

Theory of Change





1

About Refugee Week

Refugee Week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Founded in 1998 and held every year around World Refugee Day on the 20 June, Refugee Week is also a growing global movement.

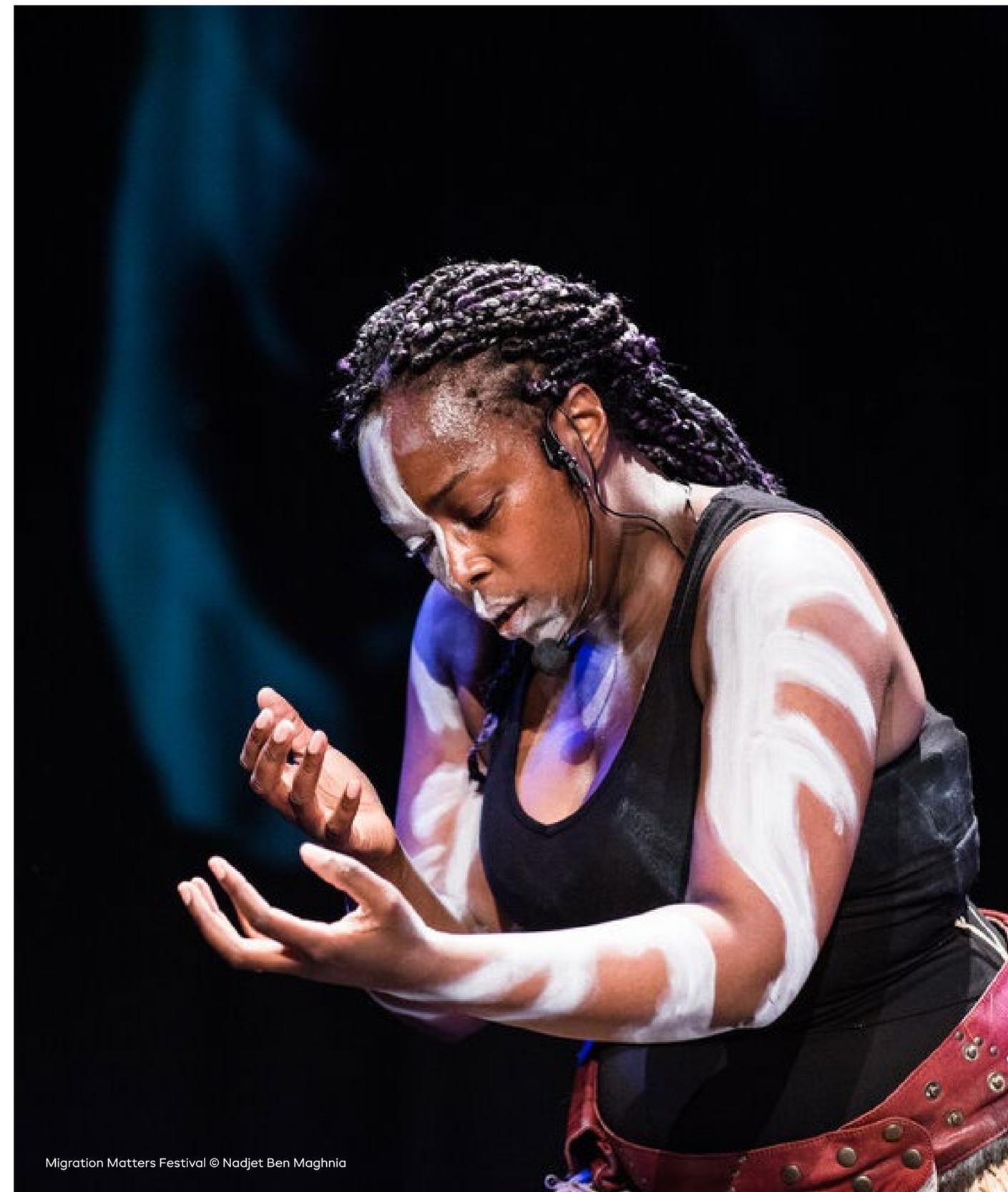
Through a programme of arts, cultural, sports and educational events alongside media and creative campaigns, Refugee Week enables people from different backgrounds to connect beyond labels, as well as encouraging understanding of why people are displaced, and the challenges they face when seeking safety. Refugee Week is a platform for people who have sought safety in the UK

to share their experiences, perspectives and creative work on their own terms.

