-week leadership course supported by the British Red Cross Human Diaspora Grant, which trained young refugees to design and facilitate workshops. It served as an opportunity for Ambassador graduates to design and deliver their own intensive film project for other young people during the half-term holiday. The second, *The Freedom Academy*, took place over a six-week period in early 2025 and was commissioned and co-led by the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG). This project, co-designed both by Compass Collective and ATG, involved developing storytelling skills towards the creation of a performance showcase. This final showcase was performed onstage at the Ambassadors Theatre in London's West End for an invited audience.

The reflections that follow are grounded in ethnography and my own experiences as a participant observer on these projects.¹² I observed rehearsals, script development sessions, planning meetings, and final performance sharings, while also assisting with practical and social aspects of the work, such as setting up the workshop space and sharing food with participants. I was observing and interacting with individuals in real-time as they engaged with the practices and took part in creative activities.¹³ I also took fieldnotes, which formed the basis of my ethnographic enterprise.¹⁴ In addition to observational practice, I was given access to project feedback surveys and evaluation reports, which I will draw on throughout this article. It should be noted that all names used have been changed for anonymity.

Throughout my observations, I was simultaneously positioned as a researcher and as a temporary member of the "Compass community." Thus, I served as a participant observer, a position that brings with it ethical questions that I acknowledge openly.

¹¹ Kate Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*.

¹² S. L. Schensul, J. J. Schensul and M. D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999).

¹³ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020); Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*.

¹⁴ Laurel L. Ellingson and Pamela J. Sotirin, *Making Data in Qualitative Research: Engagements, Ethics, and Entanglements* (London: Routledge, 2020); Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*.

As an outsider, my presence may have affected the behaviours of participants and practitioners. Moreover, my documentation of events was unavoidably written through my own experiential lens. Acknowledging my potential impact on the research, I integrated elements of autoethnography into my approach. This allowed me to maintain ethical sensitivity, reflecting on my own positionality and identifying any potential biases in considering my interpretations and interactions.¹⁵

Making Space

Solidarity and care were integrated into every aspect of these projects, from how the creative space was organised to how the workshops were carried out. Therefore, I will first explore how solidarity was embedded into the work of Compass Collective through the practical elements of these projects. I do this by examining how the workshops were structured and facilitated, and by interrogating the impact these practical elements had on participants.

Hearing Young People

Both *Dream to Screen* and *The Freedom Academy* demonstrated a deep commitment to listening and responding to the voices of young refugees. Rather than imposing a fixed model of practice, both projects were shaped around what participants identified as useful, enjoyable, and meaningful, which led to the development of a space built from shared contribution. For example, young people in the Compass Community frequently expressed a desire to gain industry-relevant skills to support aspirations such as attending drama school or working professionally.¹⁶ In response, *Dream to Screen* was led by one of Compass Collective's resident facilitators alongside a professional filmmaker, and *The Freedom Academy* was led by ATG's resident facilitator, who has extensive stage experience. Significantly, this professional presence did not mean the processes were top-down. On the contrary, participants were active contributors to every aspect of the projects, from warm-up games to devising, staging, and performing original work. Youth Ambassadors with lived experience of migration played a key role as co-facilitators not only during *Dream to Screen*, but also during *The Freedom Academy*, ensuring that young people's perspectives were embedded into the creative output and into how the project was led. Their presence challenged hierarchies and enabled a model of leadership grounded in shared experience

¹⁵ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2022); Linda Finlay, *Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice*, *Qualitative Research*, 2, 209–30 (2002).

¹⁶ Compass Collective, *ATG Freedom Academy Evaluation Survey; October Acting Project 23 YP Feedback Form*.

and mutual respect. Compass Collective succeeded in creating a space where participants could access the high-quality artistic guidance they requested, while also ensuring that their ideas, identities, and creative agency remained central.¹⁷

“Holding Hands” and Fostering Bravery

An increase in trauma awareness within the arts has signalled a need to interrogate and reflect on the spaces practitioners create through their practice.¹⁸ Recently, scholars have debated the term ‘safe space’, acknowledging that we cannot guarantee all individuals will feel ‘safe’ in any given moment.¹⁹ This does not disregard the concept of safeguarding, but rather acknowledges that what a practitioner deems safe may not always align with how participants feel. In response to this, recent discourse in trauma-informed arts practice favours ‘brave spaces’ rather than ‘safe spaces’, recognising that while participants may not always feel entirely safe, we can encourage them to engage bravely.²⁰ Throughout their practices, Compass Collective fostered a space in which bravery was not only encouraged, but celebrated.

