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Beats and Boroughs: East London Music Meet Up Impact Report

A True Cadence Initiative

Jo Gibson

Institute for Social Justice,

York St John University

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Executive summary

This evaluation was conducted by York St John University's Institute for Social Justice with True Cadence to consider the impact of Beats & Boroughs on participating young people and music organisations. It used qualitative methods including event Mentimeter feedback (n=36), filmed vox pops (n=10) and semi-structured interviews with young people and event collaborators (n=5).

"In terms of networking & making connections, Beats and Boroughs helped me a lot."

(Young person employed through BB)



BEATS & BOROUGHES

About Beats & Boroughs

Beats and Boroughs was an East London music network delivered by True Cadence between March and December 2025. The programme aimed to bring together young people, artists, and organisations to strengthen collaboration, improve access to music industry opportunities, and support more diverse participation in the creative sector.

Recommendations

Future iterations should focus on deeper engagement, structured co-production, and long-term pathways to maximise impact and support more equitable access to the music industry by:

1. Shifting events to steering group meetings for shared ownership and sustained collaboration,
2. Focussing delivery by reducing scale, resourcing wellbeing, and planning realistically,
3. Defining "agent of change" outcomes with participants for meaningful impact,
4. Continuing youth-led open mics and strengthening co-production through clear roles and dedicated resources.

Activity & Insights

Across four events and an online resource hub, Beats and Boroughs engaged 151 participants and created 27 paid opportunities, over half of which were taken up by young people. The programme offered networking, mentoring, and performance platforms, with a strong emphasis on inclusion and accessibility. A key highlight was the **Future Sounds: Youth, Music & Community** event, which provided a dedicated platform for over 20 young performers.

The programme demonstrated positive outcomes in building confidence, skills, and networks among participants, particularly those directly employed or mentored. It also created inclusive spaces that enabled diverse audiences to engage with music activity. However, evidence of longer-term impact such as sustained collaboration, increased sector diversity, and community-level change was more limited and, in some cases, too early to determine. Several challenges affected delivery, including the limitations of an event-based format for achieving co-production, the complexity of engaging participants at different ages and stages, and capacity constraints. These factors highlight a need for more sustained approaches when working with diverse young people and community partners.

Overall, Beats and Boroughs can be understood as a strong foundation for future development. It demonstrated clear demand for collaborative music spaces in East London and generated valuable learning.

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About Beats and Boroughs

Beats and Boroughs was an East London Music Network led by music social enterprise True Cadence.

The network sought to enhance opportunities and deepen collaboration between diverse young people, artists and organisations working with communities for positive change through music.

From March – December 2025, it ran as a series of events in East London and online, alongside an online resource hub.

Beats and Boroughs was made possible by funding from Foundation for Future London Westfield Eastbank Creative Futures Fund.



Scan the QR code to watch Beats & Boroughs highlights

Or visit this link:
<http://bit.ly/4uHbcUD>



Figure 1 Photo of people talking & smiling at the first Beats and Boroughs event [photo taken by Harry Bridger].

About True Cadence

True Cadence (TC) is a multi-award-winning music social enterprise based in Barking & Dagenham and serving across East London. As the home of grassroots music business education, TC works with upcoming artists and aspiring music industry professionals who wish to know how the music industry works. It provides tailored music workshops, mentorship, and a platform for young people to understand the business side of music while building the skills, confidence, and social network they need to become 'industry-ready'. TC's Vision is for every young person to express themselves creatively and have the opportunity to make it in the music industry.

Learn more about True Cadence via their website: <https://truecadence.org>

Rewind: Why did Beats and Boroughs begin? And how was the programme need identified?

In 2023–2024, True Cadence conducted research in East London with lived experience experts and York St John University researchers. We found that young musicians and grassroots music organisations felt isolated and lacked collaborative spaces, especially those working in marginalised music genres (e.g., Black musics often criminalised) and those supporting young people in music business, industry, and technology.

