

Sidney De Haan
Research Centre for Arts and Health (SDHRC)

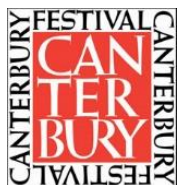
Evaluation report



Beautiful Noise: a community music celebration.

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Beautiful Noise: a community music celebration **Evaluation**

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Introduction.

Background

Canterbury Festival's *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration* took place on 15th October 2022. This free, un-ticketed community performance event is in its second year and took place across four venues across the city, Westgate Hall, Whitefriars Shopping Centre, and St. Peter's Methodist Church and Hall. It offers local volunteer performers and groups an opportunity take part in a live performance, each lasting up to fifty minutes. A total of 370 performers and 20 music groups took part. Musical performances from local choirs, orchestras, artists, and bands ranged in style from contemporary and rock, to classical. This year's event ran with support from Paul Roberts Canterbury, Cllr Alister Brady (KCC Combined Members Grant), and Canterbury Christ Church University.

In discussion with Lauren Woodrow the Programme Coordinator, a team from Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health (SDHRC), part of Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), supported this community initiative through a brief evaluation. This evaluation was funded as part of SDHRC's ongoing arts and health research through OAK Foundation. OAK Foundation are supporting the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health in its ambition: To make an internationally leading contribution to critical scholarship, research, and practice in the field of arts and health. SDHRC was founded in 2005 and named in memory of Sidney De Haan, founder of the Saga group of companies. It has contributed to and published extensive international research evidence around the impacts of singing and music events on community health and wellbeing. The Centre's current research extends to diverse arts disciplines and sectors, communities, and partner organisations in Kent and across the UK.

Method

A series of meetings were held at the Canterbury Festival office to discuss the best way to evaluate this community music event. In collaboration with the festival organisers, it was agreed that data collection would focus around four themes identified as important in the development of future festival events; these are, widening audiences, health and wellbeing, place-making and community connection, and accessibility and inclusion. Given the time and resource constraints, a short digital questionnaire was created to capture individuals' views and experiences of taking part in *Beautiful Noise*. The questionnaire aimed to detail demographic and event data and included the Office of National Statistics' (ONS) four personal wellbeing questions. On the day of the evaluation a team of data collectors, led by Dr Nina Worthington, completed the in-person questionnaire with 77 participants, aged 18+ years. The questions were multiple choice with a free text box for further comments. The data has been analysed and general themes drawn out and discussed in the light of existing literature.

Ethics

Formal approval for this evaluation was granted by CCCU's Faculty of Medicine, Health, and Social Care Ethics Panel. Participants were notified both verbally and in an information sheet of details of the evaluation and given an opportunity to ask questions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before completing the questionnaire.

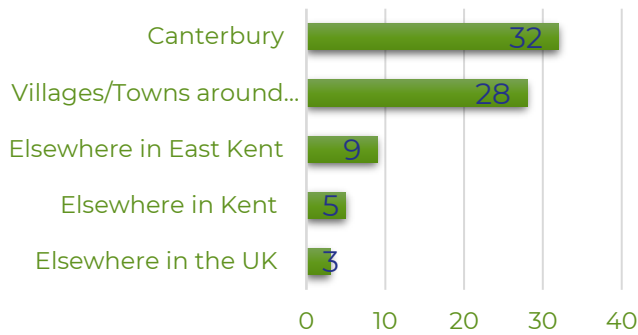
**'Uplifting, enjoyable, and lovely to see so many other people
and sharing, sharing the music.'**

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

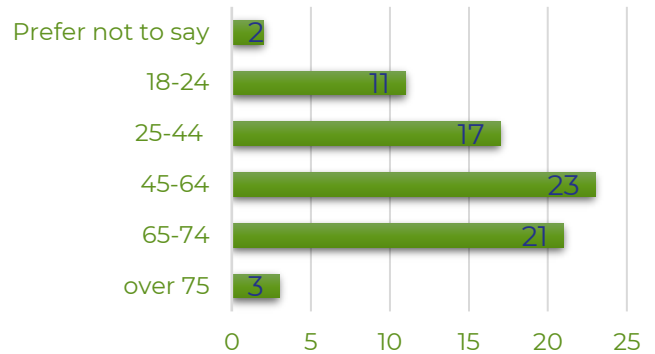
Participants in Beautiful Noise.