The idea of “putting yourself out there” and “not being afraid to make mistakes” fostered an ethos of bravery across both projects: as one participant explained, “[I learnt] to be brave”.²¹ During *Dream to Screen*, however, bravery was responded to in a particularly noticeable way. Each time an individual volunteered to take part in a game, participants were encouraged to commend this participation with applause. Similarly, whenever somebody ‘lost’ a game (they moved too slowly for example, and did not progress to the next round), the group was asked to applaud them for carrying out what was described as a “noble act”.²² The implication of this phrase was that there was no such thing as losing or failure, only bravery or ‘nobility’ in being the first member of the group to leave the game. By celebrating participation in and of itself and de-prioritising winning games, Compass created a space that was not only non-judgemental but full of encouragement and validation. These conditions boosted young people’s confidence and diminished their embarrassment, raising the quietest voices and engaging even the most reluctant

¹⁷ Kate Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*.

¹⁸ *Trauma-Informed Practice for Participatory Artists – Training* (Liverpool: Collective Encounters, 2023) <https://collective-encounters.org.uk/event/trauma-informed-practice-for-participatory-artists-training/> [accessed 2 July 2025]; *Trauma-Informed Training with Kazzum Arts* (no date) <https://www.kazzum.org/train-with-kazzum> [accessed 3 July 2025].

¹⁹ Peter Cristiaensen and others, *From Safe to Brave Spaces* (Ghent: Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, 2023); Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, ‘From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces’, in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, ed. by Lisa M. Landreman (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 135–49.

²⁰ Cristiaensen and others, *From Safe to Brave Spaces*; Arao and Clemens, *From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces*.

²¹ Compass Collective, *October Acting Project 23 YP Feedback Form*.

²² Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023.

individuals. This effect was evidenced in the project feedback survey. One individual said they learnt “[not to be] scared to appear in front of people” and another that they were “really scared” at the beginning, but it turned into “an amazing experience”.²³

Compass Collective’s success in encouraging individuals to be brave and fostering confidence was further rooted in a respect for dissent.²⁴ If an individual seemed reluctant, their participation was not demanded; rather, facilitators *asked* if they wanted to join.²⁵ When an individual did not want to be vulnerable, their decision was respected by the facilitators, and they were never pressured to take part. This respect for opting out evidenced a recognition of individuals as human beings capable of making choices and asserting boundaries.²⁶ It challenged the feeling of not being heard or recognised that often underlies refugee experience and feelings of ethical loneliness.²⁷

While bravery was encouraged, safety (in the literal sense) was not disregarded. A member of Compass Collective’s Welfare Team was always present and ready to talk to individuals who may be facing difficulties within the workshop or in their wider lives, and the facilitators themselves ensured inclusivity and accessibility for all involved. During both projects, facilitators remained committed to getting to know everyone from the outset, asking what they needed and what they wanted to get out of the work before it commenced.²⁸ They further engaged in consistent self-reflection asking what was or was not working well, who might need one-to-one support, and what might need changing or adapting to mould the practice to the group.²⁹

As articulated by one Compass Collective staff member during *The Freedom Academy*, the act of working together to create theatre is not just creative, it is also about “holding hands” to say “I’ve got you”.³⁰ By fostering brave and safe spaces, characterised by respect, support, and encouragement, Compass Collective enacted solidarity with the young refugees and asylum seekers participating in these workshops. While they may not have literally been holding hands with participants, they stood with them in unity and solidarity to support their achievements, listen to their wants and ideas, and respect and recognise their choice and agency.³¹

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Dana Blackstone, “Yes, and” and “No, Although”: Inviting Dissent and Difference Towards Agency as Part of Multi-Representative Practice in Actor Training, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 15.2 (2024), 216–30 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2024.2335640>.

²⁵ Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023; Wagstaff, Research Notes, March 2025.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*; Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*.

²⁸ Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023; Wagstaff, Research Notes, March 2025.