Our research highlighted a significant gap in music business study options for under-18s in England. [UK Music's 2024 Diversity Report](#) supports this, showing that only 5.9% of 16–24 year-olds are represented in the music industry, with Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse people underrepresented in senior (22.1%) and mid-level (23.0%) roles.

The need for Beats & Boroughs was confirmed at a sold-out event we held in June 2024, where stakeholders from East London called for cross-borough collaboration, knowledge sharing, employment opportunities, peer support, and joint learning. See this short film which documents the event: <https://youtu.be/DYvpOqdXAkE>

Access our 2023–2024 research report at: <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/media/content-assets/research/institute-for-social-justice/ISJ-and-TC-Final-Report.pdf>

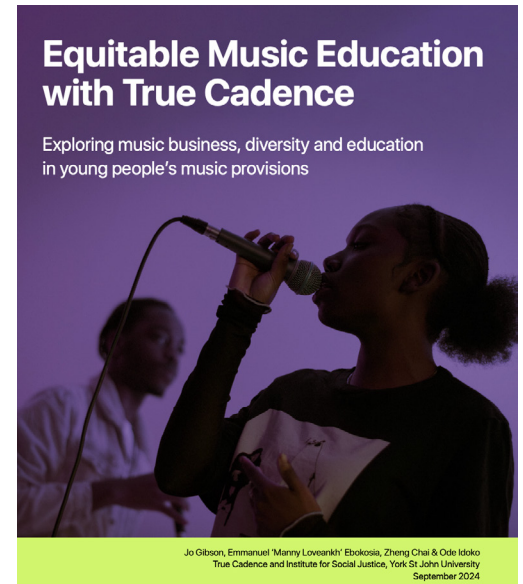


Figure 2 Research report front cover

Methodology

To identify and evaluate the impacts of Beats and Boroughs on those that participated in the network:

1. event attendee numbers and characteristics were established through information collected at event sign-up and entry (n=140),
2. event attendees were invited to respond to a short anonymous feedback process undertaken via audience engagement tool Mentimeter within each event (n = 36),
3. event attendees were invited to take part in vox pop responses collected as part of filming at in-person events (n = 10),
4. True Cadence team members – including young people paid to work, or volunteering, on the network – were interviewed (n = 4), and
5. event collaborators were interviewed (n = 1).

Across the activity, participation was optional and young people were presented with multiple modes to participate. As one example, learning disabled young adults that performed at an in-person event shared their thoughts verbally alongside a support worker rather than via Mentimeter.

Data were analysed via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants were given the option for their report contributions to be anonymised or credited. Final decisions about whether a participant is acknowledged (and therefore identifiable) were taken in negotiation with the participant, alongside consideration of their safety.

Ethical approval was granted for the evaluation by York St John University's School of Arts Ethics Committee.

Beats and Boroughs at a glance

27 paid roles

(Includes event coordinators, assistants, performers & panellists)

"It was electric"

(Young person attending event No.4, Nov 2025)

151 Event attendees

Over half of those engaged were aged 25 years or under

4 events engaging audiences from all East London Boroughs

Beats and Boroughs included

Networking, mentoring, performance platforms & an online resource hub with giveaways.

Collaborating and participating organisations

[Actively SeeK.I.N.G](#)

[Bishop Challenger Catholic School](#)

[Boathouse Studios](#)

[Chameleon](#)

[Community Albums](#)

[Community Music Service LBBB](#)

[FEMMESTIVAL](#)

[Future Fwd Consultancy](#)

[High Voltage Performing Arts](#)

[One Room Live](#)

[Pepper Pots](#)

[Plinth](#)

[Progress Project](#)

[RoEx Audio](#)

[Sirlute Charity](#)

[Sulola Studios](#)

[The Podium Podcast Studio](#)

[The Sound Library](#)

[Youth Music](#)

Event attendees described Beats and Boroughs in one word as:



Figure 3 Event attendee responses to the question 'describe today's event in one word'. Answers collated at first 3 events. The size of the word corresponds to frequency of mentions.

