

EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES: EXTENDING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITY MUSIC FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA

Abstract

This paper reflects on the many diverse professionals who often come together around complex community music programs to exercise and voice their own values and commitment to social justice and to work together to make a change more broadly in society. Drawing on a qualitative case study of an Australian refugee and asylum seeker music program, we argue that such diverse and values oriented music facilitation teams and their surrounding networks can be productively conceptualised, developed, and evaluated as “epistemic communities”. Epistemic communities consist of diverse professional and academic agents who share common values and beliefs about a social problem. They also share beliefs about things that they can do to effect change. In this case study, the common concern was social justice for refugees and asylum seekers. The common method for promoting change was music creation, participation, and dissemination. We argue that the epistemic communities conceptual framework provides one way of conceptualising the ‘ripple’ effects of complex community music programs and the ways that music and other professionals and self-advocates (e.g. music program participants) act as broader agents of social justice and social change.

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Keywords

Epistemic communities, community music, diverse teams, complex settings,
interdisciplinary, inter-professional, refugees, asylum seekers

INTRODUCTION

So much of what is possible from community music happens in the moment. It also happens in the moments – and movements – that follow those moments. Community music facilitators, musicians, and community music therapists often work in collaboration with other health professionals and community service workers to achieve social, health, and wellbeing outcomes for participants. Academic researchers such as ourselves are also often involved in community music programs as evaluators, musicians, volunteers, or program facilitators. Underlying such collaborations is an awareness – if not an overt imperative – to promote community and cultural development, equity, and social change for social justice (see for example Stige et al., 2013; Pavlicevic, 2006; Higgins, 2012; Harrison, 2010). Such a focus on community and cultural development as well as social change spreads our collective focus and efforts away from solely ‘downstream’ amelioration of social or health problems faced by individual participants (such as depression) toward long-term change in ‘upstream’ level determinants of health and wellbeing such as social policies and living environments (Schulz & Northridge, 2004; Antonovsky, 1996; Gehlert et al., 2008).

Through a recent participatory case study with the Scattered People asylum seeker and refugee music program in Brisbane, Australia, we have begun to focus on the strengths of the group of music facilitators which, we argue, arise directly through the simultaneous diversity of its members’ skills and backgrounds and a united commitment to shared social justice values around their asylum seeker and refugee colleagues and participants. This paper presents a new way of conceptualising this ‘strength through diversity’ and the social justice and social change orientation of complex music teams as *epistemic communities* (henceforth EC). We first outline the key features of ECs and then apply them to the case study of eight Scattered People team members which include direct community music facilitators and others who support the work. We conclude by discussing the potential practical applications of the

EC framework for community music facilitation teams, planning, and evaluation, particularly as those relate to complex settings.

UNDERSTANDING COMPLEX MUSIC FACILITATION TEAMS AS EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

We define complex community music facilitation teams as those which: a) work with participants who experience significant and ongoing trauma and negative social and political conditions; and b) require diverse professional and disciplinary team input to respond to participant experiences. Haas (1992) defines epistemic communities as ‘a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular policy domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area’ (1992, p. 3. See also Davis Cross, 2013, p. 137). As Meijerink notes, ‘epistemic communities are primarily knowledge-based coalitions’ (2005, p. 1065). More specifically relevant to social justice oriented work, Haas (1992) identified that epistemic communities display

(1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity—that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise—that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence. (Haas, 1992, p. 3)

Through a worked case study of a current asylum seeker and refugee music program in Brisbane, Australia, we explore the potential of seeing complex community music facilitation

teams as epistemic communities. Of particular relevance to this case study is the polemic national (and international) context shaping refugee and asylum seeker policies in Australia; indeed, Davis Cross (2013, p. 148) argues that ‘when policy change is highly controversial, even some level of epistemic community influence is significant’. Hence, the degree to which the music facilitation team and participants could exercise broader social and political agency and promote social justice through music has been a feature of both the case study and the group’s ongoing work (see Lenette et al., 2015; Procopis and Dillon, 2011; Sunderland et al., 2015).