Refugee Week's vision is for refugees and asylum seekers to be able to live safely within inclusive and resilient communities, where they can continue to make a valuable contribution.

Refugee Week is an umbrella festival, and anyone can get involved by holding or joining an event or activity. It is a partnership project coordinated and managed by Counterpoints Arts.¹

¹ Refugee Festival Scotland, Refugee Week Wales and Refugee Week Northern Ireland are coordinated by Scottish Refugee Council, Welsh Refugee Council and NICRAS respectively (members of the Refugee Week UK Partnership). For the full list of Refugee Week UK partners, see the Refugee Week website.



Migration Matters Festival © Nadjat Ben Maghnia



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2

This Theory of Change

In 2020, Counterpoints Arts led a review of Refugee Week's Theory of Change, responding to the ways Refugee Week, social justice movements and the wider political and social context had developed and changed since the previous Theory of Change was written in 2012.

The review process involved desk research and analysis to inform a background paper and a series of workshops with the Refugee Week national partners (via the Steering Group and the Operations Group), the Refugee Week Advisory Group and a group of Refugee Week event organisers and producers. It was an iterative learning process, with each workshop building on the thoughts and ideas that emerged from previous sessions.



3

Vision & Aim

The change we want to make

The vision of Refugee Week is for refugees and asylum seekers to live safely within inclusive and resilient communities, where they can continue to make a valuable contribution. This is the ultimate impact we want Refugee Week to contribute to.

Refugee Week activities work towards this vision by helping to bring about more informed and welcoming attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers.





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4

Process & Outcomes

How Refugee Week helps to make this change

We believe that Refugee Week activities, held by a wide range of partners and underpinned by our shared principles and values, can lead to more informed and welcoming attitudes. This happens when Refugee Week activities enable experiences that lead to empathy and connection, recognition of the contributions of refugees and a deeper understanding of refugee experiences - including why people are displaced (long and short-term reasons), the rights of refugees and asylum seekers and the structural injustices and barriers they face.

Some people will also be sufficiently engaged and supportive that they become part of the 'refugee solidarity movement' all year round, helping the wider movement to grow.²

For those already in our movement, Refugee Week provides opportunities to celebrate, share learning and strengthen connections, around our shared vision.

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5

Rationale & Evidence

The Refugee Week approach is to enable and support a wide range of arts, cultural and educational activities that bring people together across difference, educate and lead to empathy and connection.

● Engaging Arts and Culture

Cultural activities can promote community togetherness and help create understanding between ‘host communities’ and those who are newly-arrived.³ The arts also allow ‘refugee stories’ to be told in fresh ways that transcend stereotypes and have the ability to reach mainstream audiences and spaces. Refugee Week’s focus on arts, culture and community enables engagement by a wide range of actors, from mainstream arts institutions and national media to schools, local councils, faith groups, arts and sporting organisations.

● Enabling ‘Positive Social Contact’

Social Contact Theory states that positive social contact between people from different backgrounds helps to reduce prejudice. As well as direct contact, encountering stories in the media/ social media and even knowing other people who have ‘mixed’ friendship groups has been shown to have an impact.⁴ Refugee Week can help make this happen by making diverse friendship/ community groups visible through the media, social media and local events.

