



VIV GORDON  
COMPANY



# the MISSING MILLIONS

Improving access to the arts for  
child sexual abuse (CSA) survivors

Written by Viv Gordon with Beth Williams | May 2026

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# Why this report exists

**The Missing Millions is an independent, child sexual abuse (CSA) survivor-led report, born out of frustration and necessity.** It is a reflection of conversations we have at Viv Gordon Company everyday, shared here to inform the arts and cultural sector.

During Autumn 2025, we launched a survey to gather these conversations into one place for the first time, centring CSA survivors' lived experience as a valid and essential form of knowledge. What follows is testimony from 88 respondents from the CSA survivor community - a first step towards building an evidence base and a plea for future dialogue and research.

An estimated

**11 million adult  
CSA survivors**

live in the UK

That is approximately 1 in 6 adults.  
500,000 children and young people  
are sexually abused each year.\*

At present, there is a lack of research that meaningfully examines access to the arts for our community. We do not feature in local, regional or national cultural strategies or plans, in Arts Council England's "Let's Create" strategy or any national arts priorities. In nearly one thousand Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations - there is no specialist cultural offer for CSA survivors. **This is why we have named this report The Missing Millions.**

When marginalised communities, such as CSA survivors, are missing from data and research, our realities are easily misunderstood, minimised and overlooked. Survivors face barriers to access and inclusion across every area of life including education, healthcare and employment.

As an arts organisation, our focus is on arts and culture, where we consistently witness systemic barriers, a lack of cultural infrastructure and visible role models within mainstream provision that limits participation, talent development and cultural leadership by CSA survivors.

\* Source: CSAcentre.org / NPSCC

Our situation is complex. Child sexual abuse is a serious crime. As victim-survivors, we are first harmed as children through no fault of our own, then live with the impacts of abuse in a society where our existence is taboo.

When accessing arts events, opportunities or careers, we face two choices. Either we compartmentalise our survivor identities and carry the burden as individuals to mask and self-manage in inaccessible environments. Or we self-identify, and risk rejection and othering.

This report is an invitation to the arts sector to recognise that access and inclusion is not about the individual resilience of survivors, but about shared structures, cultures and practices that can, and must, be changed.

We know, from experience, that the barriers we face are not inevitable or insurmountable.

Without CSA survivor access to the arts, many people's voices and artistic expression would not be heard and seen. They would remain in our heads, in our diaries or in our bodies.



“Trauma-informed” practices go some way to addressing barriers. But when strengths-based, CSA survivor-led practices that centre access and inclusion are in place, we see real change - survivors creating more art, enjoying more art, taking creative risks, building confidence, skills and relationships and stepping into cultural leadership.

**We believe in the arts as a transformative space** where narrative change-making can lead to wider cultural change, enhancing the lives of everyone impacted by child sexual abuse - not just survivors but our families, friends, colleagues and communities.

**CSA survivors can and do make exceptional art that deserves to take up cultural space and be seen, enjoyed and valued in its own right.**

*Doll illustrations throughout  
by Imogen Harvey-Lewis*



# Silence, Stigma and Invisibility

## **Child sexual abuse remains highly taboo, including within cultural spaces.**

CSA survivors live with stigmatised identities. We are often conditioned not to speak about our experiences. Some survivors face threats, disbelief or discrimination when we do disclose.

Together, this creates a cycle of silence, invisibility and exclusion.

Survivors are often framed as “too emotional”, “complex” or “hard to reach”, while our creative work is dismissed as “niche”, “risky” or valued only for its therapeutic potential.

## **Listening to Survivors**

To better understand survivor experiences, Viv Gordon Company carried out the Missing Millions survey during Autumn 2025. Over two months, we received 88 anonymous responses from CSA survivors aged 18 and over. Our heartfelt thanks go to all the survivors who generously shared their wisdom and insight with us. Their voices are shared throughout this report.

Participants shared experiences of barriers within mainstream arts provision, alongside what helps create more accessible and inclusive spaces. We found that barriers and facilitators grouped across four areas:

**Attitudes & cultures**

**Safety**

**Cultural representation**

**Structural & practical access**

The following sections explore what we learned.

These assumptions shape access to cultural spaces and creative opportunities. Internalised stigma may lead survivors to withdraw, self-censor or avoid opportunities, reinforcing exclusion and under-representation.

