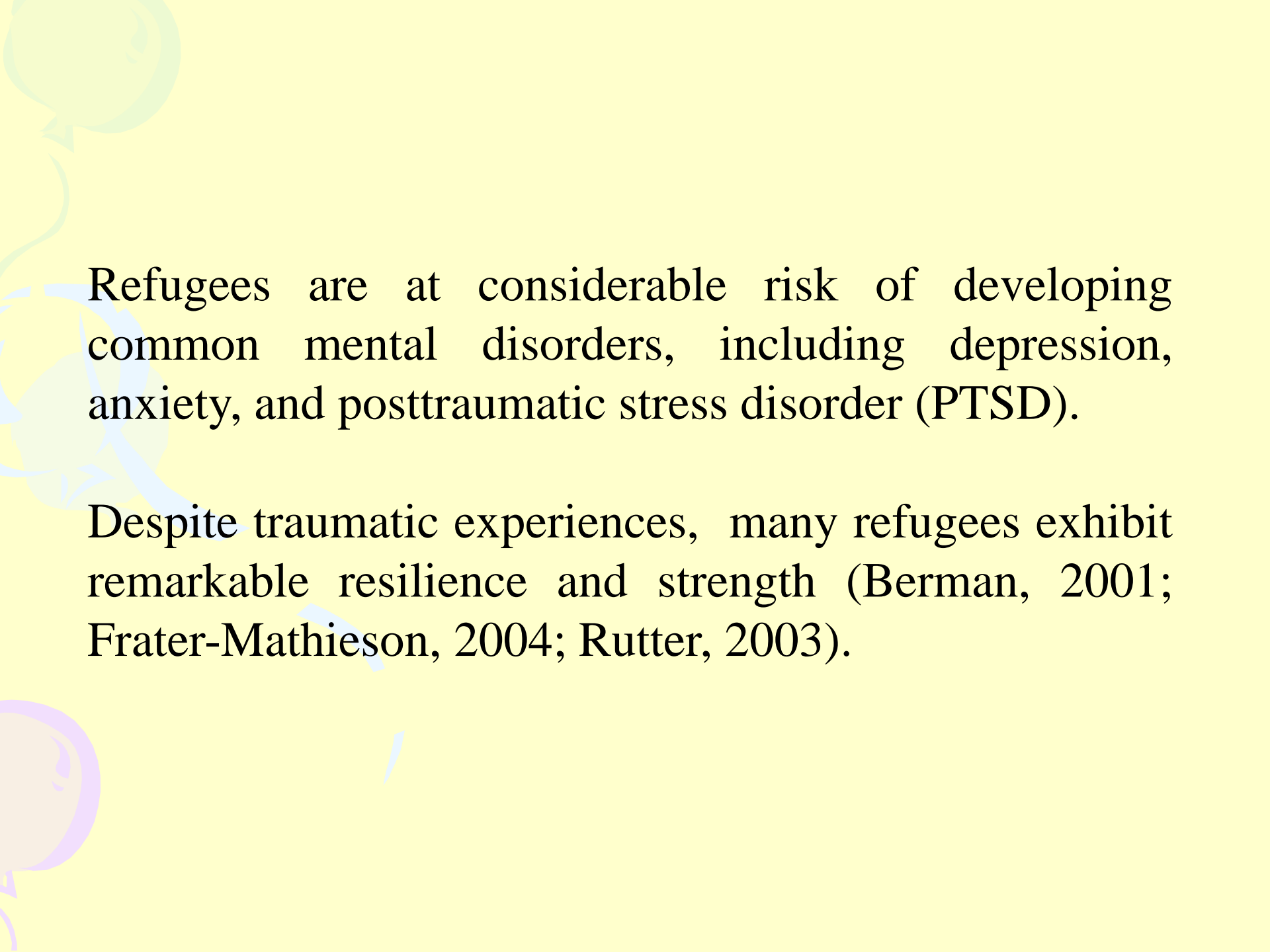
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Psychological support to refugee students: the role of various actors

Prof. Ankica Kosic



Refugees are at considerable risk of developing common mental disorders, including depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Despite traumatic experiences, many refugees exhibit remarkable resilience and strength (Berman, 2001; Frater-Mathieson, 2004; Rutter, 2003).