²⁹ Facilitator Interview, by Ellen Wagstaff, 10th April 2025.

³⁰ Wagstaff, Research Notes, March 2025.

³¹ Polonyi and Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities*.

Checking In and Out

This sense of holding hands, of supporting individuals and meeting them where they are, was further reflected in the ‘check-ins’ and ‘check-outs’ that were integral to the structure of all the workshops I observed. During check-ins, participants and facilitators sat in a circle and were invited to share things like how they were feeling, their favourite film, or their favourite food.³² These moments created space for self-reflection and listening,³³ allowing individuals to assess their emotional state and energy levels. As one participant framed it, it was an opportunity to ask “is it me that has had a hard week, or is it the room that’s stressing me out?”.³⁴ This practice also enabled facilitators to identify who might be feeling low, distracted, or vulnerable, prompting quiet interventions to ensure their experience was supported.³⁵ These micro-gestures of noticing and responding demonstrate attunement, or a mutual, affective responsiveness and receptivity between individuals as they work together and relate to one another.³⁶ This attunement underpins Compass Collective’s practice and is arguably fundamental to their capacity to build trust and care, and, in turn, enact solidarity.³⁷ At the end of sessions, check-outs provided moments for reflection, in which participants were encouraged to express how they felt leaving the space, what they had enjoyed, or what they would carry with them. For facilitators, these reflections also served as valuable feedback, shaping the next day’s work and informing the long-term development of the charity’s practice.

Particularly significant to the practice of solidarity, check-ins and check-outs served as ethical tools for trauma-informed facilitation.³⁸ They provided transitional boundaries between the outside world and the creative space, serving as an emotional border that helped participants shift focus gently and safely. For young people who are navigating the precarity of the asylum process, often without stability or support, such transitions can be profoundly important. A check-in question about favourite food may seem light-hearted, but it invites participants to recall pleasure and comfort, experiences that may

³² Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023; Wagstaff, Research Notes, March 2025.

³³ Lisbeth Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being: Toward an Ethics of Attunement* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021).

³⁴ Facilitator Interview, April 2025.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); James Thompson, *Humanitarian Performance: From Disaster Tragedies to Spectacles of War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being*.

³⁷ Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*; Polonyi and Sadeghi-Yekta, *Performing Solidarities*.

³⁸ Natalie Sunderland, Fiona Stevens, Kirsten Knudsen, Rachel Cooper, and Michael Wobcke, ‘Trauma Aware and Anti-Opressive Arts-Health and Community Arts Practice: Guiding Principles for Facilitating Healing, Health and Wellbeing’, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 24.4 (2023), 2429–47 <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221097442>.

be scarce in their everyday lives.³⁹ Likewise, check-outs helped to regulate the emotional intensity of leaving a space that may have felt joyful or grounding and returning to a reality that can feel unstable, alienating, or unsafe.

One check-out during *The Freedom Academy* encapsulated this transition poignantly. A Compass staff member invited participants to hold out their hands like an open book. He asked them to think about what had taken place in the session: what had been said, felt, and shared. Then he asked them to “close the book” by slowly close their hands, putting it away until next time.⁴⁰ This simple embodied exercise offered a way of containing both joy and difficulty; it was a method for symbolically storing what had been meaningful while also releasing anything too heavy to carry out into the week. It was a gesture of care, allowing participants to step away from the session in a way that was emotionally scaffolded.

This use of check-ins and check-outs exemplifies how theatre practitioners might integrate safeguarding and emotional support into the structure of their workshops. Such a practice was not auxiliary to Compass Collective’s creative process; it was a central part of how they enacted solidarity with the young people in their workshops, evidencing attentiveness, continuity, and ethical responsibility to the well-being of participants. In contexts where young refugees face ongoing uncertainty and isolation, these moments can provide emotional grounding and remind individuals that they are seen and supported.

Behind the Scenes

While creative expression is central to their practice, what makes Compass Collective so impactful is the wider commitment to the lives and futures of those with whom they work. By encompassing wraparound welfare support and integrating broader skill development opportunities, Compass Collective extends solidarity to refugee youth far beyond performance workshops. I will now discuss how Compass Collective enact solidarity ‘behind the scenes’ of their workshops by examining some of the support systems they put in place and the impact these systems have on the young people within the Compass Community.