The following charts show demographic information collected from 77 participants who chose to complete the *Beautiful Noise* evaluation questionnaire. The figures show the number of participants in each category:

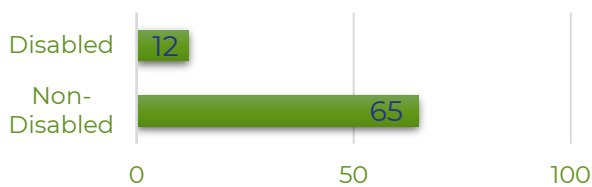
Address



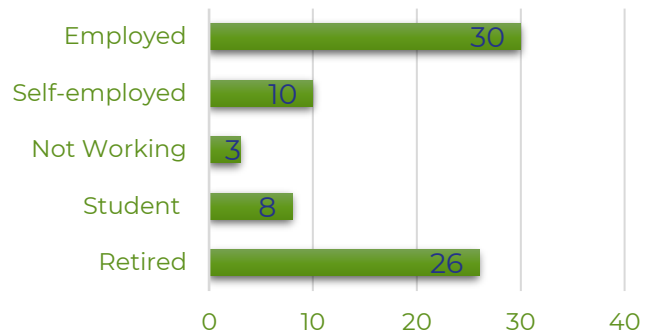
Age



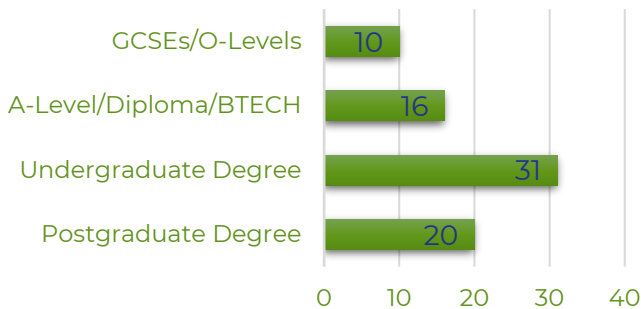
Disability



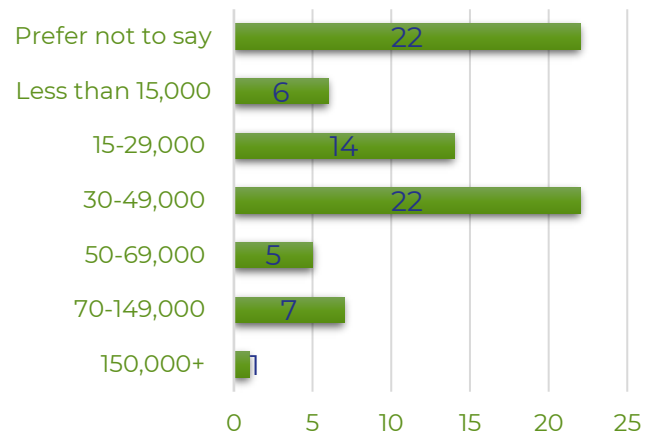
Employment



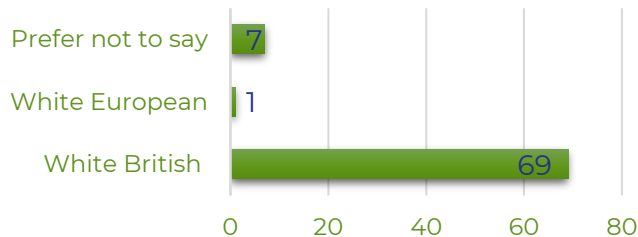
Education



Household Income (£)



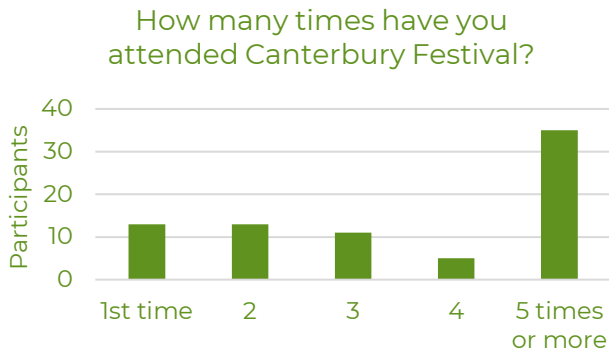
Ethnicity



Key points and themes.

