

Safe Containers through Digital Inclusion

Introduction

This report details a project run in collaboration between Mhor Collective and Arts in Ramsgate (AIR), taking place between 2025-2026 in the district of Thanet, East Kent.

Two significant contextual factors have informed the delivery of this project and the direction in which work has pivoted:

1. The ongoing rise in hostility towards migrants in the UK
2. The limited operational capacity at AIR

Though not unanticipated, the reality of both factors has shifted significantly over the course of project delivery - posing multiple, often compounding, barriers to the work that was initially proposed.

Both factors can be seen to reflect the social and political climate of division, disadvantage and discontent that exists across the UK in 2026. Arguably this climate is felt most tangibly in an area like Thanet - where economic deprivation is widespread, refugees arrive on the shoreline (though not as frequently or in as high numbers as is often recounted on the streets or on social media) and third sector funding is scarce.

The following report documents how, in understanding and responding to such factors, a digital inclusion project aimed at direct support of refugees, culminated instead in the delivery of learning and support for a group of participants who were majority white and British-born. Through this report, we unpack this seemingly contradictory trajectory while detailing the valuable learning gained through responsive, relational approaches to partnership working and pedagogy.



Challenges to Working with Refugee Groups

In commencing the project, the aforementioned factors (the ongoing rise in hostility towards UK migrants and the limited operational capacity of AIR) were noted as posing significant and compounding risks to **safety** for those participating in and delivering this work. Below, the two factors are discussed within the context of safety - a shared priority of the partner organisations.

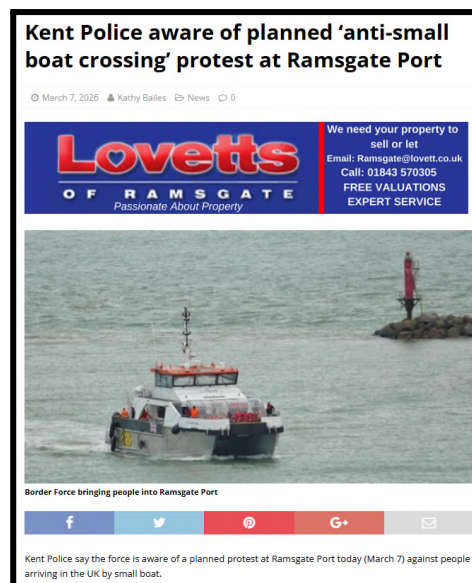
Ongoing rise in hostility towards migrants in the UK

As detailed in this project's Interim Report, the rise in support for Far-Right politics in the UK has seen increased targeting of and hostility towards people entering the country by way of forced migration. AIR staff have recounted how groups gather at Ramsgate Port (a short walk from AIR) to "document" small boat arrivals, local Facebook groups have become increasingly captured by anti-migrant sentiment, windows have been smashed across town and organisations supporting refugees have found their premises named and targeted online.

"On Facebook groups that I'm a part of, where I usually promote work that we do... I'd noticed a real uptick in things that people used to be ashamed to say." - AIR Staff

Kent Refugee Action Network, with whom the partner organisations have built connections, have spoken of their organisation's premises and social media accounts being named and doxed in the summer of 2025, amid a period of increased protest around and attacks on hotel accommodation housing refugees as well as the organisations supporting them. Other local organisations have spoken of needing to give up their premises altogether as a result of these threats and being forced to carefully consider how and with whom they publicise the work they are doing.

The following images demonstrate the scenes described and the language used in the calls for (and derision of) such protests.



