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STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE

Composing Resilience: The Role of Music in Post-Disaster Recovery and Community Resilience in the UK

OVERVIEW

This project focuses on the role of music for disaster-affected people and communities in the UK in recovering from disasters and building back. Using archival, ethnographic and participatory methods, the student will explore how music can support community resilience and recovery after major disasters.

SUMMARY

This project investigates how music can be leveraged to support recovery and resilience-building for communities affected by major disasters, using the Grenfell Tower disaster as a focal case study. The successful candidate will use this innovative project that combines historical research, ethnographic study, and hands-on community engagement to develop theoretical and empirical grounds for integrating music into disaster resilience and recovery.

Working closely with disaster survivors, bereaved families, and community activists, the student will document and analyse how musical practices have contributed to community healing after the disaster through archival and ethnographic work. The project will also include a participatory research phase to co-design and deliver creative music workshops with young survivors. The findings will help shape policy recommendations for schools, informal educators, community organisations, while also advancing our understanding of the role of music in social justice and community resilience after disasters.

We welcome applicants from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. The successful candidate will have knowledge or experience in one or more of the following areas: qualitative social research, community-based social justice projects, music education and therapy, and disaster recovery and trauma-informed practice.

The successful candidate will join an interdisciplinary team of supervisors comprising experts in music, education, history and trauma and disaster studies. They will be an active member of the [Southampton Centre for Music Education and Social Justice](#) and [Centre for Research in Inclusion](#), with [Public Policy Southampton](#) to support translating the research findings into real-world impact on policymakers and communities.

PROJECT CONCEPT

1. Rationale

Communities worldwide have increasingly faced significant local and global disasters, which disrupt lives, tear apart communities, and often leave long-lasting emotional and psychological impacts. Music, with its ability to foster emotional healing and create social connections, can play a vital role in these efforts (Hibbard, 2022). Composer Karl Jenkins' *Cantata Memoria for the Children* (2016) lost in the Aberfan disaster of 1966 shows how music can help communities remember and heal decades after tragedy. Examples in the UK demonstrate the potential of music for community healing and resilience-building after disasters. Following the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, teenage survivors created music videos to honour lost friends and process their grief, while Grenfell supporters in Cornwall used communal singing to build connections between survivors and supporters. These instances reveal that music can create powerful spaces for emotional expression, preserve memories, and strengthen community solidarity in the aftermath of tragic disasters.

Within resilience studies, there is growing interest in the role of social and cultural dimensions in how communities bounce back from disasters (Krüger et al., 2015). Music has a unique ability to forge emotional connections, preserve cultural memory, and facilitate collective expression, offering a powerful but understudied mechanism for strengthening community resilience. This project addresses a gap in the literature on disaster resilience and culture, which has focused more on the role of visual arts and performance while the contribution of music has limited attention. By examining the role of music in disaster recovery, this project will not only enrich our understanding of resilience-building mechanisms, but can also offer practical insights into how cultural practices can be effectively integrated into disaster resilience frameworks.

2. Key Objectives

- 1) Investigate and document how music has functioned as a tool for community healing and resilience-building in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower disaster, through historical analysis and ethnographic research with survivors, bereaved families, and community activists.
- 2) Develop and implement a community-led framework for using music in post-disaster recovery by co-designing and delivering creative music workshops with young Grenfell survivors, incorporating intergenerational dialogue and participatory action research methods.
- 3) Generate evidence-based insights about how musical practices can be systematically

integrated into disaster resilience frameworks, addressing the current gap in literature and providing practical recommendations for incorporating cultural approaches into community recovery efforts.

3. Methods

Building on previous research projects on education for resilience and justice, as well as community music for social justice, this project will use a qualitative, community-engaged and creative approach to explore the role of music in disaster recovery. Engaged scholarship is 'done *with*, rather than *for* or *on*, a community' (Furco, 2005, p. 10) and enables bringing together different kinds of expertise about the issue from academics and community members, facilitating equitable knowledge production and action.

- 1) **Phase 1 (Historical and Ethnographic Research)** will focus on the role music has played in recovery and justice movement after Grenfell. This includes an examination of artistic and musical responses to the disaster since the fire in 2017 through records produced and held by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission and other relevant community organisations and individuals. Interviews of survivors, bereaved, activists, artists and educators, and participant observation in community activities, will provide insights into the potential value of music in supporting community resilience in post-disaster contexts.
- 2) **Phase 2 (Community-Based Participatory Action Research)** will include partnering with young Grenfell survivors and bereaved family members, local artist groups (e.g. ACAVA) and schools to design and implement creative music workshops for recovery and resilience. A Youth Advisory Group comprising 6-8 members of the Grenfell community (aged 18-25) will be formed to co-design music workshops. They will receive training in research methods and workshop facilitation, positioning them as co-researchers rather than merely participants. Potential outputs include:
 - Develop age-appropriate musical activities about community resilience,
 - Create intergenerational dialogue through music,
 - Production of original musical pieces addressing themes of justice and recovery.