Music for social agency and social justice

We argue that framing complex community music programs as ECs may help us to understand the broader social and political agency that can be practiced via complex community music program delivery and related activity. Researchers in music sociology have previously examined the ways that individuals and groups use music as a medium for social and political agency. DeNora’s (1999, p. 31) work on music as a ‘technology of the self’ for example explored the way that women in the USA and UK used consumer music products to ‘constitute and reconstitute’ themselves as ‘particular types of agents’. Karlsen (2014) has also recently examined the ways that immigrant students in three Nordic countries individually and collectively used music to [re]substantiate themselves as social agents. Karlsen (2014, p. 425) identified that immigrant students used music for individual: ‘self-regulation’ of emotions and moods; ‘shaping self-identity’; ‘self-protection’ (e.g. by blocking unwanted sounds); ‘thinking’; ‘matters of “being”’ (e.g. increasing imagination); and ‘developing music-related skills’. Karlsen (2014, p. 425) identified further collective dimensions of agency exercised by the immigrant students including: ‘regulating and structuring social encounters’; ‘coordinating bodily actions’; ‘affirming and exploring collective identity’; “‘knowing the world” (exploring human relationships)’; and ‘establishing

a basis for collaborative musical action'. Extending on this work, we apply the EC framework in this paper to examine the potential for *networked* political and social agency through complex and diverse collaborative community music programs and teams and surrounding supportive networks.

As we will explore below, the features, aims, and *frustrations* of a value based epistemic community are evident among the music facilitators, researchers, activists, and advocates who comprise the Scattered People project team. Synthesising the various perspectives allows us to investigate and reflect upon the shared values of our enterprise, the ways we create knowledge and social action collectively, and how the diversity of our experience and backgrounds both gives the project its momentum and sustains it through difficult periods of time. Within the Scattered People EC, the shared means of promoting social justice is music. The aims are simultaneously artistic, political, and humanitarian. In what follows, we explore how the Scattered People team harnesses both its *commonality* in values regarding asylum seekers and refugees and belief in the power of musical activity and *diversity* in team members' individual strengths to seek social change for social justice.

PARTICIPATORY CASE STUDY: THE SCATTERED PEOPLE

We have been privileged to be involved as collaborators in various forms with the Scattered People team over the past four years. Our involvement with the group as volunteers and participatory researchers has consisted of the following activities: regular participation in monthly singing and song writing events with members of the music group; joint performances at concerts and fundraising events; participation in regular organisational meetings and collaborative decision making regarding research and evaluation projects and grant proposals; volunteer sound engineering, mixing, and producing for music releases; networking and involving other music and non-music professional volunteers (e.g. film

makers and fundraisers); in-depth review and analysis of the organisation's existing documentation of its activities; an international literature and policy review of existing peer reviewed and unpublished 'grey' literature on the topics of music, asylum seekers, and health and wellbeing (see Author A); co-authoring journal articles and conference presentations; and a group interview with music facilitators involved in the Scattered People collective.

The data presented below was collected as part of a broader project examining the health and wellbeing impacts of the Scattered People program for both refugee and asylum seeker participants and the music facilitators involved (see Author own A; Author own B). All research procedures were reviewed and approved by the Griffith University human research ethics committee prior to research commencing. Participants were provided with a consent information sheet and each provided either written or verbal consent to participate in accordance with the approved research ethics protocol. The data presented in this paper was primarily collected via a group interview with the Scattered People music facilitators conducted in October 2014; however, we also draw from our broader experience as participant researchers and volunteers to inform our discussion of the data.