Beats and Boroughs ambitions and outcomes

Beats and Boroughs set out to develop a co-produced network of young musicians, artists and organisations to support young people's creative futures, foster collaboration and generate insights about how to best support young people in music industry education and employment. It did this to address a lack of access to music activities and employment for ethnically diverse and low-income young people in East London.



Figure 4 Young people from The Progress Project performing at Beats and Boroughs' Future Sounds: Youth, Music and Community event at The Boathouse Studios, Barking and Dagenham [photo taken by Federico Manni].

The programme committed to 5 long-term outcomes. The following table shows those outcomes and the ways in which Beats and Boroughs addressed them.

Beats and Boroughs long-term programme outcomes			
Outcome	Ways the outcome was met	What participants said	Follow-on: learning and possibilities
1. Increased employability of participants	<p>Beats and Boroughs (BB) provided 27 paid roles.</p> <p>15 of the paid roles were undertaken by young people including: 2 co-ordinators employed for a period of 8 months, 3 event performers, 7 panellists & 3 assistants. 3 volunteers supported events to build their experience and CVs. Event photography was shared with performers and panellists for their portfolio development. All young people (YP) involved were supported with bespoke mentoring and/or signposting by True Cadence core staff.</p> <p>Through participation in the network, disabled YP from the Progress Project reported increased confidence and aspirations. Several also expressed interest in volunteering roles. Ongoing support from True Cadence contributed to some continuing to explore and take up further performance opportunities (see discussion under Programme Outcomes: Spotlighting Individual Impacts).</p>	<p><i>"It definitely did help me develop more skills and stuff [...] and made me a bit more confident."</i></p> <p>(Young person employed through BB)</p> <p><i>"I am very shy, so talking to the public was a big thing for me. I was happy coming out of my comfort zone."</i></p> <p>(Young person volunteering through BB)</p>	<p>Meaningfully supporting people to increase their employability can be resource intensive. It requires personalised and culturally safe intervention, which may be needed long-term. This is often especially so for YP with multifaceted needs (such as the ethnically diverse, low income and disabled YP that participated in the network).</p> <p>Following volunteering requests made by disabled YP, TC is keen to offer further development opportunities. For this to happen additional resource – both financially and in terms of staffing – is needed to ensure appropriate support, supervision and safeguarding.</p>
2. More diverse audiences engage with the cultural sector and benefit from community assets/available services.	<p>Beats and Boroughs attracted people of different ethnicities, ages, dis/ability and additional needs. Events were prepared to participant access needs as expressed at time of booking and facilitated responsively.</p> <p>With over half of those engaged aged 25 years or under, the programme sought insights on how to best support YP in music industry education and employment. It did this by providing a platform for YP to perform and share their perspectives & hopes at a dedicated event titled Future Sounds: Youth, Music & Community.</p>	<p><i>"Amazing. Just amazing to perform on stage."</i></p> <p>(YP from Community Albums that performed at a BB event)</p> <p><i>"We will like to say a big thank you to Manny and his team for creating a platform where young people of individual abilities show their talents. Ryan had fun on stage singing."</i></p> <p>(Parent of a YP from the Progress Project that performed at a BB event)</p>	<p>Mixed age and stage events were a challenge. YP wanted to hear from other YP, rather than organisation leader panellists for example. And organisation leaders sought a space to discuss their concerns with contemporaries. Future activity should be tailored to specific ages and stages to support relationship development, before branching to mixed ecology working.</p>