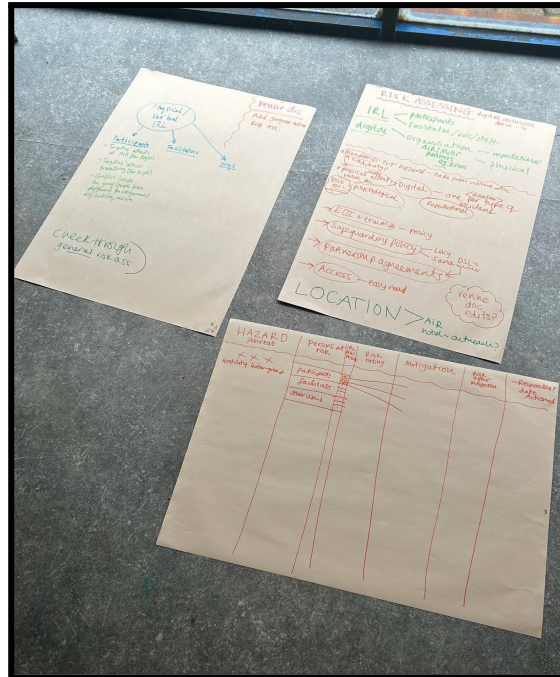
In considering the impact of this rise in anti-migration sentiment upon the safety of those involved in this work, four key parties were considered:

- **Participants** (refugees participating in this work)
 - Perhaps the most obvious party at risk in this work, these people are vulnerable to both **physical** and **psychological harms** perpetrated by those who oppose migration - a very real possibility given the local area's recent instances of hostile protest. It is important to note that those who have reached the UK as an asylum seeker often live with **significant levels of trauma** as a result of experiencing, among other things, separation from home and family, war, disaster and/or persecution. Ensuring a psychologically safe and welcoming space for folk like this is therefore extremely important and needs to be considered with the utmost care - drawing on the expertise of practitioners working with refugees and those with lived experience themselves.
 - It is also important to note that **other users of AIR** (below) have, throughout this work, expressed to practitioners opinions that include: mistrust of migrants as physical and economic threats, explicit disapproval of migrants living in the UK, racial slurs and misinformation relating to the actions of migrants in the local area (e.g. that they are mugging people on the street). In response to this, actions (detailed later in this report) were taken to challenge such opinions and work towards AIR becoming a safer space for migrants, refugees and racialised people.

- **Practitioners** (AIR, Mhor and freelance staff)
 - Hosting a support and learning programme aimed at improving the experience of refugees in Thanet comes with the risk of physical and psychological harms for those delivering this work. It is important to frame the following considerations within the experience of **burnout** mentioned in the following section:
 - Risk of violence and/or abuse from Far Right groups
 - Risk of doxing or targeting as people doing this work in their local area
 - Impact on capacity when navigating delivery alongside complex social issues and safety needs
 - Emotional impact of this work as practitioners are potentially exposed to trauma alongside having to navigate complex conversations with other users of the space

- **Organisations** (AIR, Mhor and partner organisations)
 - There are risks to the organisations engaging in this work in terms of their safety as threats of attack and abuse can take the form of:
 - Information being shared publicly about these groups by Far Right aggressors e.g. details of premises, activities, staff
 - Misinformation being shared publicly about these groups by Far Right aggressors e.g. false details of the work they are carrying out, how they are using funding, who they are working with
 - Physical venues targeted by attacks, protest and/or vandalism
 - Social media pages targeted with harmful or abusive messages or comments

- **Other users of AIR**
 - Prior to this work, AIR has a strong history of engaging with, supporting and empowering people in the local community. AIR's programme focuses on mental health and wellbeing and many of its community members are disabled people and/or those who have long term health conditions, experience poverty and have spoken openly about experiences of trauma. These complex and often compounding challenges make many of AIR's community members vulnerable to physical, social, digital and economic harms. The vulnerabilities of such a group therefore must be considered when thinking about how this new work might expose the space to increased risks.



Limited operational capacity at AIR

Throughout the project, the operational capacity of AIR has impacted delivery of the initially intended work. Capacity has been informed by:

- **Staff health challenges**

AIR operates with just one member of part-time staff who at present works many hours unpaid. Throughout the project, this staff member has experienced health challenges in addition to and as a result of the challenges involved in operating the space as a disabled and neurodivergent person. In late 2025 they took a period of immediate leave as a result of experiencing burnout. They note in their access document:

“Trauma, neurodivergence, chronic illness, disability and perimenopause can make people much more susceptible to burning out. To be able to thrive, we all must be allowed to create systems which fit us.”