³⁹ Leah Gayer, in conversation with Ellen Wagstaff, in person, October 2023; Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*.

⁴⁰ Wagstaff, Research Notes, March 2025.

Wider Support

Working within the London area, Compass Collective faces logistical challenges engaging young people. Projects like *Dream to Screen* and *The Freedom Academy* engage with individuals who have very little or no money to spend,⁴¹ so transport to and across London was a barrier for potential participants. To address this, Compass chose to provide travel expenses for all participants, regardless of location and actively communicated this to all who were interested in participating. When the basic issue of cost was removed, there was registration of interest from all areas of Greater London, and *Dream to Screen* even saw participants attend from Shrewsbury and Liverpool. During both projects, individuals were also provided with food, easing financial pressure and providing sustenance for those who might otherwise have limited access to substantial meals.⁴² Even when this support was financially difficult for the organisation to maintain, it was always prioritised.

By providing food and financial assistance, Compass Collective evidenced micro-gestures of solidarity that recognised individuals as human beings, challenging the dehumanisation that Stauffer views as a core element of ethical loneliness.⁴³ These practices moved beyond tokenistic inclusion to foster a relational ethic of care,⁴⁴ where participants' material realities were acknowledged as inseparable from their creative engagement. In doing so, Compass positioned logistical support not as ancillary but as central to creative practice—an infrastructural expression of community welcome and shared humanity. Such gestures, while seemingly small, enabled the conditions for deeper participation, trust, and belonging, underscoring how practical accommodations can function as foundational acts of recognition and respect.

Meeting Human Needs

Viewed through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,⁴⁵ Compass's projects enact solidarity by supporting young people at multiple levels of development. At the most basic level, their projects provide food, travel, and welfare support, meeting

⁴¹ Leah Gayer, in conversation with Ellen Wagstaff, in person, October 2023.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*.

⁴⁴ James Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 9.3 (2015), 278–88 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13569783.2015.1068109?needAccess=true> [accessed 4 December 2023]; James Thompson, *Care Aesthetics: For Artful Care and Careful Art* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2022); Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Maurice Hamington, *Revolutionary Care: Commitment and Ethos* (London: Routledge, 2022), ISBN 9781032437293; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁴⁵ Abraham Harold Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50:4 (1943), pp.370–39.

individuals' physiological needs.⁴⁶ With these foundations in place, Compass's projects are further able to address higher-level psychological needs vital for personal growth and fulfilment, including love and belonging, esteem, self-actualisation, and ultimately transcendence.⁴⁷ By addressing these human needs, the charity counteracts the dehumanisation that refugees often face⁴⁸ and that Stauffer identifies as a contributor to ethical loneliness.⁴⁹

Dream to Screen and *The Freedom Academy* supported participants' need for love and belonging in multiple ways.⁵⁰ Acting offered a shared language through which participants, many of whom expressed a love for film and television, could connect across linguistic and cultural differences.⁵¹ This artistic medium fostered a sense of familiarity and connection to others. Beyond the work itself, participants described powerful experiences of friendship, love and respect.⁵² One individual from *The Freedom Academy* shared that they "did not care about the show," but valued most that the staff "genuinely cared" about them.⁵³ Another reflected: "[I learnt that] there are still good people in the world who root for you."⁵⁴ These statements reveal more than just appreciation; they express a profound experience of being cared for and respected as a person, experiences central to the fulfilment of love and belonging needs that, in turn, mitigate feelings of ethical abandonment.⁵⁵

Participant responses to both projects also suggested fulfilment of esteem needs; the need to feel a sense of capability and achievement.⁵⁶ When asked what they learned from the projects, numerous individuals reported developing feelings of competence alongside technical skills: "I can act if I put my mind to it"; "[the project] gave me confidence in my abilities, enabling me to trust my ideas and execute them."⁵⁷ The development of confidence was also a recurring theme in responses to both projects, with 100% of *Freedom Academy* participants reporting that their confidence had improved as a result

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

⁴⁸ Duffy-Syedi, *Performing Care with Refugee Youth*.

⁴⁹ Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*.

⁵⁰ Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

⁵¹ Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Facilitator Interview, by Ellen Wagstaff, 10th April 2025.