The group interview was conducted by the lead author via teleconference using an adapted "talking circle" approach (see Mills, Sunderland & Davis-Warra, 2013). Using this process, all participants were asked to imagine themselves as being positioned around a circle, which they drew on a piece of paper. Participants were asked to write six words on their piece of paper that had been provided by the lead Scattered People representative as a 'scaffolding' process for the group interview process: *Social, Emotional, Intellectual, Political, Spiritual, and Other*. These six words, which represent categories of social and emotional wellbeing, were provided by a Scattered People partner investigator in the broader research projects as a reflection of the kinds of health and wellbeing outcomes he had observed in music facilitators over the past 13 years of Scattered People music activity.

The teleconference option was used due to on-going difficulties in finding a mutually suitable time for all participants to meet in person and the significant driving distance between their homes. We agreed with participants that teleconferencing was a feasible option in that instance due to the strong existing relationships between the participants. The talking circle began with each participant taking turns to describe how they had come to be involved with the Scattered People program. Each participant then used the six words they were asked to write on their piece of paper as scaffolding to share their thoughts on how their participation in the program had affected them in those different domains. This process allowed for participants' own values, stories, sentiments, and experiences to emerge. It also allowed for participants to identify their own role in and contribution to the group and the strengths they felt they brought to the work. Subsequently, the facilitator went on to ask participants to speak about what supported them in their work as part of the Scattered People collective given the significant challenges they had described in earlier discussions during the interview. The facilitator closed the talking circle by asking each participant to share three words that summarised any final comments or sentiments they wished to share with the group.

During subsequent collaborative interdisciplinary thematic analysis (see Bat, 2008) of the group interview transcript, we reviewed in detail the personal values that had led facilitators to join the Scattered People group along with what aspects of their lives supported them in their work with refugees and asylum seekers. During this analysis, we were sensitised to how the diversity of the team and the strong bonds and shared values of team members enhanced and supported the group. The data indicated that the diversity of the team, in particular the combination of music industry and community and cultural development approaches, was one of the key strengths of the group, which had been operating for more than 13 years. The data also revealed that the group collectively and continuously strives for policy and social

justice level change even though this is something that causes them significant consternation and uncertainty. Upon undertaking this paper, we then supplemented the team profiles generated from the group interview by consulting with one additional founding team member who was unable to participate in the group interview. We also added our own team member profiles as academic members of Scattered People EC (Authors 1 & 3). We provide a summary of team member strengths and diversity in the profiles below.

THE SCATTERED PEOPLE EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY

In this section of the paper, we introduce the diverse strengths and assets of Scattered People team members through a series of profiles for each of the music facilitators and academics generated during (and in two cases after) the group interview. We do this in order to illustrate the degree to which the team reflects the key characteristic of an EC. Team members were asked to approve their own profile and the paper as a whole prior to publication. All team members were given the option of using their real name or a pseudonym. When used, pseudonyms have retained the gender of the participant i.e. female names were used for female facilitators and male names were used for male participants.

Team member profile: Brian

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “I was a member of the Brisbane Asylum Seeker Centre management committee. During a meeting in 1998 as we were looking for new creative ways to establish a more welcoming environment for asylum seekers, we heard gentle guitar playing from down the corridor. We all rose from our seats to investigate. Two asylum seekers from Chile who had escaped the murderous Pinochet regime were playing songs to one another in Spanish. Significantly though, they were surrounded by Ethiopians, Eritreans, Sri Lankans – all swaying to the music – being enriched and nurtured by it – a spontaneous community

of kindred-spirits. It was a sign for us. We subsequently invited all of the asylum seekers registered at the Centre to a weekend workshop and asked how it would be for them to express what needed to be expressed and have such important expressions honoured with music from a variety of multi-ethnic and Australian musicians. All were enthusiastic. Scattered People was born”.

Primary professional identity: Community development worker, songwriter

Strengths and assets: A desire to side with people who I believe have been unfairly treated, to harness community support in order to fortify their efforts to attain justice

Key descriptors of my approach: Using music to bring people together, to provide a safe place for important things to be shared, to nurture health-giving relationships and to advance the level of awareness, compassion and understanding of the broader community.