Following this period of leave, the early weeks and months of 2026 involved the staff member making a phased return to operating the space, so as to not burn out again. They describe this process as like carefully placing items on the donkey in a game of Buckaroo so that their body and mind do not

suddenly become overloaded and refuse the strain they are under. As such, their presence in the space throughout the course of this work has been limited and their response times with regards to communication and completing tasks has sometimes been delayed.

- **Funding challenges**

AIR, like many third-sector organisations operates on a patch-work of funding awarded by different initiatives and funders. Early in the project, AIR was keen to hold off on initial outreach work with refugee-supporting organisations as they awaited decisions on the implementation of other funded work which would complement the work being undertaken with Mhor Collective. This is detailed in the project's Interim Report (December 2025):

“AIR is currently awaiting a decision on funding from Ramsgate Town Council to enable a project centering food and sharing of recipes and cookery skills as means of addressing food insecurity, health, nutrition and community empowerment. Ramsgate Town Council has recently pushed this decision back to early 2026. Should this funding bid be successful, Mhor staff would ideally collaborate on this work with AIR, exchanging and strengthening specialised approaches to creative food-based learning with digital inclusion.

Additionally, AIR is delivering funded work to widen participation and tackle loneliness in disadvantaged areas across England. AIR has linked staff working on this project with Mhor's project lead in order to collaborate on outreach work aimed at engaging refugees and asylum seekers in Thanet. These staff members have a breadth of experience in reaching and working with people from diverse and primarily disadvantaged backgrounds in the area. Additionally, both staff members are women of colour and have highlighted the need for their presence to be consistent across both the outreach and delivery stages of this work. This consistency is important as it is a means of building a sense of safety and connection for participants in the work. We know from Mhor's existing work in Glasgow, that people from backgrounds of forced migration are likely to have experience of historical and present trauma, and that a consistently supportive and safe holistic space, wherein familiar faces are present, is essential to enabling participation. It is also essential that practitioners present in these spaces represent a diversity of experience of racialisation i.e. this work cannot and should not be delivered by one white man.”

Due to the limitations on staff capacity as a result of health challenges and the nature of their role as only being partly funded, these plans for collaborative and complementary delivery were unable to be realised. As such, outreach to refugee-supporting organisations was delayed and thus questions arose around the safety and appropriateness of establishing a programme of direct support for refugees under such limited time and resource. Concerns included:

- A felt need that this work needed to be carefully risk assessed
- Delays to bringing in AIR's outreach workers (those working on tackling loneliness and disadvantage) - leaving the project to be delivered by a white person
- Subsequent delays to outreach work with other local organisations to develop learning around best-practice and ensuring safety for refugees and practitioners
- A sense that work supporting people with the trauma experienced through forced migration needed to take place in a safe container and that AIR was not currently that because of:
 - Reduced capacity of its staff member and resultant complexities of partnership working between AIR and Mhor
 - Racist and anti-migrant opinions being held and expressed by current users of the space etc.

It is worth noting that the aforementioned challenges relating to **health** and **funding** often impacted each other and at times formed a kind of vicious cycle: where-in the strain of funding challenges impacted health and wellbeing, which in turn impacted staff's ability to further secure and direct funding.

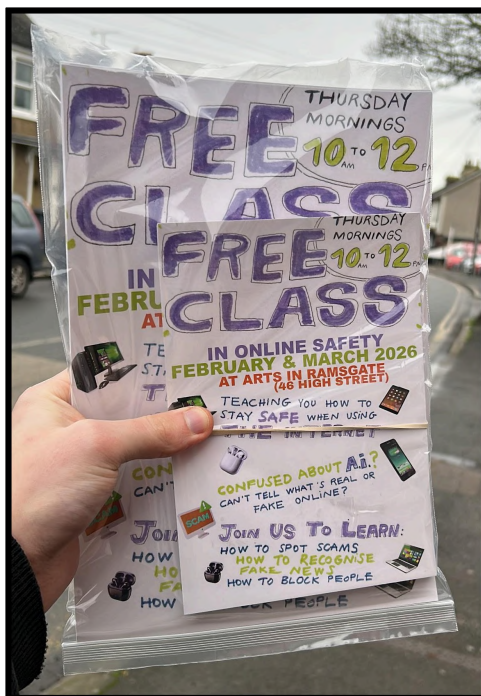
Learning and Successes:

In response to the aforementioned challenges, in early 2026 a decision was made to pivot the delivery of this project and focus efforts on several new outcomes. Underpinning these aims was an agreement to establish a more responsive, long-term strategy for improving the experience of refugees and asylum seekers locally. These aims were:

- To develop media literacy strategies for tackling anti-refugees and migrant sentiment present in local community members using AIR
- To better understand and assess the risks involved in delivering this work
- To support AIR to establish itself as a safe and appropriately resourced space in which to deliver work that supports refugees

The following section outlines key learning developed through this work.

Tackling Division through Media Literacy



As mentioned, a challenge of ensuring that AIR could be a safe environment for learning and support for refugees was the pervasiveness of racism and anti-migrant sentiment among existing users of the space. As a response to this, a body of work began which focused on understanding:

- How and why these views take shape and spread
- How they might be challenged

Through conversations with AIR users, during 'Tech-Support Drop-in' sessions, it was identified that a significant source of these opinions was misinformation disseminated through digital

media. Alongside this - users of the space expressed fear and mistrust of some online communications, citing romance and financial scams as well as fake news as points of concern in their lives.



A two month long 'Online Safety' course was established in response to these insights - aimed at exploring how digital inclusion support and media literacy learning might function to:

- Build trust between participants and practitioners
- Open conversations about safety and wellbeing online
- Develop learning around how the experience of refugees and migrants in the UK can be improved by interventions with perpetrators of hostility and abuse

This final point is directly informed by Mhor Collective's existing work in tackling **Violence Against Women and Girls**, wherein work is not singularly focused on encouraging women to make "safer decisions" (a practice that may be likened to 'victim blaming'). Rather this work takes the form of direct support of women and girls through digital support, media literacy learning and connection to devices **alongside** a separate but relational workstream that sees men and boys addressed as potential perpetrators of this violence. Mhor currently delivers this work through its **Incel and Online Misogyny Network** which seeks to connect practitioners working with young men and boys with one another; opening conversations around common challenges and successes and sharing resources amongst these groups.

In a similar way, Mhor and AIR have decided to approach violence and hostility against refugees and asylum seekers from a position that focuses on preventing such violence, rather than solely encouraging people of refugee experience to be more vigilant on the streets and online. Mhor approaches this work having faced push-back from previous funders around this approach, with concerns raised that this work might be an attempt to "change people's political opinions". Notably, these same concerns have never been expressed regarding similar approaches to violence prevention as it relates to women and girls. With this in mind, practitioners at Mhor and AIR, were keen to begin exploring the landscape of third-sector practice as it relates to:

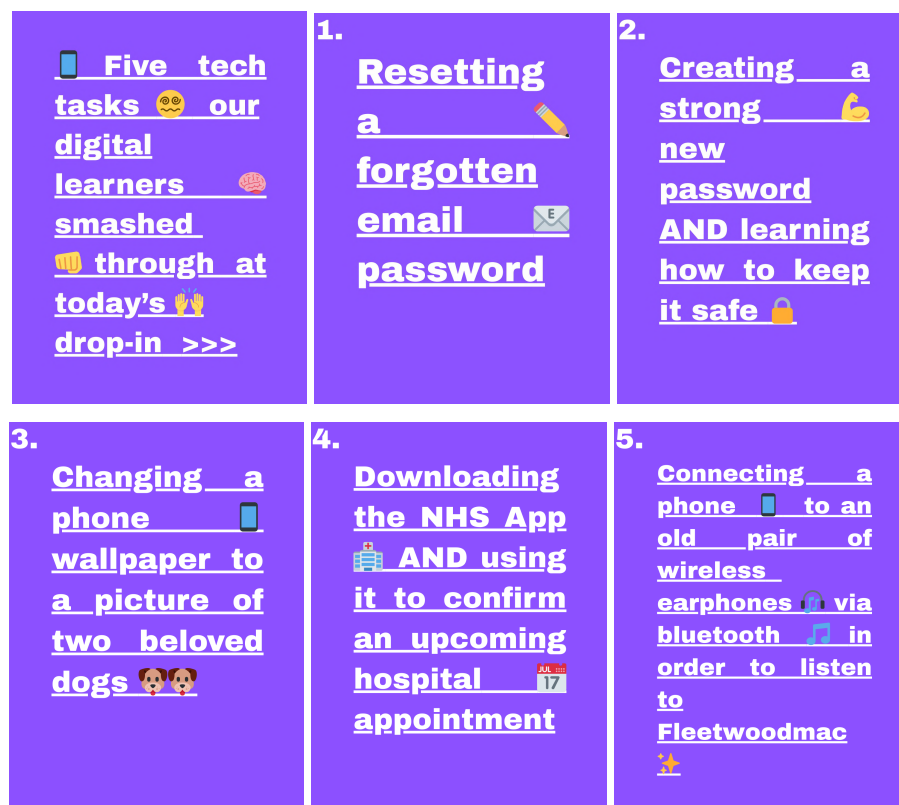
- Fear or hesitation around engaging with conversations that tackle racism
- Levels of structural and entrenched racism that politicise the experience of migrants and refugees, and protect notions and acts of hostility towards

these groups by framing them as acceptable “political opinions”- rather than human rights infringements

A case study detailing this work is linked [here](#). However key points of learning have been listed below:

- **Building trust through technical digital inclusion support:**

Offering free digital inclusion support through drop-in sessions allowed for relationships of understanding and trust to be developed between participants and practitioners. These ‘quick wins’ in the form of troubleshooting a technical issue or teaching someone how to navigate a device or online service proved to encourage participants to return to the space in the following weeks. They also naturally opened conversations and questions around topics of digital media and online safety.



- **Online safety as an entry point:**

Participants often came to sessions with questions around scamming, hacking and data security. The conversations that emerged from these questions gave way to deeper and more interconnected questions and conversations about current affairs and the complexities of the digital media

landscape. Topics ranged between: social media, Facebook, voter targeting, algorithms, fake news, echo-chambers, scapegoating, The Epstein Files, Murdoch Empire, media biases, the attention economy, Donald Trump, Prince Andrew...

- **Having conversations ‘off-screen’**

The sessions that emerged from this work largely took place away from screens and devices. Rather, they took the form of group conversations, over pastries, fruit, teas and coffees - where thoughts were illustrated on a whiteboard and devices only occasionally used to give an example of a scam text or a dodgy hyperlink.

- **Encouraging group conversations**

When screens were used, it was to encourage group conversations - such as participating together in an online quiz about identifying online scams. These kinds of interactive and participatory activities proved popular - prompting discussion, opinions and openness among the group.

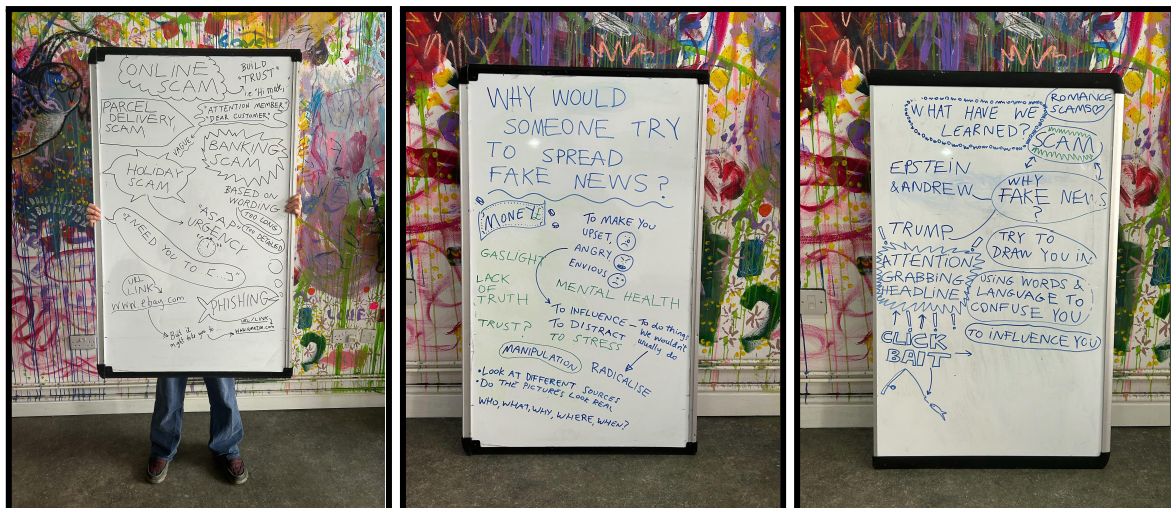
- **Parallels between incel culture/online misogyny and other forms of radicalisation:**