1. Widening Audiences

78% of participants in the *Beautiful Noise* evaluation live in Canterbury or in towns and villages around Canterbury, highlighting that this free music event is strongly attended by local people. 17% of



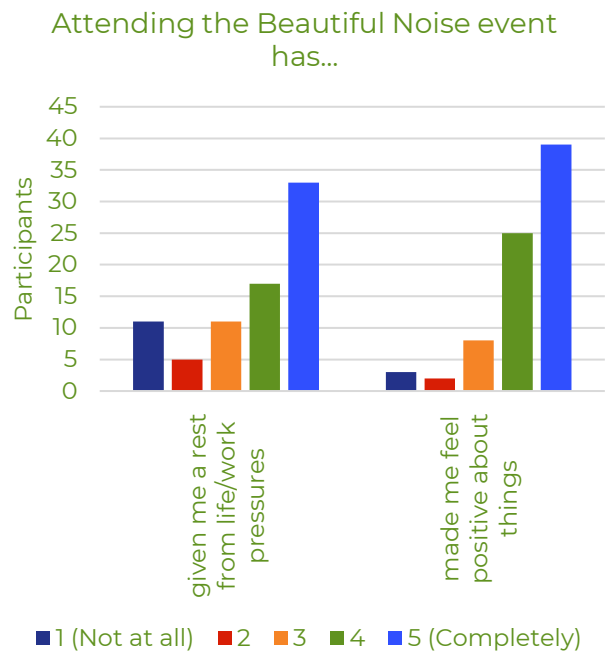
participants (13 out of 77) were attending a Canterbury Festival event for the first time. The majority, 76%, of these live in 'villages and towns surrounding Canterbury' or 'elsewhere in East Kent'. 42% of participants (35 people) had attended Canterbury Festival events 5 times or more; 54% of these lived in Canterbury. This suggests a high retention of regular festival attendees living locally and that the *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration* is attracting new audiences and local performers from surrounding areas.

66% of participants planned 'to attend other Canterbury Festival events over the next two-weeks'. The majority of these were paid for, ticketed events; Luxmuralis' sound and light show, *Shine: Let There Be Light*, at Canterbury Cathedral was the most popular event participants had purchased tickets for. However, of the 77 evaluation participants, 48 (62%) compared to 29 (38%) stated that the fact that the *Beautiful Noise* event is free was important in their decision to attend. In response to a question asking for the top 3 factors that 'would encourage you to attend more events' the highest scoring statement was 'if the events were free', which was cited 53 times. The fact that the event was free seemed of higher importance to younger participants with 53% of those under age 45 selecting 'if I had to pay to attend' as one of the top 3 factors 'that would stop you coming to events like this'. In contrast this was selected by only 19% of those aged 45+ years.