Team member profile: Leathy

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “I began with Scattered People some 13-odd years ago and it was through my brother, NAME. He was producing the albums and I was helping with some vocals for those. I got involved in the choir as well at the same time. As far as the facilitating, I kind of fell into that a bit. I considered NAME more a facilitator than I was. I was a musician and that was my contribution. I didn't really know how else I could contribute. I had musical skills so that was where I wanted to offer. Then when NAME wasn't able to continue I took on the BITA [Brisbane Immigration and Transit Accommodation, also known as the Pinkenba detention centre] thing, which I then became more focused on the facilitating of it.”

Primary professional identity: Musician.

Strengths and assets: Skilled singer-songwriter and guitarist. Family connections and relationships. Long term commitment to the Scattered People. Historical knowledge of the program.

Key descriptors of my approach: Collaborative and inclusive song writing, musical arrangement, performance, community development and music program delivery in detention and community environments.

Team member profile: Lou

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “Probably three-and-a-half years ago I watched that SBS special documentary, Go Back to Where You Came From.¹ I then took my whole family to the Brisbane World Refugee Day march and then I just wanted to do something more and make a difference, so that's when I contacted Romero Centre [Brisbane-based organisation committed to social justice issues]. They put me in touch with Brian, because I love music and it was going to be based on music. So that's the direction I moved then. Then I started at [detention centre] with the group.

Primary professional identity: School teacher, social activist

¹ A documentary series produced by the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS), where six Australians, with diverse opinions on Australia's asylum seeker debate, are taken on a journey ‘in reverse’ to that taken by refugees to reach Australia.

Strengths and assets: Experience as a primary school teacher and English second language teacher, local networks and social capital, home with close proximity to nature which is offered to refugees as respite, family history of social activism, advocacy support for families and individuals engaging with the legal system in Australia.

Key descriptors of my approach: Advocacy, English second language instruction, friendship and family support.

Team member profile: Paola

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “I became involved when I was doing my studies. When I joined with community services... I, in a way, accidentally went with one of the social workers ... and one of the people that she worked with... met Brian. At that time they were meeting at the [Refugee and Health centre near Windsor in Brisbane]. She was doing a brief presentation and the idea on what they were all sharing, and I [noticed] that it was beautiful and was here [and] involves community and involves music, and I really like it. I guess it was something that I wanted to just be part of. So I asked Brian if I could volunteer and he invited me to come along.”

Primary professional identity: Community services worker, psychologist

Strengths and assets: Formal studies in psychology and community services, experience of being a migrant from Colombia, experience of speaking English as a second language, musician (vocalist), music participation (recording, music programs, and live performance), paid role as facilitator of community music program coordinator for the Scattered People via partner organisation.

Key descriptors of my approach: Community development, person-centred practice, family support, consensus decision-making and collaborative team development.

Team member profile: Chris

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “The things that led me to [be involved] have been a fairly long history of working – actually since the very late '80s – in various capacities in community development and music, community cultural development, that kind of stuff and workshops, being involved in a bit of theatre and then working in remote communities for about a decade up in north-west Queensland. Then there were a few other things. Once I'd finished that, I did a little bit of work with Speak Out, a couple of projects there, which involved a whole bunch of people who were doing pre-school studies. There were people from, basically it was a journey from Africa right through to people from Japan and places like that and they were all working on listening to their stories and so on, and then working with people with disability, song-writing once-a-week for about six or seven years. So I guess what it's always boiled down to is actually listening to stories of the human experience, shall we say. So that's just enjoying and being rather fascinated by the different ways that experience is expressed. Then [about three and half years ago] really it was through Yani actually - because she used to talk about Scattered People a bit and she was involved, and so I just tagged along really.”

Primary professional identity: Musician, community cultural development worker.

Strengths and assets: Community cultural development, Aboriginal cultural heritage and knowledge of cultural protocols, multi-instrumentalist (bass, guitar, didgeridoo, vocals), song writing, group leadership, collaborative decision making, performance, storytelling.