● Supporting Local Activities

Demonstrating and celebrating welcome and togetherness locally can contribute to strong and resilient local communities, as ‘neighbourly bonds’ are strengthened and diversity is experienced as something positive and normal. Local activities can contribute to attitudinal change by enabling positive contact between people from different backgrounds (see Enabling ‘Positive Social Contact’). As a network of local groups, Refugee Week constitutes a ‘narrative infrastructure’: a movement of people who spread positive stories and values through their networks.⁵

● Telling Human Stories

Research has shown that communication focusing on human stories and common values is often more effective than polemical or mythbusting approaches, which in fact often leave people remembering the “pithy myth”.⁶

3. [Arts and Refugees: History, Impact and Future](#), Arts Council England, The Baring Foundation and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2008

4. [Remembering the kindness of strangers](#): Division, unity and social connection during and beyond COVID-19, British Future, 2020

5. [Changing Our Narrative About Narrative](#): The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power, Othering & Belonging Institute, 2018

6. [How to talk about immigration](#), British Future, 2014



6

Audiences

Refugee Week's target audiences are broad yet strategic, and reflect the fact that the Refugee Week network operates in a wide range of different settings – one of the festival's key strengths.

The target audiences below have been identified partly because they include/are able to reach 'fence-sitters': people who have some concerns about immigration and diversity, but are open to engaging with other perspectives and experiences. In particular, Refugee Week aims to reach people with concerns about the perceived cultural impacts of migration, who are likely to respond well to Refugee Week events that highlight the importance of community and inclusion.

One key way that Refugee Week reaches fence-sitters is through partnering with organisations outside our current sphere; 'meeting wider audiences where they are already', for example through arts institutions, sports clubs, outdoor public spaces, schools, places of worship or via mainstream media.

● Arts and Culture Audiences

A diverse group that varies depending on event and venue and may also contain any of the three other target groups. Operating in a range of arts and cultural settings enables Refugee Week to reach wide and varied audiences who might not otherwise engage with refugee issues.

● Existing Supporters (active/passive)

Refugee Week enables existing supporters to celebrate, share learning and build connections, as well as activating 'sympathetic yet passive' supporters, thereby growing and strengthening the wider movement. Existing supporters also help engage 'fence-sitters' in Refugee Week.

● Children and Young People

The changemakers of tomorrow. Engagement in schools enables Refugee Week to reach a wide cross-section of society.

● Opinion Formers

Figures with the power to influence wider public attitudes, including (but not limited to) journalists, 'social media influencers', celebrities, faith leaders, politicians, civil servants, teachers and doctors.



7

Shared Values & Principles

We encourage all Refugee Week initiatives which reflect these core beliefs.

● **There is a Bigger Us**

We are not the same. Our experiences are different and we do not have equal access to resources and power.

But we are also interconnected and interdependent: part of a 'bigger us'. We believe that the safety of each of us matters to all of us, and strive to come together around shared values of fairness, mutual support, kindness and respect for universal rights.

● **Open to All**

Refugee Week is an open platform and welcomes a wide range of responses suited to many different contexts. As a movement, we aim to make our activities inclusive and remove barriers to participation.

● **Celebrating Contributions**

Refugee Week celebrates the contributions of refugees in order to challenge negative stereotypes and create a space where refugees can be seen and heard beyond their experience of displacement.

We believe that everyone has a contribution to make, and reject the idea that people seeking safety should have to 'prove their worth' more than others in society.

● **Arts and Culture Make Change**

We believe that arts and culture can help us see migration and displacement differently: by creating connection across difference, taking the voices and experiences of refugees to new spaces and helping us imagine how we can live better together.

● **A Space for Many Stories**

Refugee Week aims to be an empowering platform where people who have experienced displacement can express themselves on their own terms.

We recognise that no single narrative represents 'the refugee experience', and support diverse representations of people and experiences through arts and culture.

● **Leadership Matters**

We believe that, wherever possible, initiatives about refugee experiences should involve people with lived experience of displacement in their planning and leadership.

● **Refugees are not a Single Group**

We recognise that refugees and asylum seekers are not a single group and have different experiences, including because of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and immigration status.

● **Reclaiming 'Refugee'**

We use the word 'refugee' because of its legal and historical significance, and because we believe it is important to reclaim it from negative uses.

At the same time, we recognise the danger of labels and respect people's right to decide how they define themselves.



8

How We Work with Partners

We actively seek and welcome involvement by organisations, networks and communities of all kinds which share the Refugee Week vision and adhere to our shared values and principles.