Despite the scale of our community, survivors remain largely absent from cultural research, representation and decision-making.

Survivors are framed as

**“too emotional,  
complex or  
hard to reach”**

# Barriers

TO ACCESS

"I don't have creative difficulties - I have access difficulties."



# Attitudes & Cultures

Our question about barriers to accessing mainstream arts and cultural opportunities reveals patterns of shared experience within the CSA survivor community.

Survivors described feeling **pressure to adapt themselves** in order to participate in mainstream arts spaces.



I feel I need to restrict what I say, how I behave and the emotions I exhibit so as not to cause 'offence' to other people.

**72%** said they feel they have to mask and fit into mainstream expectations

**69%** cite feeling uncomfortable in mainstream arts spaces including:

**60%**

not always feeling safe, welcome or considered

**43%**

feeling different, stigmatised or othered

**43%**

feeling silenced, censored or discriminated against



As an artist, I often feel silenced and marginalised.



# Cultural Representation

Many respondents describe cultural misrepresentation as a barrier to engagement with mainstream arts offers.

**Survivors feel misrepresented and culturally erased.**

# 71%

often see CSA survivor experiences misrepresented in mainstream culture, either trivialised, sugarcoated or sensationalised



**When you try to go beyond using it as a shock-tactic storyline twist**

and actually try to delve into what it really is - people don't want to know.



Authentic survivor experience based creative/artistic work is lacking or **non-existent in mainstream artistic cultural spaces.**



Viv Gordon performs 'Cutting Out'  
Photography by Barney Witts

# Safety

Survivors cannot engage fully if environments don't feel safe.

CSA survivors have lived experience of being unsafe so it is understandable that we need to feel safe to engage with the arts.

“ I fear sharing my creative work about my own experiences due to fear of having my trauma **questioned, downplayed or invalidated.** ”



Artwork by John Slater from the 'Cutting Out' zine

**60%** don't always feel safe, welcome or considered in mainstream arts offers

Other barriers to spaces feeling safe and accessible in addition to attitudes and cultures:

**66%**

face barriers relating to confidence or **anxiety about going to new places or meeting new people**

**41%**

worried about becoming triggered in a **space that isn't trauma informed**

**17%**

feel worried people might touch them **without consent**

# Structural & Practical

Financial and practical factors significantly shape whether survivors can participate in arts and cultural activity.

Statistics show **child sexual abuse can have a range of impacts** into adulthood including socio-economic disadvantage and reduced social networks.

**60%**  
can't afford  
mainstream arts offers



I only sometimes find it difficult to leave my home. Some venues are difficult.

Some respondents spoke about challenges leaving home including anxiety about being in mainstream spaces and lack of trusted childcare.



I'm a single parent, so I do not use baby sitters for obvious reasons.





Improving

**access**

for CSA survivors

# Attitudes & Cultures

**CSA survivors can participate and create more freely** when we don't have to explain or defend ourselves.

Responses show the importance of a specialist cultural offer delivered by, for and with the survivor community.

# 84%

value knowing they are coming to a **survivor-led space**



I know I don't have to explain myself in these environments and that I can feel safer and more at ease - which allows my creativity to flourish.

# 84%

value being in a CSA-survivor-centred environment where they **don't have to explain themselves**

**Respondents also emphasised the importance of strengths-based approaches.**

# 72%

value being in a **space that affirms and celebrates their survival**



This is the first space where I have encountered the notion of being *\*proud\** of my survival, in a way that never minimises the difficulties and realities of surviving CSA.



# Cultural Representation

Respondents highlighted the importance of authentic cultural representation in enabling both participation and creative expression.