Key descriptors of my approach: Community cultural development, team development, Indigenous ways of working, critical reflective practice.

Team member profile: Robbie

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “It was just over two years ago - two years and two months I think, Cal, the singer with GANGgajang [popular Australian pop rock band] was doing some work at Gasworks Studio, part of the University [Queensland University of Technology]. That's where I met Naomi and Phil. So I just went in and said I worked with Cal [band member] and stuff. So a short time later I got an email from Naomi introducing me to Brian and yeah, it was one of the best emails I've ever received. So Brian and me made contact and then Brian actually came to my place, which you've all been to, and we had a cup of tea I think – I wasn't a coffee addict at that point – and we just hit it off. I've been writing music, and about displaced people, for a very long time... So I was writing stuff for and about displaced people, but when I got with Brian and he told me all about Scattered People, then it seemed like just one of those perfect things, that I could actually write and do music with displaced people – actually do it with them. I'd reached the point in my life where I just wanted to help anyway. I just wanted to help, through music, make music a little bit more helpful, rather than just playing gigs and stuff. So that was fantastic.”

Primary professional identity: Musician, arranger, producer.

Strengths and assets: Professional music industry experience as member of iconic Australian bands GANGgajang and Yothu Yindi, professional music industry networks, orchestral arrangement, song writing, guitarist, vocalist, audio production and engineering, history of social justice advocacy through commercial song writing.

Key descriptors of my approach: Band and artist development, commercial music industry, professional music practice.

Team member profile: Naomi

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “I think it was at the end of 2010 a mutual friend of Brian's and mine got quite ill. His name was Steve Dillon. He's a musician, music teacher, wonderful advocate for people with disabilities, people who have experienced lots of different kinds of marginalisation. But I had had a conversation with Steve a little bit earlier that year and he said, what are you doing with your music? I said, not much and I'd really love to find a way to make music more part of my daily life. So Steve's this kind of guy who, you put that thought out there, he'll just keep ticking away in his mind until he finds a way to help you to achieve that kind of stuff. So I got an email from Steve introducing me to Brian... asking if I might be able to help them to put together a business plan for this thing called Sweet Freedom [parent entity for the Scattered People]...”

Primary professional identity: University lecturer and researcher, musician, songwriter.

Strengths and assets: Access to university facilities and resources, singer-songwriter, audio engineering, diverse professional networks (e.g. fundraising, music production), performance, research evaluation methods, organisational development (Board of Directors and planning), documenting and disseminating learning.

Key descriptors of my approach: Ethnographic, networked, university and research contexts, research based, knowledge sharing.

Team member profile: Caroline

How I came to be involved in the Scattered People: “In late 2012, I attended a symposium at the Queensland Conservatorium on the links between music and health and wellbeing, where Naomi and Brian talked about the Scattered People project. Naomi and I had worked together in the past and we were about to apply for an internal grant with a number of researchers from music and health backgrounds to formalise the research collaboration with Scattered People. As a researcher with an interest in refugee mental health and arts-based approaches, I was simply mesmerized by Brian’s account of his work with refugees and asylum seekers and was excited about working with this group of music facilitators. Once we successfully obtained two small grants in 2013, I felt that attending the monthly music gatherings in Nundah in north Brisbane was an essential part of the research process. They were transformative. I also had the opportunity to converse with three of the facilitators outside of the gatherings, which enriched my understanding of their involvement. I then became a member of Sweet Freedom.”

Primary professional identity: University lecturer and researcher.

Strengths and assets: Commitment to social justice, participatory research approach, experience as a migrant with English as a second language, access to university facilities and resources, documenting and disseminating learning.

Key descriptors of my approach: Person-focussed, ethnographic, university and research contexts, collaborative knowledge construction and sharing.

The above team member profiles are not intended to be exhaustive and do not include all members of the broader team and surrounding networks. Nevertheless, the included profiles indicate both professional and personal levels of diversity within the Scattered People EC.