2. Health and Wellbeing

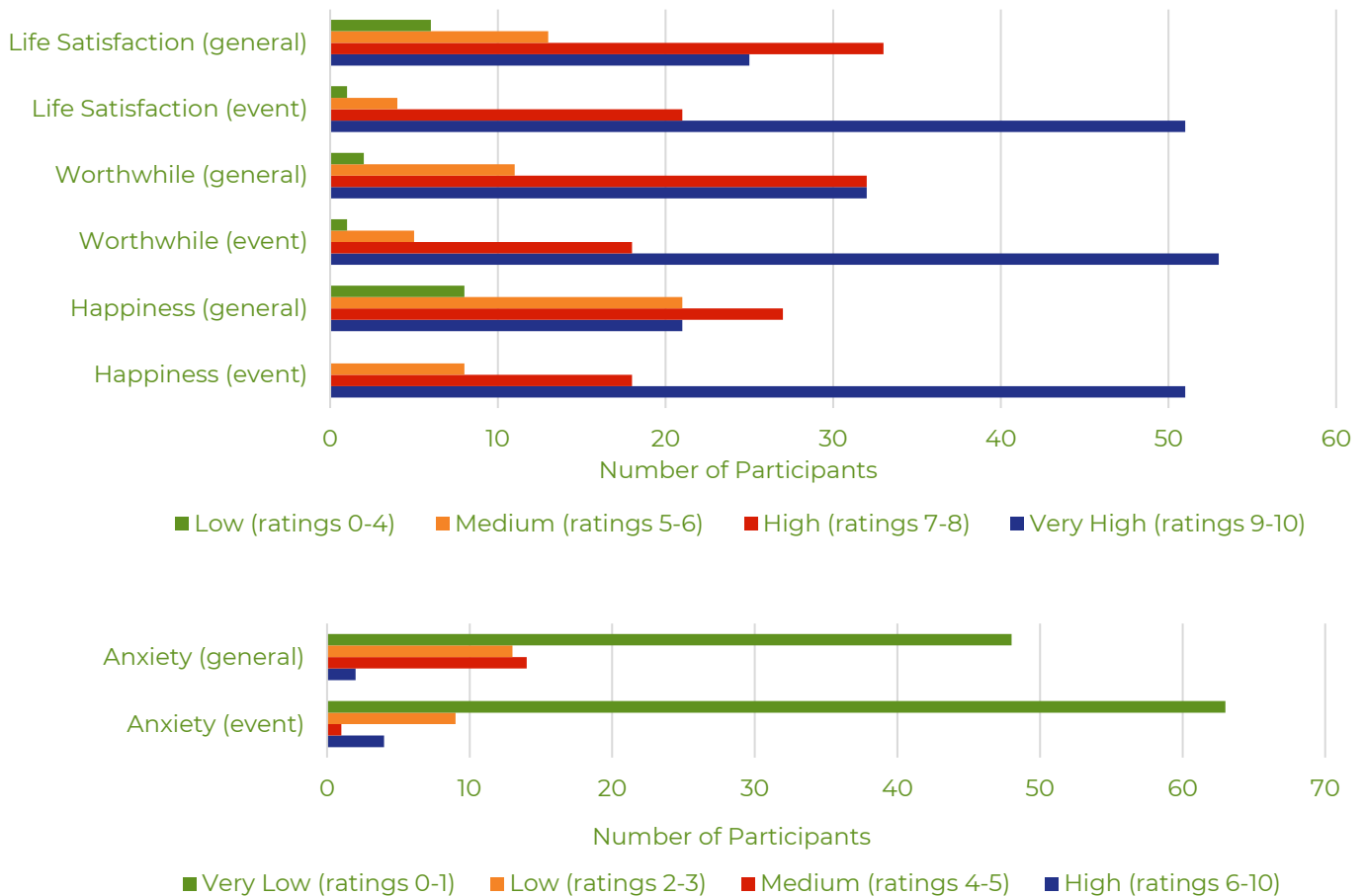
At the *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration* participants were asked 'on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "completely"', to what extent they agreed or disagreed with seven statements about 'taking part in today's event'. Responses to two of these statements are set out in the chart here. 64 respondents rated the statement 'Attending the *Beautiful Noise* event has made me feel positive about things' as 4 or 5 on the scale, which represents 83% of respondents. 65% of respondents (50 out of 77 participants) rated the statement, 'Attending the *Beautiful Noise* event has given me a rest from life and work pressures' as 4 or 5 on the same scale.