⁵⁴ Compass Collective, *ATG Freedom Academy Evaluation Survey*.

⁵⁵ Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*; Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*.

⁵⁶ Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

⁵⁷ Compass Collective, *ATG Freedom Academy Evaluation Survey*.

of the practice.⁵⁸ These reflections evidence feelings of competence, mastery, and self-confidence central to meeting esteem needs.⁵⁹

Further, the decision to provide professional-level actor training across both projects addressed participants' self-actualisation needs.⁶⁰ For many, displacement had disrupted educational trajectories or made career ambitions seem unattainable. In *Dream to Screen*, one participant shared that they had been forced to abandon a career path in their home country, while another explained they had never had the opportunity to pursue one.⁶¹ In this context, training with industry professionals was not only about learning performance techniques; it became a symbolic and practical reintroduction to the idea of a future. It signalled belief in participants' potential, affirming their right to opportunity, recognition, and creative ambition, regardless of their circumstances. In enabling participants to pursue their goals and re-establish a sense of self-purpose, Compass was seen to address the highest levels of Maslow's hierarchy by enabling self-actualisation.⁶²

Finally, Compass Collective's broader engagement in fostering a cohesive sense of community and interpersonal connectedness can be understood as contributing to the cultivation of self-transcendence.⁶³ Through collective creativity and mutual care, young people working with Compass experience a sense of purpose and belonging that extends beyond their own individual growth. They come to see themselves as part of a community —as collaborators and friends working together, supporting one another's dreams, and growing alongside one another. This feeling is implicit in the tendency of Compass Collective and the young people with whom they work to refer to themselves as "The Compass Community".⁶⁴ It seems that this charity's work not only invites participants to perform, but also to belong; to face the uncertainties of displacement in unity and collective solidarity.

Conclusion

Since its founding, Compass Collective has supported approximately 500 young people aged 14–26, from over 28 locations throughout the UK, 70% of whom arrived in the UK as

⁵⁸ Compass Collective, *ATG Freedom Academy Evaluation Survey; October Acting Project 23 YP Feedback Form*.

⁵⁹ Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Wagstaff, Research Notes, October 2023.

⁶² Abraham Harold Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Compass Collective, 'Compass Community', *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/compasscollect/> [Accessed 24 July 2025].

unaccompanied minors.⁶⁵ This article has presented the organisation's work as a valuable model for enacting solidarity with refugee and asylum-seeking youth through creative engagement. Examining *Dream to Screen* and *The Freedom Academy* reveals that solidarity can, and must be, articulated not only during participatory performance workshops but in the processes that underpin them and the wider structures that surround them. Only when we begin to care for and hear the voices of young refugees and asylum seekers on a deeply committed and relational level can we begin to address feelings of ethical loneliness.⁶⁶

This study of Compass Collective's work amplifies the importance of sustained commitment to the lives and well-being of young refugees and migrants; a commitment that extends beyond the theatre workshop. I argue that this commitment must be replicated by other companies, practitioners, and organisations if they are to undertake ethical work with young refugees and asylum seekers. Solidarity is not just about the spaces we create; it is equally about the support we provide and the communities we build. With this overarching advocacy for commitment in mind, I end with a statement released by Compass Collective in response to the UK government's recent White Paper on migration, a statement which captures the ethos of care, friendship and solidarity that filters into every aspect of their work:

"Migrants are friends, creatives, learners, dreamers and leaders. They're human beings with ideas, experiences and skills that bring joy, hope and change...Compass will continue to be a safe and welcoming community. We will continue to deliver creative programmes, education, training and other opportunities which support our young people to integrate into the UK. We will continue to challenge negative narratives by championing migrant voices and celebrating our incredible community"⁶⁷

Acknowledgements

I would like to give thanks to the Compass Collective team, the Ambassador Theatre Group, and the extended Compass Community for sharing their space and their practice with me.

⁶⁵ Compass Collective, *Compass Collective*, <https://www.compasscollect.com> [accessed 2 July 2025].

⁶⁶ Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*; Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being*.

⁶⁷ Compass Collective, 'In Response to the Release of the Government's White Paper on Migration', *Instagram*, 16 May 2025 <https://www.instagram.com/compasscollect/> [accessed 2 July 2025].

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