Throughout Phase 2, data collection will include workshop recordings, participant reflections, focus group discussions, and creative outputs, analysed collaboratively with community members to ensure findings reflect local perspectives and priorities.

4. Wider Implications

This project will have broad academic and practical implications:

- 1) **Broadening the Role of Music in Recovery:** By investigating how music can be used as a tool for emotional healing and community resilience, this project will expand the role of music in resilience building after disasters. It will contribute to the growing field of music, health and social justice, exploring new ways that music can support disaster recovery.
- 2) **Fostering Interdisciplinary and Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The project will create opportunities for collaboration between academics, music educators, disaster activists, and bereaved and survivors. This interdisciplinary approach will demonstrate the value of integrating the arts into disaster recovery and provide a model for future projects.
- 3) **Supporting Community Resilience:** The project emphasises the importance of younger

generations in building resilience and collective memory after a disaster. Through collaborative music-making, the project will help communities build long-term resilience and solidarity.

- 4) **Influencing Policy and Practice:** The project's findings will offer policy recommendations and best practices for integrating music into community resilience to disasters. These recommendations can be used by schools, teachers, informal educators and community groups to effectively plan and deliver resilience plans that recognise the therapeutic value of music.

5. Conclusion

This project seeks to understand the role of music in post-disaster community recovery and resilience-building through focused study of the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2017. By combining historical analysis, ethnographic research, and participatory action methods with young survivors, it will generate insights into how musical practices can be systematically integrated into disaster resilience frameworks. The findings will inform policy and provide practical guidance for communities, educators, and organisations working to strengthen post-disaster resilience through creative engagement.

6. References

- Furco, A. (2005). *Promoting civic engagement at the University of California*. Center for Studies in Higher Education.
- Hibbard, S. L. (2022). Disrupting 'what we know too well': a relational frame for considering trauma in music education. In D. Bradley & J. Hess (Eds.), *Trauma and resilience in music education: Haunted melodies* (pp. 35-48). Routledge.
- Krüger, F., Bankoff, G., Cannon, T., Orłowski, B., & Schipper, E. L. F. (Eds.). (2015). *Cultures and disasters: understanding cultural framings in disaster risk reduction*. Routledge.

Please explain how this project represents a contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies.

This project explores the emotional, social and cultural dimensions of resilience, focusing on how music can act as a therapeutic tool for community healing and a method of social justice after disasters. It takes a qualitative and interpretive approach to disaster resilience, using methods from a range of humanities and social science disciplines, including historical, ethnographic, educational and participatory methods. As music and education are relatively underexplored approaches to resilience, this project will broaden the scope of resilience research by relating it to theories and methods in these disciplines.

With the notion of resilience at its core, the project will contribute to knowledge in a range of disciplines - not only music and education, but also memory studies, trauma studies and critical disaster studies. It will demonstrate how theories and methodologies from the humanities (music) and social sciences (education) can be integrated to explore community resilience to complex societal challenges such as man-made disasters.

Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project. Note that students recruited into this programme will

undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.

We will welcome applicants from various academic backgrounds. Given the breadth of disciplines involved in this project, it is unlikely that any applicant will have prior experience and training in all relevant areas. The expectation is that the successful candidate will have knowledge or experience in one or more of the following areas:

- Research in educational settings
- Community-based projects for social justice
- Music education and therapy
- Disaster recovery and trauma-informed practice

For those areas where the student needs more knowledge and skills, the supervisory team will provide relevant training through the Doctoral College, the Public Engagement with Research unit (PERu) and Public Policy [Southampton](#) as well as external bodies such as the [National Centre for Research Methods](#) and discipline-specific organisations such as [British Educational Research Association](#) and [British Forum for Ethnomusicology](#). The student will attend training sessions targeted at public policy engagement and impact sessions provided by PPS and CHEP to increase social impact of the project.

Given the high level of sensitivity involved in working with disaster-affected communities (especially for a recent disaster), the student will be expected to receive advanced training in qualitative research ethics, participatory action research and trauma-informed research practice. This aspect of the project will be primarily guided by Dr Wonyong Park, who has extensive experience of researching with disaster-affected communities and can direct the student to relevant resources and training opportunities.