<p>3. Participants act as agents of change within the local community.</p>	<p>Beats and Boroughs offered welcoming spaces for people to come together with others who share things in common, as well differences. Through this, many participants reported building networks and relationships. This suggests the programme strengthened social infrastructure which is considered necessary for effective and sustainable change within communities.</p> <p>There is some evidence of direct action through individual small acts. For example, Joshua – a TC participant that was employed and mentored through Beats and Boroughs – developed facilitation and hosting experience. Subsequently Joshua was commissioned by LBBD local authority to develop community and youth work (see discussion under Programme Outcomes: Spotlighting Individual Impacts).</p>	<p><i>“I’m looking for good bonds, relationships with people that I can collaborate with. I love collaboration and I think there is a lot of great people in the room.”</i> (BB Event attendee 1)</p> <p><i>“I’ve got more leads, I’ve got more networks and I’ve met more people especially from the council and music industry.”</i> (Young person employed through BB)</p> <p><i>“I guess a question is what does it look like for young people to be agents of change?”</i> (TC staff member)</p>	<p>Whilst BB potentially sowed seeds for change through network and relationship development, it is difficult to tell if participants went on to act as agents of change within their communities. This is in part due to BB’s event format which attracted one-time attendees, alongside the programme ending prematurely (see discussion under Programme Challenges).</p> <p>During an event titled <i>Funding and Sustainability in Community Music</i> questions were raised about what counts as change, who can make it and who decides. Attendees talked about a desire and need for collective action to establish lasting, systemic and community-driven change in music education and industry. Going forward, this presents an important area for TC to explore further with YP and their communities.</p>
<p>4. Increased diversity in the creative / entrepreneurial sector in the programme boroughs.</p>	<p>Beats and Boroughs aimed to support diverse YP to enter the creative sector and to equip organisations with approaches to better serve underrepresented groups. BB provided platforms for diverse YP to work on the programme, perform, receive mentoring and develop their CVs and portfolios. However, the extent to which BB increased diversity in the creative / entrepreneurial sector is likely contained to the programme itself. This is stated to avoid premature and exaggerated reporting on whether the increased networks, experience and confidence gained by some participants directly led to diverse participation in these sectors.</p> <p>It was envisaged that the network would include forward-looking conversations for action; to better serve those currently excluded from creative industries and education. In reality, facilitating dialogues that lead to action - between organisations leading the work and young people seeking to participate - within an event format was a challenge. See discussion of mixed ecology working under outcome 2 in this table, and discussion of event format under Programme Challenges.</p>	<p><i>“Getting into the music industry is hard. It’s hard to know who to turn to. Who has your back?”</i> (BB YP panellist)</p>	<p>TC could build upon partnerships made through BB to continue to work towards increasing diversity in the creative / entrepreneurial sector. For example, by collaborating on further opportunities for diverse YP such as extended open mics hosted with local venues and youth organisations or developing a steering group (see discussion under Programme Challenges). In this sense BB might be considered as a bridge towards increasing diversity. Building upon partnerships in this way would require additional resource to work in ways that meaningfully invest in diverse YP beyond widening participation.</p>

<p>5. Increased capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship.</p>	<p>Beats and Boroughs fostered relationships and centred knowledge exchange through panel discussions, presentations, Q&As and networking – all of which have potential to increase capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship. However, similarly to outcome 4, the extent to which BB did this is likely contained to individualised and localised levels. For example, some event attendees reported making new contacts and connections but did not say how or what that would lead to. Some reported leaving events feeling ‘nourished’ and ‘energised’ which points to increased capacity. Others said where they would recommend BB.</p> <p>Notably, one participant contacted TC to start conversations about collaborating on a South East London Beats and Boroughs, demonstrating the programme’s value and potential replicability.</p>	<p><i>“I recommended BB at a UEL partnership event. This is linked to organisations, academics and funders.”</i> (BB Event attendee 2)</p> <p><i>“We’ve met with people where hopefully we’re gonna see some new collaborative working, and hopefully there’s some options where we can support people who are maybe applying for funding themselves but are a bit scared about that, so we can assist them and help each other, because that’s the way to success in these difficult times.”</i> (BB Event attendee 3)</p> <p><i>“I made new contacts.”</i> (BB Event attendee 4)</p>	<p>Increasing capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship requires tangible scaffolding – beyond anticipating that this will happen through networking. This is especially so for YP and those with multifaceted needs. For example, to move networking to collaboration for new ventures, future iterations could include post-networking design labs. These labs could offer a space where people that made connections through BB networking events could 1) workshop their ideas together, 2) be allocated an industry contact (for mentoring and/or partnership) and 3) be provided with a small budget to kick-start the idea. Carefully facilitated and with appropriate resource, this approach could support diverse young entrepreneurs.</p>
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Programme outcomes: Spotlighting individual impacts

The programme demonstrated positive outcomes in building confidence, skills, and networks among participants, particularly those directly employed or mentored. This section spotlights some individuals impacted in this way.

