

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – Mull Music Makers



**“Music workshops
for young people
on Mull”**



About this case study

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland’s evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12th year of operation. These case studies demonstrate some of the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study is about Mull Music Makers, a monthly violin and musicianship workshop on the Isle of Mull. It aims to give young people living on Mull the opportunity to learn musicianship skills, play the violin, take part in group music making and perform for an audience.

This case study was developed through discussions with three music tutors, the local programme co-ordinator, six parents and seven young people.

The approach in Mull

The Mendelssohn on Mull Trust holds a yearly festival on Mull, which includes four days of workshops for young people, delivered by professional musicians and culminating in a performance at the end of the festival. Parents and young people enjoyed these workshops but felt that once a year was not enough for young people to progress or develop, particularly those who did not have private music lessons through the year. One parent, felt the workshops were particularly beneficial for her child and wished to see more regular music activity on the island and for children to have the same opportunities as they would in other parts of Scotland. She decided to pursue the matter and with support from the Mendelssohn on Mull Trust the Mull Music Makers project was born.

“The festival workshop was fantastic; it was a huge confidence boost for him...so I went on a little ‘one man mission’...”

Mull Music Makers is the only music making activity of its kind on the Isle of Mull and was created to fill the gap in music provision in the area. The programme aims to:

- provide young people the opportunity to learn general music skills and to learn the violin;
- develop capacity and enhance skills locally by supporting local volunteers;
- increase sustainability of music education on the Island by liaising with the local authority and arts organisations; and
- develop confidence and wider skills in young people through group music making and performance.

The project began with a pilot workshop in 2013. This was funded through a local community group. Following the pilot programme, the Mendelssohn on Mull Trust applied for YMI funding to provide regular funding for the project. The Mendelssohn on Mull Trust was keen to employ a local parent to lead on the project and so the programme is primarily managed by a parent (the local programme co-ordinator) who has good community links. Discussions with local parents and teachers found that the pilot workshop was successful and had good community backing which encouraged the co-ordinator to apply for YMI funding. In the interim period between application and receipt of YMI funds, the Mendelssohn on Mull Trust funded the first three workshops.



The programme is open to all young people of school age living in Mull. There is no fee but the project accepts donations from parents. The workshops are held in a central location, usually in Craginure close to the ferry terminal. The project provides a community bus, with a volunteer driver to help transport young people from more remote parts of the Island. Music tutors travel to the Island on by ferry and stay for the duration of the weekend.

The Mull Music Makers workshops have around 40 regular participants each month, with most participants at primary school age. There is a waiting list of a few months. In the first year of delivery the programme ran monthly and participants could choose to attend as many or few workshops as they wished. Now that young people are progressing with their skills the programme is asking parents to commit their children to one year of monthly workshops to ensure that young people get the most of the programme and maintain continuity of learning.

The programme costs £38,000 to run each year. YMI provided around £24,000 and Argyll and Bute Council provides £3,000. The remainder is funded through donations from parents and community members (over £2000), applications to various trusts and foundations, local fundraising and some resources given in kind. Funding covers the cost of the local co-ordinator, tutors (including their travel and accommodation costs), venue costs and the cost of instruments required for the young people.

Activities

The music workshops run on Saturday and Sunday for one weekend every month. All participants attend both days and all activities are conducted in groups. Time is allocated for music lessons ('master class sessions'), musicianship sessions and ensemble playing. There are two sessions each day, with beginners in the morning and more advanced players taking part in the afternoon. The structure of the programme has allowed for new players to be accommodated into group work without compromising the progress of those who are more advanced.

Because there are limited formal music making opportunities on Mull, most participants are beginners and have not played an instrument before. The workshops focus on building up musicianship skills in rhythm and melody before the young people learn to hold and play the violin. Once they are ready to play the project provides participants with a violin.

The young players develop their musicianship through songs, rhymes and games as well as learning the technical aspects of playing the violin. They also work towards the workshop and performance at the Mendelssohn on Mull festival, which takes place during July each year.

Young people choose from a list of pieces to play and help develop the themes for the festival workshops. Last year the participants also created artwork related to the theme to enhance the performance.

Although there are no formal links to the Curriculum for Excellence, much of the work contributes to its four key capacities as well as more specific outcomes for expressive arts. Many of the tutors are also music teachers in formal education and are familiar with the ethos and principles of the Curriculum for Excellence approach.



Support and training

The programme works with a bank of around eight tutors, all of whom are highly trained professional musicians and music teachers. Many of the tutors have specialist knowledge of particular teaching methods or working with particular groups of young people, for example, children with complex needs. This provides a natural environment for peer learning and tutors themselves are keen to learn and share new techniques.

Tutors have received external continuing professional development sessions from Orff Schulwerk in the Orff Approach to music education. This approach integrates music, movement, drama and speech into lessons that recreate a child's world of play.

The programme is also working closely with parents to ensure that participants maintain progression and momentum between the workshops. The tutors use many methods of music teaching including the Suzuki method, which encourages parents to attend lessons and take notes to ensure that pupils maintain skills and techniques when practicing at home.

“For kids unable to get lessons between workshops, parents are their biggest support.”

It also helps parents to understand the challenges their children face when learning to play the violin.

“Parents get to see that there are many elements needed for playing the violin and observing helps them to appreciate the concentration and ability that their children achieve in order to make a good sound.”

This element of parental training will be further developed as the workshops progress.

Working with others

Partnership working was felt to be very important, particularly the partnership between the local co-ordinator and parents. Parental investment is key to the successful running of the workshops as young people are not able to attend without parental support, particularly when there are numerous other activities available for young people at weekends. As well as incorporating parents in the workshops as much as possible, the local co-ordinator keeps in regular contact with them and acts as a point of contact for tutors and parents. Parental involvement has helped to shape the programme over the last few years and feedback from parents has been taken on board. It was felt that the partnerships are very strong and are working well.