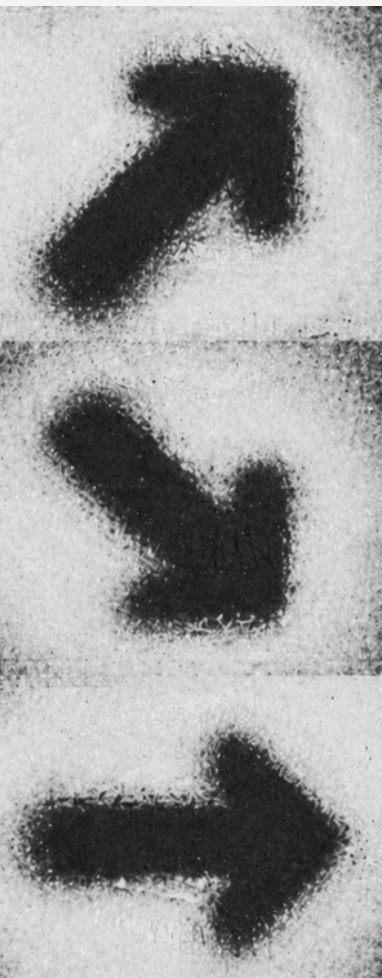
**Seeing survivor experiences reflected in artistic work**, and having space to share their own work, were key factors shaping access to the arts.

## Seeing ourselves

**72%** said that “seeing artistic work that reflects my own experiences helps facilitate access to the arts

## Being seen

**39%** are practicing artists who face barriers getting their work seen in mainstream spaces because there is a lack of relevant platforms and/or venues question whether their work will upset people



**85%**

value having access to **diverse CSA survivor artists and perspectives**

**64%**

shared that VGC spaces feel more accessible because “I can share my artistic work without fear of censorship”



CSA survivor work is often quietly, politely rejected by arts programmers. It's not seen as popular, commercially viable, or fun enough.

But **there are a lot of us with stories to tell, beautiful, messy, riotous art to share** and millions more waiting to see their experience represented creatively.

# Safety

At Viv Gordon Company, we strive to hold “safer” spaces as we cannot predict what will make any individual feel safe.

Respondents identified a number of factors that make arts spaces feel safer and more accessible.

**80%** knowing staff and volunteers are trauma-informed

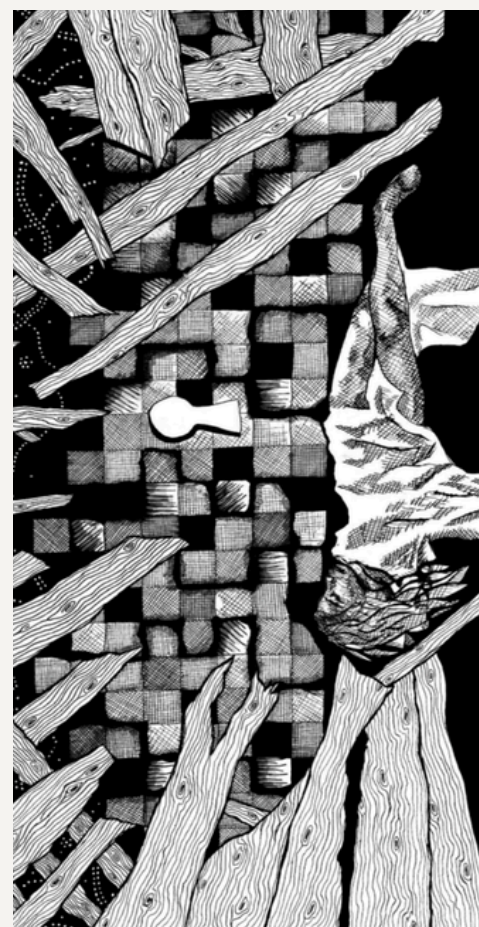


It is incredible to be in a room and not have to pretend everything is ok. It is ok to belly laugh with defiance whilst also being heart broken that so many other people have experienced something similar.

**71%** being in a relaxed, informal and friendly environment that centres choice and consent



I can take part on not so great days because my needs are taken into consideration every day.



Artwork by Holly Ambrose from the 'Cutting Out' zine

Practical elements that increase safety include:

**63%**

having quiet space available

**55%**

detailed info packs with travel information, visual guides, clear signage

**52%**

having specialist wellbeing support available if I feel overwhelmed or emotional

# Structural & Practical

Practical measures such as affordability, flexible formats and travel support play a significant role in enabling access.

Respondents emphasised the **importance of opportunities that are reachable in different ways.**

**78%** said they value Free or "Pay What You Can" opportunities

**81%**

would like to attend **in-person events**

**73%**

say **online opportunities** make engagement more accessible

**55%**

value **travel bursaries** to attend in person



Providing online opportunities for those too anxious or who live too far to events in person was very helpful.



The financial support and bursaries helped me travel to another city to access this and I am still so grateful.