Resilience is the ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological functioning despite the experience of threatening events (Bonanno, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2007).

Usually, resilience depends on the interaction between individual, family, social, cultural, political and contextual factors (Punamaki, 1989; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, & Othman, 2008) before and after traumatic experiences (Schaffer, 2000).

Personal qualities: Internal resources were identified in the literature as a major contribution to refugee resilience (optimism, perseverance, a belief in one's own inner strength, having hope for a good future, etc.). Many refugee students bring unique skills, strengths, and knowledge with themselves.

External forms of support are also prominent in the construction of resilience. A number of studies emphasised the importance of family (including extended family), friends, and community.

Religion and spirituality are strongly identified as another major factor contributing to refugee people's resilience. Several studies have shown that religion in its various forms is linked to enhancing a person's psychological and physical wellbeing (Green & Elliot, 2010).

How to support the resilience?

It is important to to identify refugee students who are at high risk.

Specialized mental health services that may involve a wide range of treatments, such as:

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT),
- Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET),
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and
- individual-based multimodal interventions for PTSD.

Barriers to accessing mental health care are complex and multiple, involving legal, economic, religious, cultural factors...

Task-shifting intervention in mental health care

Task-shifting means that a task that is originally performed by a highly-qualified specialist is transferred to a less specialized worker with fewer qualifications.

European guidelines recommend stepped-care and collaborative care models as cost-effective alternatives to conventional care for common mental health symptoms in adults (Clark, 2011).

A preventive psychosocial task-shifting intervention is currently delivered by peer-refugees in Dutch asylum centers (Kieft, Jordans, de Jong, & Kamperman, 2008).

E-mental health interventions

E-mental health interventions may reach clients that would otherwise not have access to mental health treatment due to internal (e.g. fear of stigmatization) or external (e.g. infrastructure) barriers.

Additional advantages are the relative brevity of e-mental health interventions and the possibility to automatize parts of the treatment.

[Ssyla Digital Therapy Platform](#) connects migrants and refugees with a network of therapists to address specific mental and psychosocial health needs.

E-mental health interventions are usually based on CBT and they have been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of common mental disorders such as PTSD (Kuester, Niemeyer, & Knaevelsrud, 2016; Sijbrandij, Kunovski, & Cuijpers, 2016), depression (Andrews, Cuijpers, Craske, McEvoy, & Titov, 2010), phobia (Andrews et al., 2010).

Potential challenges of delivering e-mental health interventions may include lack of trust in the political neutrality of a website or app and concerns about data storage, the costs of internet or mobile use.

Scaling up with the multi-component PM+ and related programmes

WHO is developing a range of scalable psychological interventions for use in settings affected by adversity. One of these, called Problem Management Plus (PM+), which is available as an individual version (Individual PM+) evaluated in Pakistan (Rahman et al., 2016) and Kenya (Bryant et al., 2017) and as a group version (Group PM+) evaluated in Pakistan (Chiumento et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2017).

Scaling up with the multi-component PM+ and related programmes

They may be delivered by non-professional helpers in community or primary care settings or by lay people such as peer-refugees after approximately 10 days of training followed by weekly group supervision by a trained clinician.

Clients are taught four strategies:

- stress management (slow breathing exercises);
- problem solving (proactive management of practical difficulties through a series of sequential steps including selection of problems, brainstorming for solutions...);
- behavioural activation (re-engaging with pleasant and task-oriented activities)

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Innovative initiatives within Universities

The University of Göttingen

- the establishment of an advisory service for studying refugees
- the formation of a guest student programme
- language courses and programmes for refugees interested in studying.

The University of Göttingen

Service-Learning-programmes are being developed for students who want to practice their theoretical knowledge by supporting refugees.

Existing measures include students supporting language acquisition of refugees, the establishment of a Refugee Law Clinic for legal advice, as well as numerous, student managed activities for integration (ConquerBabel, ConnAction).