Participants' responses to the ONS personal wellbeing questions offer some insight into how the *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration* impacts



individuals' health and wellbeing; ONS wellbeing questions assess 'quality of life' through four measures, 'Life satisfaction, feeling the things done in life are Worthwhile, Happiness, and Anxiety' (ONS, 2018). The following charts show the number of participants for each of the four measures. The results are presented using thresholds that ONS (2018) consider to be 'Low', 'High' or 'Average' ratings of personal wellbeing. Results and thresholds for 'Life Satisfaction', 'Worthwhile', and 'Happiness' are detailed in the first chart and results and thresholds for 'Anxiety' are set out in the second chart. Most respondents reported positively on all four measures, with few reporting negative items. Results were reported in relation to 'general health, and *Beautiful Noise* 'event health'; comparison between these is meaningful, with measures reported most negatively also being measures most changed by participation in the event.

Responses to ONS Personal Well-being Questions



The most changed aspect of 'general health' was 'Happiness'. Asked to 'respond on a scale of 0-10, where '0' is "not at all" and 10 is "completely"' to the question 'overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?', 29 participants (38%) reported a low or medium score (below 6). 'Happiness' was the

'Bonding experience with others and good for the body, mind, soul, and your health.'

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

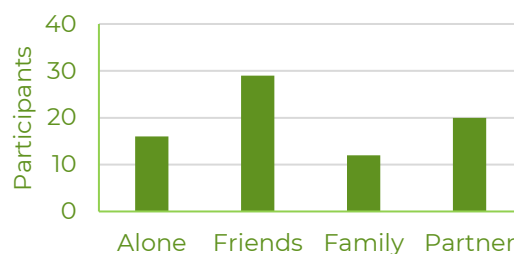
lowest scoring aspect of 'general health' among participants. Comparing this with 'event health', and asked 'overall, how happy do you feel right now?', no participants scored 'Happiness' as low and only 8 (10%) scored this as medium; there was a rise of 28% in the number of people scoring 'Happiness' as high or very high at the event. The second most changed aspect of 'general health' reported at the *Beautiful Noise* event was 'Life satisfaction', with 19 participants scoring this as low or medium (below 6) in response to the question 'overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?' In contrast, and when asked 'overall, how satisfied were you during your time at this event?', only 5 participants scored this as low or medium, with 18% more participants rating 'Life satisfaction' as high or very high at the event. In addition, there was 14% less participants reporting high or very high scores for 'Anxiety' at the event compared to the day before; that is in response to the questions 'On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?' and, 'overall, how anxious do you feel right now?'. There was also positive change in the number of people reporting lower scores for 'feeling the things done in life are Worthwhile', with 92% of participants reporting high or very high scores at the event (7-10, with 10 meaning 'completely'); that is in response to the question 'overall, to what extent do you feel that you spent your time today in a worthwhile way'.

Kent's Needs Analysis (2022) identifies 'Improving mental health support in the community' and 'Support in the community for the vulnerable, elderly and isolated' as two of five priority 'areas of need' for Canterbury. This document recognises how students 'wellbeing and mental health has worsened because of the pandemic', and Canterbury's ranking as second in the county for people 'isolated though long-term illness' and third highest in the county for 'elderly people who have reported loneliness'. Responses to the ONS questions as part of this evaluation point to how *Beautiful Noise* might contribute towards improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people across age groups in Canterbury and counter social isolation. It is also worth acknowledging that improved 'health' reported at *Beautiful Noise* is not just an indicator of the impact of the event day itself but highlights the value of community performance opportunities as longer-term goal that local music groups can work towards, giving purpose to groups meeting regularly in the lead up to the event. Data collected from *Beautiful Noise*, therefore, lends support to existing evidence around how 'festival volunteers derive personal benefits, including sense of connection and reciprocity, and access to resources with potential health and wellbeing benefits', and this being 'beneficial to the public health agenda of community development, reducing isolation and supporting healthy ageing' (Coren et al., 2021).

