



# Mental Fight Club

'Our Business is to Create'

## A Report to The Beer-Harris Memorial Trust

May – October 2025

**Brief History:** Mental Fight Club (MFC) is a charity founded and led by people with experience of mental ill-health. It bubbled up into existence in 2003, an impromptu arts collective coming together to hold performance events in celebration of contemporary poetry's power to evoke joy where there once only was mental crisis. In 2012, we launched our first project, The Dragon Café. We became a registered charity in 2014.

**MFC's charitable objective** is "the promotion of social inclusion amongst people who are excluded from society or parts thereof as a result of mental ill-health through the provision of creative events which allow for the exploration of mental illness, recovery and wellbeing for all." It exists to offer, through its programme of creative activities, the chance for attendees to learn critical tools. These are the foundations that help beneficiaries develop their own strategies to prevent the onset of serious mental illness, support early recovery, and maintain that recovery long term.

**Details of the project supported:** Since 2012, we have been gathering every week at our flagship programme, the Dragon Cafe. This happens on Mondays from midday to 7pm and has offered varied co-creative activities that our beneficiaries shape alongside our artist leaders:

- Writing and poetry
- singing and song writing
- art
- animation
- banner and kite making
- drama and theatre

We have collaborated with:

- Southwark Playhouse
- Street Wise Opera
- Waterloo Festival
- Big Song Share
- Bloomsbury Festival

**Profile of recipients:** Everyone is welcome at the Dragon Cafe. We do not ask the intrusive questions about diagnoses that our beneficiaries have suffered elsewhere, which is how we deliberately reduce stigma and allow for self-determination and dignity.

Our beneficiaries are aged from 18 to over 80 (with a majority aged 45-64) and almost a third identify as coming from a BAME background. They come from all walks of life and have experience of many different types of mental distress including depression, psychosis, hearing voices or

obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Their symptoms range from very acute to mild. We help people who refuse medical help as well as those who are long-term users of NHS services. Some experience Severe and Enduring Mental Illness. Three quarters classify themselves as disabled, meaning they are unable to work, are on benefits and their day-to-day life is affected adversely. One in twenty told us that they are non-binary or trans. They come from every single London borough, but most live in Southwark where we are based.

**Impact of the project:** Our aims for impact throughout the project for the community is:-  
o to decrease loneliness and isolation  
o increase confidence  
o improve attendees mental ill health

Since the beginning of May 2025, we have reached 506 people with experience of mental ill health and there have been over 2,800 creative interactions. Our participants tell us the impact which reflect the three main aims:

*“My mental health has benefitted so much.”*

*“I feel brave and more confident.”*

*“It makes me feel excited, elated and also helps bring the best in me.”*

## Case Studies

### Case Study 3: Female 36 Years

S is unemployed. S decided to come to Acting Up activities at the Dragon Café because she had liked doing drama in the past and this was a free opportunity. She was hoping to make new friends, develop her confidence and become more creative.

S told us that Acting Up has made a difference in other areas of her life: *“It has given me a bit more confidence. It’s helped my self-esteem. I have gotten to know new people and it has helped with my social anxiety”*. S said it has helped her develop *“social skills and confidence in performing, but also in myself”*.

## Achievements

### The Dragon Café Singers

This has been exciting year for The Dragon Café Singing Group, characterized by a vibrant series of public performances that have resonated across numerous distinguished venues including Southwark Council and Conway Hall.

After the Dragon Café proudly completed work on the third song in the ambitious trio exploring the themes of Past, Present, and Future – Vivien Ellis Singing Lead organised a visit to a professional recording studio. A particularly illuminating and enriching experience for the participants was an exclusive glimpse into the intricate world of music recording. This immersive experience provided invaluable insights into the technical artistry behind sound production, culminating in the creation of a tangible recording of beloved Dragon Café songs spanning across the years.

This then led to these compiled recordings proudly released as the album of 12 songs “In This Circle Is My Heart - Songs from The Dragon Café” and these are on are on YouTube and Spotify. From the music, words, album cover all was co-produced by our beneficiaries.

- o [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4aP\\_Ry7VIRMPbNGX3pGw7A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4aP_Ry7VIRMPbNGX3pGw7A)
- o <https://open.spotify.com/album/2PpYaPqyt28VtUuiaDgWHK?si=n0J-03W4ScONXAS2JGu4jQ>

We want to thank Beer Harris for their contribution to The Dragon Café.