Joshua's story: Beats & Boroughs enabled continued music opportunities and skill development

Joshua joined TC as a participant in 2022. A year later, TC supported him to deliver his first live event through their Music Industry Masterclass where Joshua discovered his interest in hosting and facilitating live performance spaces.

Through Beats & Boroughs, TC were able to train Joshua as a facilitator and involve him in their collaborative work with the Progress Project, where he gained experience working with disabled young adults. That experience contributed to Joshua securing a commission from LBBDC Council.

The programme played a significant role in offering Joshua continued music opportunities and focussing his path at a time when he was considering stepping back from music.



Figure 5 Joshua hosting BB event Future Sounds: Youth, Music & Community at The Boathouse [photo taken by Federico Manni].

The Progress Project: Beats & Boroughs enabled a platform for confidence and creativity

TC worked with disabled young adults from the Progress Project to develop two songs and a [music video](#).

Beats & Boroughs provided a platform for the Progress Project to share the music they made in a setting that felt safe and supported. The combination of creation and platform seems to have had a real impact on the young people's confidence and aspiration. Some have expressed interest in work experience opportunities with TC.

Furthermore, their music video is performing well on YouTube and has been nominated to the [Council for Disabled Children's SEND Awards 2026](#) partnership category. This suggests that the work is landing beyond the immediate programme.

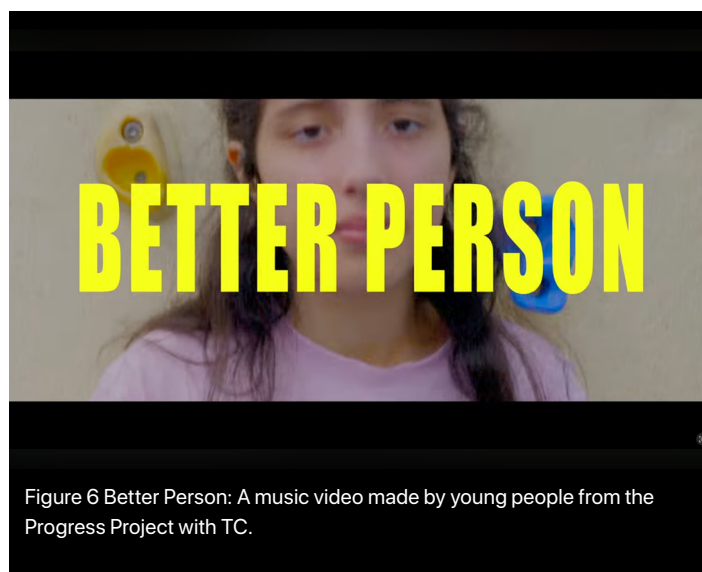


Figure 6 Better Person: A music video made by young people from the Progress Project with TC.

Blake, Ngozi and Noah: Beats & Boroughs supported young people to gain work experience and confidence*

Beats & Boroughs supported paid work experience for young people. For several of the young people supporting events, this was their first experience of working in a live event setting, and in some cases their first paid opportunity.

Blake, for example, was 16 and waiting to join the Royal Air Force. His confidence had been knocked from being rejected the first time he applied due to seeing colours differently (colour vision deficiency). Before getting involved in the programme, Blake described spending most of his time at home with little structure to his days. This opportunity gave him something to engage with, some responsibility, and a sense of direction during that gap period. Without the programme funding, that opportunity likely wouldn't have existed.