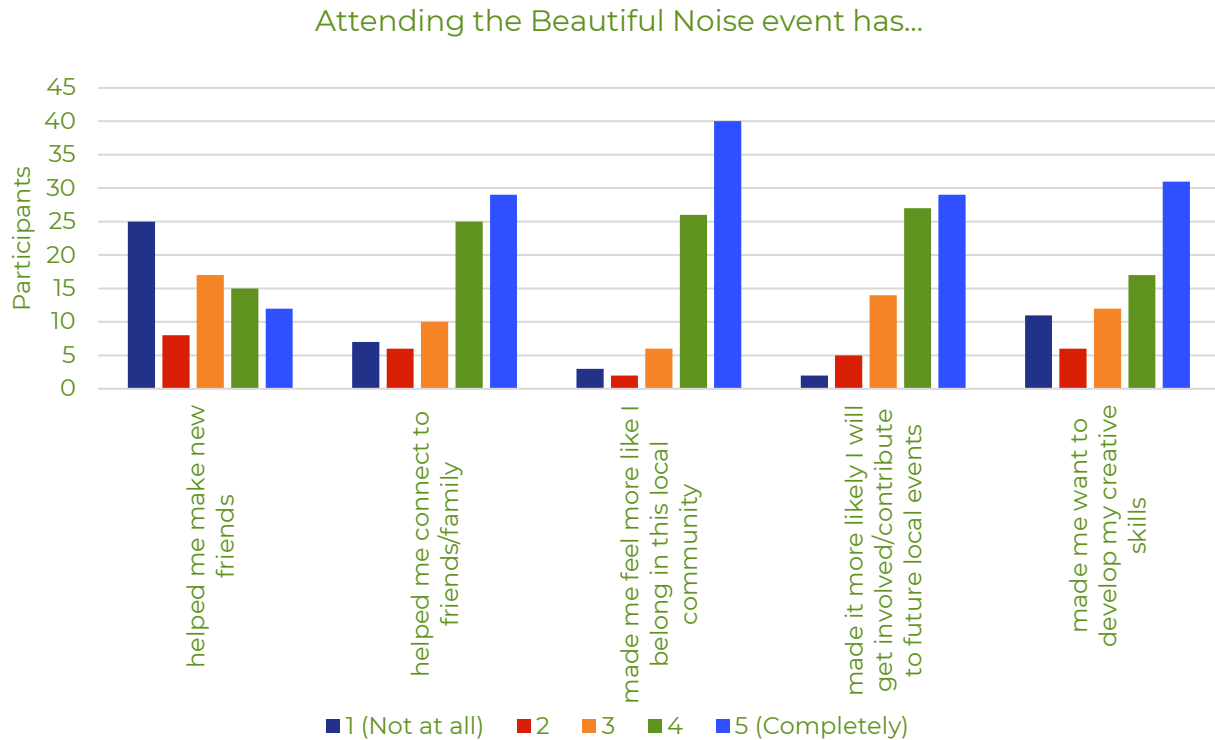
3. Place-Making and Community Connection

In response to the question 'who have you come to the festival with today?', 21% (16 out of 77) evaluation participants selected 'I came by myself'. 38% attended 'with friends' and 42% attended 'with family' or 'with partner'. In terms of how *Beautiful Noise* supports individual's interpersonal connection, 70% of participants rated the statement 'Attending the *Beautiful Noise* event and the festival has helped me connect to friends and family' at 4 or 5 (completely agree). In contrast, when responding to the statement 'attending the *Beautiful Noise* event has helped me to make new friends' only 27 (35%) scored this at 4 or 5; the largest group, 25 out of 77 participants, disagreed with this statement, rating it at 1 ('not at all'). An explanation for this could be that most people taking part in the event attended with existing friends, family, or familiar performance groups. However, it is worth noting that half of those rating this statement at 1 attended the event alone.

Who have you come to the Festival with today?