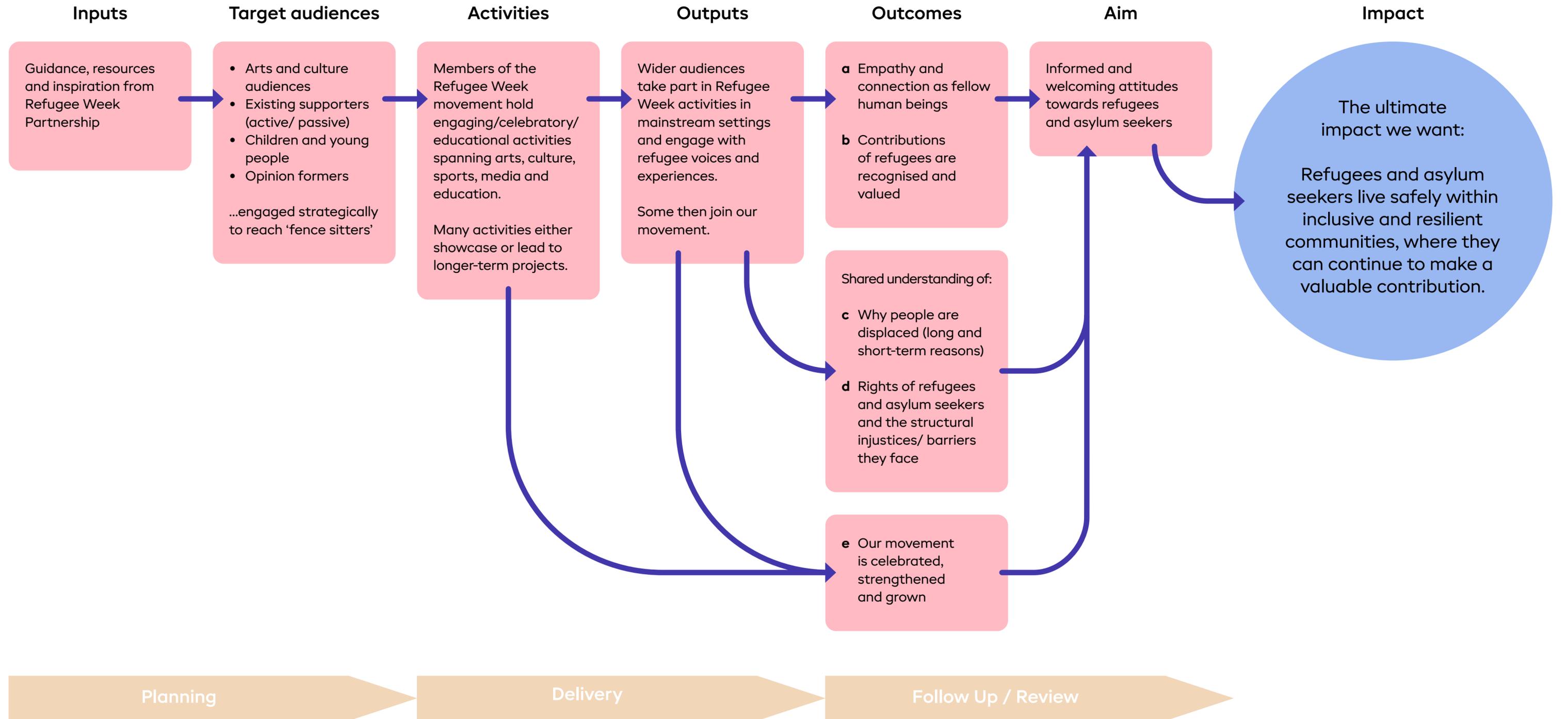
Judith Kerr © Jillian Edelstein



8

Measuring the Difference Refugee Week Makes

We are committed to ongoing reflection, consultation and evaluation to ensure Refugee Week remains relevant and impactful. Counterpoints Arts undertakes or commissions an annual evaluation of Refugee Week, and Refugee Week is shaped by feedback from its network and other stakeholders gathered throughout the year through meetings, workshops and surveys.



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