Conversations were had during the final session about ‘The Manosphere’ and the upsurge in online misogyny. Participants were unfamiliar with this phenomenon and interested in how, through algorithmic targeting, young men and boys are groomed by radicalising misogynistic content. The majority of participants in these sessions were women, two of whom had disclosed to facilitators their experiences of domestic violence. One in particular spoke of feeling bullied by her grandson, a young man who lived with her and engaged heavily in online gaming. These women expressed notable interest in the topic of online misogyny. Practitioners drew links between the methods and systems employed by tech companies and content creators to incite hatred and violence against women and girls and other identities such as migrants and refugees. In feedback interviews, a participant spoke clearly on gaining a better understanding of these systems of demonisation.

- **Empowerment through critical thinking:**

Within group sessions where discussions centred on identifying online harms such as scams and fake news, conversations were had about developing **critical thinking skills** as tools for making informed decisions about who or what to trust online. During these conversations we spoke of the need to feel **informed and empowered** online. Exercises included:

- Making lists of the pros and cons of the internet - to highlight the benefits of a digitally included life and shift thinking around the internet as being an exclusively dangerous or negative space
- Identifying known indicators of scams such as language that prompts urgency, sensationalises or seems “too good to be true”. These principles were then applied to examples of fake news or radicalising content - where similar language is often used to incite panic or mistrust of certain identities
- Thinking about offline social phenomena that confuse us or limit our capacity to recognise other people’s experiences, such as “echo chambers” or “scapegoating”
- Challenging notions of “stupidity” when they arose. Often people felt “stupid” for asking questions or, perhaps more commonly, described those who are victims of online harms as having been “stupid”. Frank conversations were had with participants to normalise the experience of online harm, of falling victim to scams or believing in fake news. These conversations helped to support participatory exchanges wherein building critical thinking skills as means of empowerment was prioritised over feelings of embarrassment or judgement



- **Group learning benefitting wellbeing and mental health:**

By the end of this block of sessions, participants expressed that they would like sessions to continue as they had had a positive impact on their wellbeing and mental health and supported them to feel less isolated.

- **Slow-paced, small scale responsive work achieving significant personal impact:**

This work developed slowly and at a small scale over a period of two months. The maximum number of participants present at a session was six (by the final session), with attendee numbers often averaging just three or four. The work was responsive to these small groups and to the individual participants who began to attend regularly over the course of weeks. Session plans were rarely developed, and if they were, they often deviated to accommodate the questions and interests of the attendees. This responsive approach to learning gave participants agency in shaping the sessions themselves and appeared to act as encouragement for them to come back and/or bring a friend, as they cited feeling included and at ease with confronting often complex and emotionally charged topics.