The profiles also indicate the profound extent to which *valuing musical practice and social justice* have formed a shared foundation for the EC's work. The group has literally come together due to its members' shared understandings of and commitments toward the value of music and social justice. In many cases this was facilitated by an existing member or third party who introduced new members to the group because he or she knew they would support the group's underlying philosophy. Hence, while there is significant professional and experiential diversity between its members, the group displays and perpetuates the key characteristics of ECs around shared values, aims, intuitive knowledges, and lived experience regarding "what works" in terms of musical activity for community building and social advocacy (see Haas, 1992). Perhaps most profoundly, *the group displays a shared 'conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence'* of their musical activity (Haas, 1992, p. 3, italics added). This underlying conviction and commitment to enhance human welfare persists even if members self-critique or feel uncertain about the outcomes of their work at different times.

EXPLORING THE SCATTERED PEOPLE EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY: SHARED NARRATIVES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MUSIC

As indicated above there are strong shared values and practices of social justice and music between members of the Scattered People EC. In this section we explore some of the most prominent narrative themes that emerged from our analysis of the group interview.

Firstly, and perhaps most notably, there is a strong oscillation between themes of passion (for music, for social justice) and themes of membership when it comes to unifying narratives of the group. The intersection of these two themes is evident in this quotation from group member Chris:

*“I went for the first time ... and I just thought, ‘this is what I want to be’. I am grateful that I’ve been able to continue in different roles, but **the main one is my heart is there.** Otherwise I would not enjoy it as much I guess and it’s admiration for people. It’s political in many ways, as humans, it’s political and as you want to know more, you want to understand more, you want to have a valid argument that you can defend ... Yes it is the learning and listening and so on - the people that are, for want of a better term, the participants, the refugee people - listening to their stories. But I guess the other aspect of it for me, which is more interesting is actually being also around people that have, what I see to be **similar motivations.** So they’re the social and emotional aspects of it. **The political aspects of it have more to do with the other musicians really.** So it’s more the small group of people that I’ve met, like this group, that’s currently invisible, but present nonetheless.”*

Chris’ words indicate the extent to which the “political is personal” for the members of the group. In evidence of the epistemic community nature of the group, a concern with policy pervades the group’s narratives even about minute musical practices of recording the group’s songs for an upcoming release. Here Robbie, who has produced the third Scattered People album, discusses arranging for an asylum seeker participant to record a vocal for the album at his studio:

“... you hear all the political stuff and the emotional and musical stuff. I guess the most precious thing in my mind is yesterday, I finally managed to get [participant NAME] here ... after much trying, because [participant NAME] as you all know has been going through a lot of troubles, particularly with the government. His very words yesterday were, he escaped a horrible government to come here and now there’s a horrible government here.”

The themes of empathy and personal and political connection with music program participants reflect and reinforce ‘a shared set of normative and principled beliefs’ and a will to action for the group (Haas, 1992, p. 3). This is especially evident when Leathy discusses her work with children in forced detention:

“seeing the kids in detention is particularly heartbreaking ... you feel the need to do something and you don't know what, but if you've got music and you can use that as part of going into your detention centres, and just trying to give a bit of normality ... It's just one hour but it feels very important to do it ...”

The close intersection of members’ beliefs, emotions, expertise, and personal and political values are evident in this complex setting. The group’s work in forced detention centres and in community settings such as a local neighbourhood centre or a recording studio are simultaneously personally challenging *and* politically reinforcing for EC members. As Robbie reflects,

“I think producing the album was very intense, and it's very hands-on and it's very close to what it's all about. From actually working one-on-one with asylum seekers, it can be very emotional. You know that feeling like, I guess it's the role I've taken on here, you start to feel like they're all your family and you have quite a huge responsibility for them. I've got a family so yeah, and I've got children. You just feel like you've really got to represent people as properly and honestly, and in a beautiful way is the way to do it - the music's got to be very beautiful because beauty will always win I think, will always get the message across rather than protests and all the rest of it.”