<http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/refugees-welcome/540426.html>

The University of Eastern Finland

- a survey charting our students' and staff members' interest in volunteering;
- the representatives of local third sector actors working with asylum seekers gave the volunteers an idea of the kind of help that is needed.
- expertise that is related to the university's fields of study, for example languages, health sciences and social sciences.

The University of Eastern Finland is currently also running the **Learning Spaces project**, which seeks to develop new kinds of self-motivated learning activities for asylum seekers, and which is carried out by the School of Educational Sciences and Psychology. Students will, under supervision, develop new kinds of self-motivated learning activities to avoid a situation where asylum seekers stay isolated.

The University of Oslo

- organising an information day for refugees and asylum seekers with an academic background, set up as a regular university conference.

- launched a call for an “Academic Dugnad” at the University of Oslo (i.e. an extraordinary joint effort) in order to facilitate the continuation of studies for refugees coming to Norway.

Several measures have been implemented, from lecture series to reviews of regulations.

<http://www.uio.no/academic-dugnad>

The University of Siegen

The initiative "Refugees Help Refugees" of the University of Siegen: The project for the integration of refugee students has been awarded in Berlin by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

- They help in orientation at the university, in the search for accommodation as well as in study preparation.

OSNABRUECK UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

The initiative for refugees consists of three offers:

1) Guest auditor program: refugees who have already applied for asylum, can take courses of up to 10 ECTS per semester for free.

2) Campus without Borders where students can volunteer to be buddies or tutors to the refugees who participate in guest auditor program. Thus, one student tutors one refugees and helps him or her through the "labyrinth" that a university can sometimes be.

3) Tandem Project: Social Work with Refugees:

This project also aims at the guest auditors.

Students of Social Work can participate in the project.

They receive training to be prepared to dealing with refugees (e.g. trauma awareness, systemic counseling, legal aspects, local networks, etc.) and support them throughout their semester.

Mentoring for refugee students

The Multicultural Youth Mentoring Project

provides culturally and linguistically diverse youth to develop leadership and advocacy skills. Adult mentors, recruited from a range of professional, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, are matched with young people, and they work together to achieve a set of goals that a refugee has identified as important in his or her life.

<http://www.cmy.net.au/>

SPIRASI (Spiritans Asylum Services Initiative) is a humanitarian non-governmental organization that works with survivors of torture, asylum seekers, refugees, and other disadvantaged migrant groups in Ireland to foster self-reliance and integration.

The Health Information and Promotion program is dedicated to providing health information to asylum seekers through a peer-led approach, using group sessions and individualized discussions. The aim of the program is to equip asylum seekers with the skills and information to be able to seek appropriate health and welfare services.