For others like Ngozi and Noah, the impact shows up in continuation. They didn't just support one event, they stayed involved throughout and went on to support other TC activity such as flyering and engaging with the public.

*pseudonyms are used in this section



Figure 7 Attendees applauding at Beats and Boroughs' Funding and Sustainability in Community Music event held at Studio Wayne McGregor, Newham [photo taken by Harry Bridger].

Programme highlights

Future Sounds: Youth, Music & Community was a highlight of the programme. Held in collaboration with [The Boathouse Studios](#), [Community Albums](#) and the [Progress Project](#), this event was programmed in response to attendee feedback which asked for YP-focussed activity and performance platforms. Over 20 YP performed at the event. This included original tracks, existing songs, spoken word poetry and playback of original produced music. YP described the event as 'electric', 'amazing', 'entertaining' and 'excellent'.

Key to the event's success:

- 1. Collaborative design:** The Boathouse wanted to expand its open mic night and diversify audiences. Community Albums and the Progress Project sought performance opportunities for YP, while TC aimed to develop BB. Working together allowed partners to align goals and create mutual benefit.
- 2. Responsive approach:** When YP seemed disengaged during the opening presentation, we adapted by moving to speed networking, snacks and the open mic. Although this reduced planned Mentimeter evaluation, it prioritised engagement. Participants could perform in different ways, including playing electronic tracks or karaoke-style singing.
- 3. Held with care:** Collaboration between three youth organisations helped secure performers and audiences while ensuring safeguarding through the presence of organisational leads.

YP appreciated the performance platform noting that many venues in the area are for over 18's. As a point of reflection, the opening event buzz tapered towards the end as YP went home. This left us with a question around how to maintain an audience for those performing later in the event. Initial ideas with event collaborators include competition incentives, speed networking with industry professionals programmed later in the event and rotating event hosts (different YP from different participating organisations).

Alongside the success of the open mic, participants liked the event topics which were co-decided with young people. Participants also liked access to discount codes and free trial periods for relevant software provided by our partners, alongside tailored resources. These were made available during events and through the programme's online resource hub.



Figure 8 Young people from Community Albums performing at the open mic at The Boathouse Studios [photo taken by Federico Manni].

Programme Challenges

In the programme funding application, we said that Beats and Boroughs would embrace forward-looking conversations for action and not shy away from big issues. We extend this to the programme's reporting. We do this to better identify, acknowledge and learn from failures rather than using narratives of success to mask them (Jancovich et al., 2025).

The following challenges presented during Beats and Boroughs:

Balancing an initial tangible offer for buy-in with a porous structure for collaboration:

- a) **Problem:** On reflection we got the balance wrong. Offering BB as a series of events set up an expectation of delivery – content to be consumed – rather than collaborative development. This reduced commitment to the programme.
- b) **How this came about:** Whilst we collaborated with community partners to run events, many were time and resource limited. This led TC to take the lead, which reduced co-production. During events some attendees expressed interest to contribute to BB, however suggestions often required resource beyond the scope of the grant to bring to fruition.
- c) **What next:** Reconcieve networking events as steering group meetings. This idea was suggested by a YP working on BB during a reflective interview. Steering groups could support a phased co-production approach by inviting members to develop programme activity beyond attending events. They could also include scaffolded networking moments to support member interaction.

Facilitating dialogues – between organisations leading the work and young people seeking to participate – that lead to action:

- a) **Problem:** The event format reduced necessary space for YP and organisations to consider key issues and meaningful action together.
- b) **How this came about:** This was in part due to the presentational nature of the events (linked to the first challenge). It was also because within the promise of networking, YP wanted to hear from other YP, and organisation leads wanted to talk with contemporaries since they often work in silos.
- c) **What next:** Use the steering group approach to initially work with discrete ages and stages before moving to mixed ecology working. Work with YP to post comments/dreams/concerns to the online resource hub. Use these to orient collaborative working with organisation leads. Then invite organisations to report on resulting actions at subsequent steering group meetings.