The initial extensions of the EC into a broader “network” beyond the immediate music facilitation team and participants is evident here as Robbie identifies that asylum seekers

have become part of his own family, identifying the attribute of beauty as a key to success in properly advocating for the refugees.

The concepts of “beauty” and “family” can be seen generally as unifying concepts for the group: they are involved in a beautiful project with beautiful people and make beautiful music and connect deeply with them. This is particularly the case for Lou and Leathy who have, like Robbie, Naomi, and others, involved their own family members and networks in the broader Scattered People EC and invited asylum seeker and refugee participants from the Scattered People programs into their own communities and homes. As Lou reflects,

“... those weeks when I'd come to [forced detention centre] on the Thursday, that filled a void for me. I'd drive home really happy - you'd be very sad sometimes with what was happening or the stories they'd tell you - but just so fulfilled inside, just really happy. Like Paola said, the group was so welcoming, and they were like your best friends. It was lovely to spend the time with them. So over these few years I've brought people up to my home to stay. I do a lot of conversational English with them, just to take them places, which I know Maleny [home town] reminds them a lot of northern Iran. So you just sit and watch them and they look out at those mountains, or wherever we go. They're just lost and you know that that's given them some - they feel better or just for that time - it's a distraction but it's a good distraction. So now many of those people have become like my family to me. They're very important to me. There's a few special ones. So now when we're going back in to [detention centre] with Leathie, I feel for the first time I can get up and talk and I'm not embarrassed. I feel like I'm doing something good.”

In addition to family, there is a powerful link between beauty and power in the unifying narratives of this group—literally a belief that propagating the beauty of music has the power

to create connections, change things for their advocacy group, influence political outcomes, and change attitudes. As Paola reflects:

“I went with one of the social workers to ... one of the sessions ... She was doing a brief presentation with the girls and the idea of what they were all sharing, and I noticed that it was beautiful and was here that involves community and involves music, and I really like it... So to see them connect to music, to see them all being open, or even just to be there, without talking or without necessarily singing, but just to be there and smiling, or just to be part of that atmosphere, and feel that energy was so ... beautiful and powerful. Then just being blessed with that people knowing to come with beautiful hearts, and coming out from ... places around Brisbane to then get to know more people. It's just so powerful I guess... it has been very emotional, but a good emotional I guess, because I feel I connect better when there is heart involved ... but it has brought beautiful experiences in my life...”

A key ‘shared causal belief’ (Haas, 1992, p. 3) of the group unsurprisingly focuses on the role of government in perpetuating social injustice for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia and elsewhere. The policy proposals of the group are hence aligned with music as means of telling stories and, in turn, politicising and publicising the cause of refugees. As Chris summarises

“I guess the workshop, the song-writing, the recording of giving voice to or being part of that giving voice to that experience of other people, is the rewarding part of it really, in lots of ways Yeah, well it is political. It's a human act ... and some people would see that as challenging. The most challenging aspects of allowing people to tell their story is the fact that other people don't want them to. That's where it becomes political, or it can.”

The common policy platform for this EC is music – music as means of political change, music as community glue, music as emotional ameliorative, and music as the driver of human welfare for a policy situation that has been condemned internationally as torture, as being in contravention of Australia’s international obligations, and as one of the single most divisive aspects of the contemporary Australian policy landscape.

DISCUSSION

Davis Cross (2013, p. 159) argues that epistemic communities are engaged in ‘tangible realities that require policy solutions’, in the same way that Scattered People has been involved with refugees and asylum seekers through music over many years. Despite some scepticism about the effectiveness of epistemic communities to influence policy and decision-makers, and the measured change to the framework from its original conceptualisation, the utility of epistemic communities as a concept has also been highlighted (see Davis Cross, 2013, pp. 144-146 for a full discussion). The framework’s potential has, nevertheless, been understated, and newer approaches to considering complex community music programs as suggested here can contribute towards highlighting the usefulness of this concept.