Promoting resilience through culture and arts

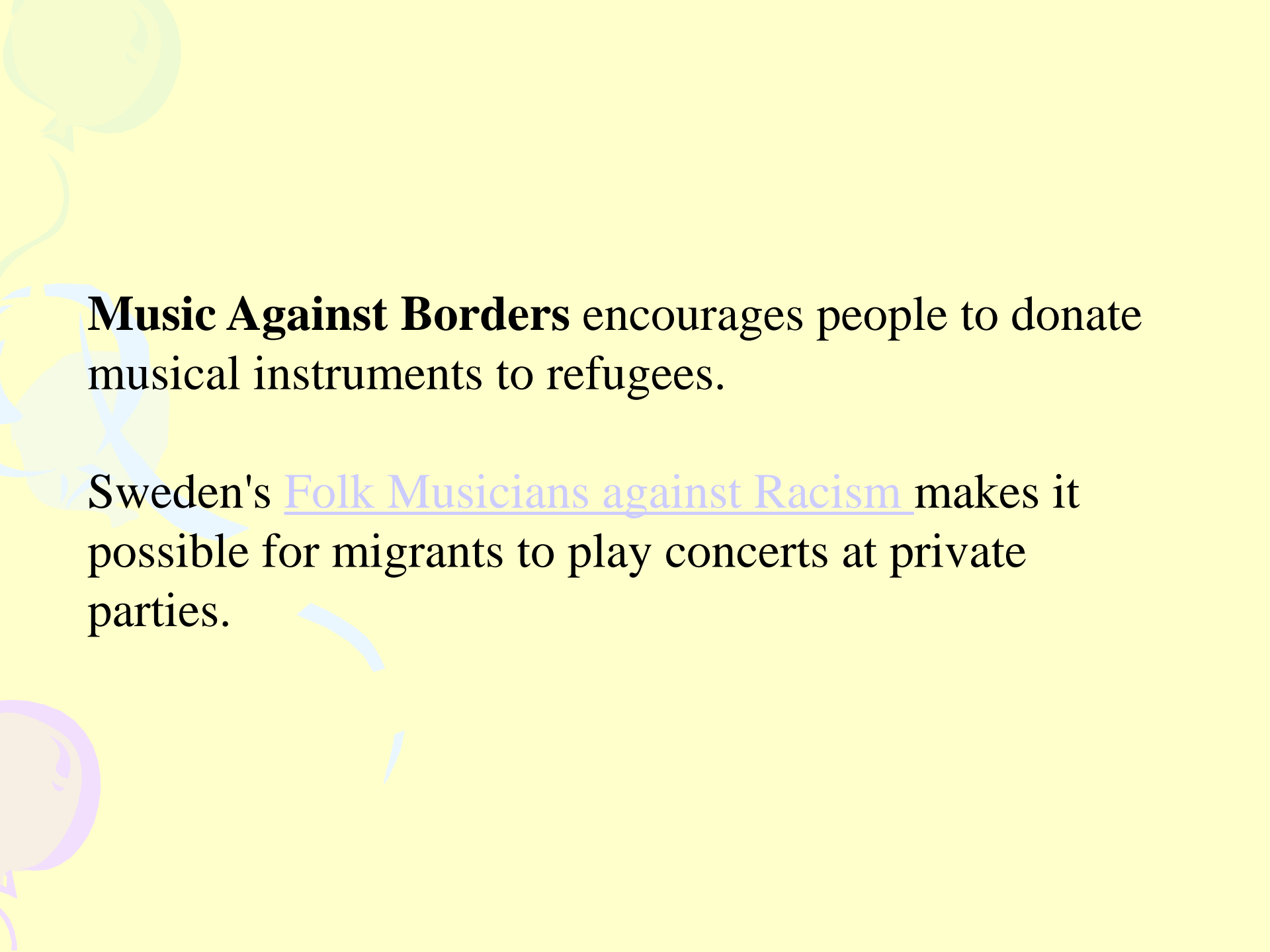
It is a powerful means of promoting openness to others, sharing emotions and happiness.

Artistic expression can be an important tool in therapeutic settings since it promotes self-esteem, facilitates the expression of emotions as well as the processing of traumatic experiences. Creative and artistic tools in therapies offer the means for refugees to explore, express and reconstruct their emotions and experiences related to conflict, violence and exile.

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Music Against Borders encourages people to donate musical instruments to refugees.

Sweden's [Folk Musicians against Racism](#) makes it possible for migrants to play concerts at private parties.

Telling Stories through Theatre Performances

Theater and performance arts appeal to wide audiences and are powerful storytelling tools. Theater group audiences can be larger and more diverse than traditional campaigning organizations, potentially reaching members of the public who might be unaware or apathetic to refugee and asylum issues.

Iceandfire is a theatre company that explores human rights stories through performance across four work strands: production, outreach, education and participation. **Asylum Dialogues**, one of the performances, tells stories that show acts of solidarity between British people towards asylum seekers. A poll indicated that the performances encouraged audience members to become more actively involved in asylum and refugee issues.

Making Museums A Hub For Integration

Museums have an important role to play in connecting communities and showcasing stories.

In celebration of Refugee Week, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London offered visitors an opportunity to see the V&A collection from the perspective of a refugee through unique tours of Museum galleries guided by refugees from around the world.

[Crossing Channel Facebook Group](#) 'A media channel for the public to cross paths with every day stories you don't hear every day about the people seeking refuge in Europe.

Websites curating artwork of displaced diaspora and supporting the work of displaced artists.

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Sport

Like music and culture in general, sport has the power to overcome cultural and ethnic differences, to rally a community and to create a sense of confidence and belonging.