Ending Beats and Boroughs prematurely:

- a) **Problem:** We planned to run 8 events through BB, engaging 320+ participants. Instead, we ran 4 events engaging 151 participants.
- b) **How this came about:** Our planned activity required more capacity and resource than we had envisaged. For example, working with diverse YP, often with multifaceted needs, in personalised and culturally safe ways, took considerable time (both planning and mentoring). Alongside this, both TC and ISJ leads had personal matters that impacted their capacity during delivery including maternity and illness. And one YP recruited to the programme left mid-way through to take up permanent employment.
- c) **What next:** Whilst remaining ambitious for young people and their music making, use this experience to reflect realistically on what is possible within time and resource bound frames. Taking a similar approach to respectful payment (as endorsed by both TC and Foundation for Future London), plan in respectful time allocation. Use this experience to reflect on resourcing care (for practitioners as well as participants) within such programmes as is often missing from socially engaged creative work (Belfiore, 2022).



Figure 9 People talking during a networking moment at Beats and Boroughs' Funding and Sustainability in Community Music event [photo taken by Harry Bridger].

Conclusions

Beats and Boroughs set out to develop a co-produced network of young musicians, artists and organisations to support young people's creative futures, foster collaboration and generate insights about how to best support young people in music industry education and employment. At its best the programme offered meaningful employment, mentoring, performance platforms and networking with and for diverse young people and creative organisations across East London. However, there were challenges. The programme's long-term outcomes were only partially met (see the table on pages 8 – 10 for detail). On reflection, some of the anticipated outcomes were either too ambitious, or not possible with the scope and resource of the programme. This speaks to an overstretching of VCSEs more broadly in the context of increasing demand for services, reduced income and growing financial pressure leading to fatigue, burnout and overstretch (Marshall, 2025; Larkham & Mansoor, 2023). And, that in some senses, reporting of the outcomes will be inevitably partial at this stage. This is because it may be too early to tell whether BB increased capacity for

innovation and entrepreneurship since collaborations of this nature often require time to reach fruition. As an example, TC are in early talks with a participant who is seeking to develop a South East London Beats and Boroughs.

Identifying and acknowledging the programme's challenges, rather than using narratives of success to mask them, significantly helped our learning (both TC's and the report author). Next steps include developing the programme through a steering group approach, working with collaborators (established through the programme) to create pathways where young people's needs and ideas for music education and access to industry are heard and acted upon, and resourcing care. These steps are intended to nurture and grow the network. And they are vital in the context of silo working (which is all too often the case for community musicians and organisations leading to gaps in the work, missed opportunities and replication) alongside underrepresentation of young and ethnically diverse people in the music industry.

Recommendations

Reconcieve Beats and Boroughs networking events as steering group meetings to balance an initial tangible offer for buy-in with a porous structure for collaboration.

Plan realistically and resource care: reduce scale and focus on depth, build in contingency for staff changes and resource participant and practitioner wellbeing.

Consider 'agent of change' outcomes: define what meaningful change looks like and ways to achieve it with participants.

Continue young person focussed open mics with community music collaborators and local venues. Try competition incentives, speed networking with industry professionals programmed later in the event and rotating event hosts, to maintain audiences to event end.

Resource and strengthen co-production to enable meaningful collaboration by allocating budget for partner involvement and establishing expectations and roles together.

Acknowledgements

True Cadence would like to thank everyone that contributed to Beats and Boroughs making sure it platformed and supported young people and their music making. Special thanks to Regina Binzari and Jah Rahman for coordinating the programme, to Studio Wayne MacGregor and The Boathouse Studios for hosting us, to Community Albums, The Progress Project, One Room, LBBD Community Music Service and Youth Music for your collaboration, to Pepper Pots, Roex and Plinth for event giveaways and to Foundation for Future London for generously funding Beats and Boroughs.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone that attended, spoke and performed at the events.

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