The application of the concept of epistemic communities to this community music case study demonstrates how, as Davis Cross (2013) describes, the network of members has the potential to ‘persuade others of their shared causal beliefs and policy goals by virtue of their professional knowledge’ (p. 142). While the members of the Scattered People EC could often feel that their on-going involvement had little influence on the broader policy context, the range of aptitudes and the complementarity of the group suggest that they may have a more significant influence than what they are aware of.

Importantly, participants in the group interview referred on many occasions to the uncertainty they felt about not being able to effect social change in “upstream” (social and

political) determinants of refugee and asylum seeker wellbeing such as social policies, despite employing a range of strategies. Many of the facilitators could clearly see the benefits of their work in providing musical counter stories to dominant negative stereotypes surrounding “boat people” in Australia; however, when it came to social policies determining the fate of their refugee friends and colleagues, they expressed frustration and, at times, despair. Davis Cross (2013, p. 152) explains that uncertainty is a central concept to epistemic communities, as it is through uncertainty, which is present in every area, that a space is created for epistemic community activity to emerge. The idea of uncertainty is therefore essential to this process, as it signifies that contexts might change and that decision-makers may be willing to listen to different narratives as they shift perspectives on particular issues. Thus, there was a firm commitment among this group to pursuing social change through sharing the stories of refugees and asylum seekers through song writing and a professional music recording.

The group has maintained a firm commitment to sharing refugee stories as a key form of musical agency. This is often achieved through network connections to additional media outlets such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio. Individual music facilitators have also exercised agency and advocacy within local networks in their home communities. For example, Lou and her family members have produced numerous media stories in the local newspaper in the town where they lived, which she regularly shared via email with members of the broader Scattered People EC. These activities are examples of frequent and ongoing forms of social activism and agency shared within the group. In terms of *individual agency*, the team member profiles clearly indicate that the Scattered People facilitators have used their involvement to ‘constitute and reconstitute’ (DeNora, 1999, p. 31) their own personal, professional, cultural, and political identities both as musicians and citizens.

For Lou in particular, the Scattered People collective has provided an opportunity to reconnect with the ethic of social justice and inclusion that her social activist father instilled in her as a small child. For others such as Robbie and Chris, the collective has provided a point of connection with displaced people and other likeminded individuals. Naomi, Lou, Leathy, Robbie and Paola have also found an opportunity to exercise their own creative musical agency through their involvement in the group. The Scattered People team have also experienced a broader *collective agency* in terms of ‘affirming and exploring collective identity’ and ‘establishing a basis for collaborative musical action’ (Karlsen, 2014, p. 425) as persons who do not accept the current violation of human rights and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. These experiences of individual and collective agency are then amplified and shared as the group extends the artefacts and processes of its work with many layered networks of professionals outside of the immediate team.

CONCLUSION

As researchers and teaching academics we feel privileged and empowered to be working within a passionate and inspired group of professionals such as the Scattered People. Our exploration of the complex community music activity undertaken by the Scattered People team has, as explored in this and other publications, yielded benefits to all involved. Yet, all of us are frequently challenged and humbled by the question: can we really make a difference? This paper has laid out one way of understanding complex and diverse community music teams that may help us to answer this question in the future. By understanding complex community music teams as epistemic communities, we unlock a pathway to evaluating the broader policy and social change for social justice outcomes of these groups. Future research should focus on developing ethnographic and networked methodologies for tracking the broader social justice “ripple effects” of groups such as the

Scattered People in order to inform not only community practice, but also community music theory, and policy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank all members of the Scattered People music group for their friendship, support, and participation in this research. We would also like to thank and acknowledge Associate Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet for her valued contribution to the initial collaborative thematic analysis which set us off in search of an appropriate way to theorise our findings! We would also like to thank the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre at Griffith University for funding of a junior fellowship during 2013-2014 which supported this work.

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