Outreach

Though outreach work was delayed by aforementioned challenges relating to safety and capacity, work in this area did begin in the final months of the project. Valuable relationships were built with practitioners and organisations also working to support refugees in Thanet and more broadly across Kent. Several notable insights were gained through this work:

People living in Hotel Accommodation

- At the time of writing, hotel accommodation in Kent serves men exclusively.
- A practitioner who works for Kent Refugee Action network spoke of, in her experience, the men she supports having reasonably high levels of digital literacy.
- A significant barrier that she spoke of these men facing was a lack of access to appropriate devices. This organisation had been in touch with various local and national organisations that distribute devices but was finding that supplies had more recently dried up. They spoke of people having to borrow devices from other people in order to log in to emails and online accounts to check the status of their asylum claims. Sharing of devices in order to process sensitive information and share or download sensitive documents poses significant safety risks.

“For example I have one young man who has had a broken phone for months

and so has to borrow friends phones to check if he has any emails from the home office for his interview. Obviously if he misses the email it is a big problem. I've exhausted all of my channels for support with laptops and phones at the moment- screen share, care for Calais and the Amal fund are all currently not able to help"

This experience of exclusionary system design is common across Mhor Collective's work in supporting people from various walks of life: essential services and systems - Universal Credit, social housing, school uniform applications, the Home Office's asylum system - are increasingly being digitised but failing to consider (or perhaps succeeding in ignoring) those who do not have access to devices or connectivity or the skills and confidence to use them.

- When speaking of appropriate device provision for refugees, it was learned that not all smart phones are compatible with the Home Office app - a means of navigating asylum claims. When it comes to IOS devices for example, iPhone 8 or higher is required to run this app.
- The UK Government is gradually closing hotel accommodation for asylum seekers in Kent, meaning that those currently living in these venues will experience further upheaval, uncertainty and disconnection from local spaces and community connections that they have made since arriving. Such instability prompts an increased need for digital access as means of maintaining connections and accessing information and services.

UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)

- KRAN supports separated young refugees and asylum seekers who are living in Kent
- Practitioners at KRAN have spoken of media literacy gaps as posing significant risks to the safety and wellbeing of young people. Grooming and exploitation of these young people is common, with county lines drug smuggling cited as a significant trafficking system in which young people often become lost and uncontactable by KRAN.
- Much of KRAN's work centres the empowerment of young people often through creative content creation and platforming of their voices. This area was also identified as a space in which media literacy gaps are present, such as:
 - The potential for online media to be a tool for empowerment, learning and personal development
 - The risks of having an online presence and the increased visibility that comes with this. Particular note was made of the climate of hostility

towards refugees in the UK and how such visibility online might leave them vulnerable to harm both on and offline

Mapping

Through research and relationship building, [a list of contact organisations](#) and local community allies has been created.

Additionally work has been started to build up a working [database of risk assessments and safeguarding documents](#) from local and national organisations that support migrants and refugees.

Further learning around tackling division

Links made with Samphire highlighted the success of other work happening locally to tackle anti-migrant feelings. The work done by a practitioner at this organisation, centres his own lived experience of forced migration and the UK asylum system. This practitioner spoke of the success he had experienced in challenging these views by engaging in frank and direct in-person conversations about his experiences with people who may otherwise hold negative or hostile feelings about him on the basis of his identity.

Device provision for KRAN community members

Towards the end of the project, the relationship built with KRAN presented an opportunity to support a group of young men living locally by assigning a portion of this project budget to the purchases of devices for them. KRAN staff said:

“Mhor Collective have generously provided the funds for us to purchase laptops for young asylum seekers living in Margate, South East Kent. Asylum seekers receive about £9 a week and are not eligible for Digital Inclusion projects (because they need to have residency), and other schemes are now closed. They need these devices as they are either over 19 and not eligible for any education, or under 19 and have limited access to English classes. People want to study online and often have inadequate phones to study on and are limited by what they can do on library computers. They also need these devices as the Home Office and lawyers communicate via email. It can be very difficult to do this on phones, especially if they need translation tools. Some people's phones are broken and they have to borrow friends' to see communication like this. In addition, the devices Mhor Collective have helped us provide are vital as they are the connection people have to family and friends back home, often in precarious situations at war. A laptop can really

*open someone's world to learning, to managing their asylum claim effectively,
and to stay in contact with the people they care about."*

Disability, Partnership Working and Short-Term Funding

The partnership between Mhor Collective and AIR was not without its challenges. The original project design had not anticipated the extent to which AIR's capacity would be impacted by health, nor the degree to which the local context would shift. AIR staff reflected honestly on what they would do differently:

"I think if I were to do this project again, I would start the project very differently. I would have a much more in-depth conversation and create those safe containers much more intentionally... We didn't have a really detailed conversation when we set out about access, and about what it might mean and what we might need."