“The constant dialogue is really important.”

Impact on children

Tutors constantly take feedback from participants and try to tailor the programme of activities to ensure that all young people are enjoying the sessions. The project has also recently undertaken a survey of parents from which initial responses are very positive.

Skill development

Mull Music Makers has helped young people to develop important core musicianship skills, which can be used with any type of music making. Young people have shown real progression in their skills from the original annual workshops. At the last Mendelssohn on Mull festival most young people participated through song and percussion. The festival ran four days of workshops before the performance but this was not enough time to teach young people to play the violin. This year, all participants will be able to perform on the violin with good technique, which is considered to be a strong achievement for players and tutors.



“I think it’s amazing seeing such a huge group of children all playing the fiddle...having started from scratch.”

Confidence

Children are also growing in confidence by being involved in Mull Music Makers. Workshops are structured around group work, which helps participants to feel more comfortable than taking part in solo activities. Seeing and listening to their tutors and peers has allowed many participants to develop confidence to a level that they can now perform confidently on their own.

“My daughter was quite self-conscious and shy. She didn’t like doing things in front of people but this has given her a lot of confidence.”

One young participant has formed a band with her friends called ‘the Flaming Fiddles’, which won first prize at a talent show.

Wider skills

The skills taught through the workshops have wider benefits for young people. It was felt that listening skills, discipline and teamwork all had much wider benefits beyond music and would help with lifelong learning.

Attending Mull Music Makers workshops has helped with young people’s behaviour and tutors have seen positive changes in the participants.

“He’s really taken to this and I’ve seen a real change in him.”

Interest and momentum

The structure of the workshops and the fact that they are monthly rather than weekly has been helpful in maintaining interest and momentum with the young participants.

All young people we spoke to said they enjoyed attending the workshops and were a lot happier and more interested in music since participating.

“I like mostly singing and playing the violin together and having a really good time.”

“I like the teachers, they’re all really nice and I like learning new tunes.”

Being linked to the Mendelssohn on Mull festival has also helped to give the programme a strong context and participants know that they are working towards a performance.

Impact on tutors

The tutors involved with the project are professional musicians and trained music teachers. This project has given the tutors a chance to work alongside other music tutors experienced in many different areas. They have used this opportunity to share skills and ideas on structuring group lessons and using different teaching resources and techniques. This is beneficial for the workshops but also for the tutors.

“This inevitably has a positive impact on our own teaching outwith the project.”

Difference for the wider community and youth music sector

The workshops have brought young people from all over Mull together on a regular basis and allowed them to meet people with whom they will be attending secondary school. Given the distance and travel time across the Island this has had a positive effect on the community. Parents (and pets!) are encouraged to stay during the workshops and this provides a good opportunity for parental networking and socialising.

“When you have such a scattered population anything that brings people together is really important.”

Parents commented that there is very little in the way of a youth music sector on Mull or across Argyll and Bute, with limited music provision in schools. As a direct result of Mull Music Makers the local co-ordinator and a local music teacher have created a separate YMI project to further address the need for music provision in the area. This project is delivering singing workshops to primary school pupils in Mull through the YMI Formula Fund stream. It is hoped that in the coming years the impact of Mull Music Makers and the school based project will be seen more directly as the young players mature and create a music scene to perform and share their skills.

“As these kids progress they will bring music into the home and into the community.”

Key successes and lessons learned

Key successes of the programme so far include:

- the team of music tutors providing a variety unique skills to each other and the young participants;
- placing a high value on musicianship as the basis for learning an instrument;
- development of another YMI project in local primary schools as direct result of the workshops;
- embedding a genuine interest and positive affiliation with music for young people;
- a high level of commitment from participants continuing to return to the workshops; and
- bringing together members of the community from across the Isle of Mull.

“If you have music when you’re young you can take it with you for the rest of your life.”

Parents and tutors agreed that the success of the programme implementation was largely due to the local co-ordinator who lives on Mull and is well known in the community. It was suggested that should anyone wish to replicate the project they ought to appoint a suitably knowledgeable local co-ordinator to manage the project and communicate effectively with local residents. It was also noted that the programme developed from a longstanding annual event, with which local residents were very familiar, rather than starting ‘from scratch.’

“There’s no way this would be happening if it wasn’t for her.”

The Island location poses a number of challenges, which the programme works hard to overcome. Primarily the spread of people over Mull poses some transport difficulties. The workshops are always delivered at a central a location and a free bus is often provided for those who are furthest away. This has helped to overcome some of the challenges imposed by the geography of the island. The running of the workshops is dependent on music tutors travelling to Mull by ferry, should the ferry be cancelled, there is no alternative route. On occasion, young people from Iona have been unable to attend due to ferry cancellation.

The Isle of Mull is a popular tourist destination. As such, many parents work in industries that become particularly busy during the warmer months of the year and this sometimes results in participants being unable to attend due parental work commitments.

What's next?

In the near future, the programme hopes to be able to increase the focus on reading music, providing more performance opportunities for young people and gathering more feedback. As the programme grows, it hopes to make more links into the rich history of traditional music present on the Island.

Further into the future it is hoped that Mull Music Makers will establish itself as a high quality violin academy on Mull.

The project is in discussions with the newly formed Youth Arts Hub in Argyll and Bute to determine how they can work together and share knowledge. Music Makers continues to liaise with local music organisations, such as Comar, and is considering forging links to visiting musicians and allocating young people tickets to local music events, to make the most of any opportunities available.