Existing literature acknowledges how festivals play an important role in building community connection. For example, Black (2016) notes how ‘small-scale’ community events, ‘stimulate both bridged and bonded connections with place, [...] connections are made or reinforced through the holding of festivals between people, their culture and cultural heritage and with place’. Studies show how ‘community involvement, including support for a festival, is an important factor in predicting the strength of a person’s attachment to a community or place’, and, in turn, ‘sense of community [...] affects the community’s well-being’ (Derrett, 2003). *Beautiful Noise* evaluation participants were also asked ‘on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all” and 5 means “completely”, to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements in the following chart:



66 out of 77 participants rated the statement ‘Attending the *Beautiful Noise* event made me feel more like I belong in this local community’ as 4 or 5 (5 meaning ‘completely’ agree) on the scale, which represents 86% of participants. 29 out of 32 of those who rated this statement at 5 (‘completely’ agree) live in Canterbury. Regarding active engagement in future Canterbury Festival events, 73% of participants also rated the statement ‘Attending the *Beautiful Noise* event has made it more likely I will get involved/contribute to future local events’ at 4 or 5. This lends support to existing studies that have found that free festival music events are a valuable route to place-making, building community connection and a desire to contribute to community activities among local people. This data also suggests it may be valuable for *Beautiful Noise* organisers to further consider how the event might

‘Performing together makes me feel like I am worthwhile and belong. Music is magical.’

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

better assist those taking part to develop new relationships across performance groups and build improved community connections.

4. Accessibility and Inclusion

16% of participants in the *Beautiful Noise* evaluation self-defined as 'disabled' or having an 'impairment or long-term health condition'. This closely aligns with the 17.6% of Kent's population that declare 'an illness or condition which limits their day-to-day activities in some way' (KCC, 2023). If considering how successful the *Beautiful Noise* event is in engaging disabled people in performance, 16% is well above Arts Council England's latest diversity figures, which report only 7% of people working in the arts declare disability, including onstage performers, against a working age population of 23% (ACE, 2021). In this way, accessibility for performers who identify as disabled people may be considered a strength of this community music event. Accessibility for disabled people is also important to build on for future Canterbury Festival events; 'Kent has an aging population. Forecasts show that the number of 65+ year-olds is forecast to increase by 44.9% between 2019 and 2039' (KCC, 2023). Kent has a greater proportion of people aged 45+ years than the England average; just over a fifth of its population is aged 65 and over (20.3%), as such, disability is more prominent (KCC, 2023).



Travel was highly rated as a factor that participants selected 'would encourage you to attend more [Canterbury Festival] events' or 'would stop you coming to events like this'. 'If it was easier to travel to/from events from where I live' was

cited 38 times as one of the top 3 things that would encourage people to come to more events. 'If it was more difficult to travel to the festival' was most frequently cited, 46 times, as a factor that would stop participants 'coming to events like this', which may also be an indicator of accessibility.

Participants in the *Beautiful Noise* event spanned across age groups. 28 out of 77 (36%) of participants in the evaluation were between 18 and 44 years old. Most participants, 47 of 77 (61%), were aged 45+. 24 of these were aged 65+ (31% of the participant group), as such, performers aged 65+ could be considered overrepresented compared with the general county-wide population. It may, therefore, be valuable to review ways to engage more volunteer performers aged 18-44 in future *Beautiful Noise* performances. It should also be noted that 66% of participants reported their 'highest level of education' as being at least 'undergraduate degree' level. This is perhaps unsurprising in a city with three universities. However, when compared with the general population in Kent, with only 36% of people aged 16-64 are qualified over NVQ level 4/5, which also opens possibility to include a wider demographic of participants from across the county in *Beautiful Noise* events in the future.

99% of participants who chose to declare ethnicity as part of this evaluation self-defined as 'White British'. This aligns with the largest ethnic group in Kent, with 93.7% of all residents being of white

'Participating in the event today was incredibly rewarding and fulfilling.'

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

ethnic origin (KCC, 2023). It is noted that 7 out of 77 evaluation participants (9%) chose not to declare ethnicity, however with 6.6% of Kent's residents 'being of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) origin', there is scope for Canterbury Festival organisers to consider further ways to increase the representation of ethnic minority communities in future onstage performances (KCC, 2023). Although this data suggests *Beautiful Noise* is effective in engaging diverse sectors of the community, theatre critic Lyn Gardner's observation of festivals' commitment to inclusivity coming out of the pandemic may be relevant in future planning. She recognises how 'festivals often operate in a way that necessitates frantic activity squeezed into a short time frame' but how 'slowness' and 'more thoughtfulness' can improve inclusivity; that this 'allows you to really get to know people, to embed within communities', 'not for a single project but over many years' (Gardner, 2021). This notion that thoughtful planning supports festival inclusivity is reiterated by Dawson (2020) who acknowledges 'While money is limited, care and thought does not have to be. Organisers need to listen and act [...] Event attendees can also take action by looking around at who is present at events and thinking of all of the people (with disabilities, single mothers, people in poverty, people of colour and so on) who are not present and who have not been included.'