# CSA Survivor Access Matters

'Amazing Resilience' Artwork by CSA Survivor Artist, Jeanie Jones



# Considerations for the Arts Sector

This report is an early step in advocating for CSA survivor access to arts and cultural spaces.

We offer the reflections below as considerations for the arts sector.

## RECOGNITION

### Recognise CSA survivors as a significant cultural community

1 in 6 adults is a survivor of child sexual abuse.

Survivors face shared marginalisations and should be recognised as a distinct community.

An inclusive arts and cultural sector must reflect this through meaningful investment in funding, commissioning, artist development, infrastructure, programming and participation.

**We are asking the cultural sector to actively ally with our community** by consulting with CSA survivor-led organisations and practitioners.

## ACCESS

### Beyond trauma-informed practice

CSA survivor access and inclusion requires more than trauma-informed practice.

**It is necessary to understand and address barriers to participation and actively enable access** so survivors have the resources and agency to lead change.

This includes adjustments to environments, language, communication, attitudes and culture to create clear pathways into creativity, participation and cultural leadership.



## **CREATIVE LEADERSHIP**

### **Supporting survivor artists**

All marginalised communities benefit from visible role models and collective activity to see ourselves reflected culturally, reclaim othered identities and imagine new futures.

**Many communities have moved from underground scenes to mainstream recognition, bringing creative innovation, fresh talent and contemporary relevance.**

Likewise, CSA survivor creatives need spaces and platforms to make and share our work.

We need our art to be understood as legitimate, not dismissed as therapy, and for cultural organisations to take proactive steps to welcome and support us and our work.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Building survivor-centred cultural provision**

As a community, CSA survivors are building from the ground up.

Our community is fragmented, geographically dispersed, and often affected by socio-economic disadvantage, while specialist arts provision remains limited and inconsistent. Current provision is under-resourced and difficult to access, creating further barriers to participation.

**We urgently need investment in cultural infrastructure that meets the needs of our community.**

## **SURVIVOR-LED FUTURES**

### **The power of specialist, survivor-led cultural spaces**

**The results of our survey are clear.**

**Survivor-led cultural spaces are the strongest facilitators of access and inclusion.**

These spaces enable creativity, skills acquisition, confidence, creative community and arts practice - and need to be available across the UK. Our hope is that, over time, more cultural spaces will become safe and inclusive enough for CSA survivors to artistically thrive within them.

In the meantime, we ask cultural institutions to take steps towards our community by engaging in conversations, undertaking CSA survivor-led training, piloting CSA survivor-led participation and programming, commissioning research and investing in a fairer future for the millions of us currently missing from the arts.

This report is only possible because of the generous contributions from 88 CSA survivors who responded to our survey. Heartfelt thanks and solidarity.

**VIV GORDON**  
COMPANY

Viv Gordon Company is a child sexual abuse survivor-led arts organisation. We make multi-disciplinary performance rooted in social justice, survival and resistance.

Led by Viv Gordon, artist, CSA campaigner and survivor-activist, our work is ambitious, loud and defiant and grounded in the lived experience of CSA survivors. We work collaboratively, using theatre, writing, comedy, poetry and music to amplify the voices of survivors, build community power and work to create meaningful social change.

We are based in Bristol and work nationally across the UK.

**Want to be part of the change?**

Viv Gordon Company offer training and consultancy to support arts and cultural organisations to improve access and inclusion for CSA survivors.

Join Zebra Day CSA, our annual CSA Survivor Pride event on 31 January.

 **Email**

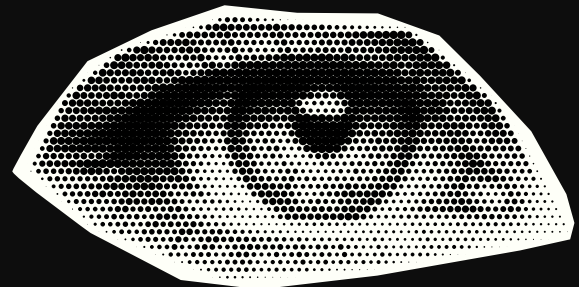
[hello@vivgordon.com](mailto:hello@vivgordon.com)

 **Website**

[vivgordoncompany.co.uk](http://vivgordoncompany.co.uk)

 **Social Media**

[@vivgordonco](https://www.instagram.com/vivgordonco)



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