They spoke of the challenges of communicating fluctuating disability within project structures that often assumed steady productivity:

"The short-term funded nature of the way that we work - the fact that we have to hop from stepping stone to stepping stone of pots of money, is the biggest barrier. We can't plan, we can't pace, we can't be flexible. And there's also the constant stress of wondering whether you'll get to the next stepping stone—and everything that that means for the community that we support."

Additionally, they spoke of internalised ableism and how this impacted the decisions they made during the project:

"I don't think the conversation about ableism is as mainstream as some of the other intersecting injustices involved in our work. And I think the internalised ableism in myself has prevented me from putting certain mitigations and supports in place."

They also spoke positively about what the partnership had made possible:

"I have felt very able to speak my mind and be honest. And I think the only way that we can create structural change around these things is to be honest and critically reflect. I feel that we've done that all the way through... You [Mhor Staff] have been a sounding board for me. You have a certain kind of political understanding that other peers in Ramsgate don't have."

The pivot itself - responding to the needs of the participants actually in the room rather than insisting on the original plan - was, in AIR's view, a significant breakthrough in terms of approaching these specific challenges with sustainability and responsiveness in mind:

"I believe that we should be able to have some flexibility and be able to respond to the true needs of the people who are in front of us... I think what you did has been so hugely influential on the atmosphere in different sessions. It's much easier for me to have conversations when things come up now."

In addition to this relational working, the work of Mhor staff has been able to leave AIR with some more tangible resources should partnership not continue:

- Through a partnership with Jangala, AIR has a free community WiFi box that will provide connectivity to staff, volunteers and users of the space until at least August 2026. AIR staff reported that up to 200 weekly users of the space stand to benefit from this service.
- To mitigate the risks of lone-working and as a solution to the limited capacity of AIR staff to be present regularly in the space, a freelance artist and community worker was commissioned to assist at the weekly digital inclusion sessions at AIR. Mhor staff delivered on-the-job digital inclusion training to this local artist - through shadowing and inviting collaboration on delivery during sessions, as well as time spent debriefing on successes, challenges and useful resources. AIR have expressed that they are keen to continue commissioning this artist to deliver digital inclusion sessions in future, should funding to pay them become available.



Suggested next steps:

It is important to note, when considering future steps to develop this exploratory work, the ever increasing popularity of Far-Right viewpoints in Kent and across the UK. Work to improve the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK are therefore evermore necessary as they and the organisations that support them face mounting attacks from political aggressors and members of the public. At a community consultation held by KRAN in April 2026, immediate threats were reported by local organisations as including:

- The May 2026 elections which, dependent on results may incite further local division and unrest
- The approaching summer period, in which there is generally an increase in small boat crossings to the UK as well as periods of protest, rioting and public unrest
- The closure of hotel accommodation in Kent which will cause uncertainty and upheaval in the lives of many asylum seekers

Reflecting upon these issues, AIR Staff captured both the difficulty and the possibility of this work:

"These years coming are going to be tough. So I'd really love to be able to learn from this together and figure out how we plough on."

Suggested future work

Future work to develop these learning and successes of this exploratory project centre the impact of **media literacy learning** in improving the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Two points of delivery would be considered in such work:

- Continued work to establish media literacy work that focuses on wellbeing and safety from online harms, while embedding anti-racist approaches and focusing on solidarity among oppressed minorities, women and those experiencing poverty. This work will be strengthened by links established with Samphire, KRAN and other community allies.
- Work delivered in partnership with KRAN to support young people seeking asylum with media literacy and critical thinking. This work would centre on KRAN existing approach to empowerment through content creation

alongside learning around identifying online harms specific to their circumstances.