Commenting on Beautiful Noise.

A free text box in the evaluation questionnaire enabled participants to 'share a sentence that describes your experience of participating in the *Beautiful Noise* event at Canterbury Festival'. Participants could express their views in their own words and in as much detail as they wanted. Opinions on the event were largely positive. In this visual representation of terms chosen by participants more frequently used terms are the largest. The most frequently appearing and stemmed words in their comments were, 'enjoyed', 'perform', 'good', 'people', 'music', 'sing', 'fun', 'happy', and 6 out of 77 participants chose to describe their experience of the event using the term 'uplifting'.



Themes of enjoyment of the event and community were most prominent, with participants remarking on 'a thoroughly enjoyable varied programme of events', and 'enjoyable and comfortable surroundings'. One participant explained taking part in *Beautiful Noise* 'makes me feel a part of my community', and another noted the event is 'a good way to get out in the community'. Themes of enjoyment and community are also apparent in comments such as, 'singing together gives a sense of togetherness, joy, and sense of

'Really nice to sing with people, a powerful creative outlet, nice to have a place to do that.'

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

wellbeing’, ‘I love the chance to perform and being around others’, and the remark, ‘I feel less alone performing’. Comments such as this further support the view that free music events and the performance opportunity created through *Beautiful Noise* are important in building community connection and powerful in countering social isolation.

Prevalent themes identified in participants’ comments clearly support the notion of *Beautiful Noise* having a positive impact on their personal health and wellbeing. They refer to taking part as being ‘good for the body, mind, soul and your health’, other performers describe how the event ‘changes the way I feel, changes hormones’ and is ‘uplifting and gave me a sense of relaxation’. The prevalence of the term ‘uplifting’ may indicate again the effectiveness of *Beautiful Noise* in promoting positive wellbeing and the value of this community music experience for individuals following the pandemic. Although most participants only expressed positive personal views and experiences of the *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration*, it is also worth highlighting what five participants viewed as improvements needed. All five refer to aspects of publicity and visibility of the event. They comment on improving future advertising, noting the ‘location could be improved, it’s a bit tucked away’, the event ‘needs better advertising’; one participant explained, ‘I’m disappointed with the number of people that came. I think more people would attend if they knew about it’. Reviewing strategies for publicity and advertising is perhaps an additional way to increase the reach of this event in the future and to ensure a broad range of communities continue to benefit and take part in performances.

Conclusion.

This was a limited evaluation project in terms of time, context and numbers involved, therefore, no generalisations can be drawn from the findings. However, there are clearly a variety of benefits resulting from the *Beautiful Noise Community Music Celebration*, benefits that were not limited to individuals, nor to the immediate temporal context of a one-off event. The observations made are supported largely by existing literature in the field which serves to enhance the validity of the findings. The event is strongly attended by local people and attracts new audiences and local performers; the fact that the festival event is free is important in this and offers potential to gain further funding to extend its benefits for individuals and communities. This small-scale evaluation has pointed to how the event might contribute towards improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people across age groups and counter social isolation; it gives purpose to groups meeting regularly and has potential to support individuals in building new relationships and community connections. Accessibility for performers identifying as disabled people appears a strength of this event, alongside its effective engagement with people across age groups. There is exciting scope for expanding this free Canterbury Festival community event through improved publicity and thoughtful planning; to include a wider demographic of participants across age groups and educational and ethnic backgrounds in creating *Beautiful Noise*.

‘It is a very good thing. It is really important for local people to know what music groups are available for them to join.’

(Beautiful Noise Participant)

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