

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – Music Plus



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 the Music Plus programme, which is delivered by the Scottish Music Centre. This national programme offers young people aged 14 to 19 a six month mentoring programme. It is designed to offer practical experience of working in the music industry and high quality one-to-one mentoring from professionals. The programme is flexible and participants come with varying levels of experience. It involves mentoring sessions as well as a variety of experience days and events run by professionals, and peer-to-peer workshops with current and previous participants.

This case study was informed by discussions with nine young people, four mentors and two people involved in planning and managing the project.

The approach

Music Plus was set up in 2009 by the Scottish Music Centre after it was approached by Creative Scotland to develop a mentoring programme for young people in Glasgow. It has since expanded year on year and now covers all of Scotland.

The programme mainly targets young people from areas of high deprivation, where they may not have access to opportunities or may not know what is available for them. However the programme is open to any applicants from all areas of Scotland.

Mentors for the programme are “hand-picked” by the Scottish Music Centre for their skill and experience working in the industry and with young people.

Each mentoring session is tailored to the personal needs of the young person. Mentors encourage participants to set and achieve targeted outcomes. These can vary from specific technical skills to softer skills, such as increasing confidence,

general wellbeing, communication skills and taking steps to performing in front of an audience.

“I want to open their mind to the range of possibilities so that they know anything is possible.”

The programme links informally to the Curriculum for Excellence but the outcomes that young people work towards are self generated. The programme is deliberately an open format and informal to allow young people to pursue their interests at their own pace. The mentors do refer participants onto further education or apprenticeship opportunities where they express an interest.

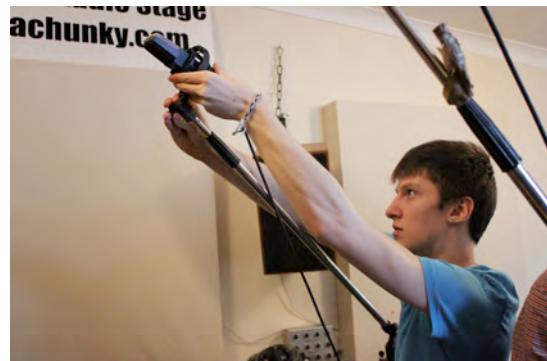
“You can’t fail at Music Plus.”

“With Music Plus they have a certain level of freedom to explore.”

The annual cost of running Music Plus is £104,000. Of this, £90,000 is funded by YMI with the remainder financed through the Robertston Trust and provided through in kind support. As the programme aims to be inclusive and accessible, a large portion of the budget is spent reimbursing travel costs and travel time.

Activities

Music Plus is primarily promoted through local youth organisations and word of mouth. As the project is regularly oversubscribed it does not require wider advertising. Young people apply to the programme online before being passed on to the regional co-ordinator for an interview to determine the best mentor for their musical interests. Once allocated a regional mentor, young people decide how they wish to proceed and can choose from a variety of options depending upon their interests and needs. These can be taster sessions, working on sustained progress in one area of interest, or a combination of these elements. Mentoring and workshops on offer include, but are not limited to, vocal/instrumental coaching, song writing, band management, sound production and DJ’ing. The programme also has a series of online tutorials that are freely available.



There is currently a waiting list to be admitted to Music Plus and these applicants will have to wait until the next round of funding to begin working with a mentor.

“What we do well is to help people who have an interest and some skill but are not quite ready to showcase their talents, and Music Plus helps them get that stage.”

The programme supports 100 to 150 young people and up to 80 mentors each year across Scotland. Participants are normally allocated six sessions with their mentor,

which tend to be spread over a period of up to nine months. There is some flexibility in the structure. Where a participant is particularly enthusiastic extra time is allocated to allow them to make the most of the opportunity.

“When we see any creativity and potential it is encouraged as much as possible.”

Music Plus is generally offered on an individual basis but young people are encouraged to meet and work together at workshops, showcases, group sessions and experience days where they often form bands or groups to perform jointly at showcase events.

The programme tries to encourage participants to perform and make use of their music skills in the community as much as possible. Events are hosted by Music Plus and in some regions, the co-ordinators have organised regular performance slots with local venues or festivals.

Mentors also provide support for young people wishing to further their career in music by helping with progression routes such as personal statements, applications and directing towards opportunities in industry or further education. They also have an element of pastoral care, as many young people come from difficult or troubled backgrounds.

“Sometimes it isn’t even about the music, it’s just about them.”

“I like to create an environment that is safe and inviting to ensure that they continue for the full six sessions and get the most out of the programme.”

The programme is planned entirely by the participants in accordance with the areas of music and the industry they wish to explore. Mentors help to guide, offer options and opportunities and provide coaching. The level of guidance varies upon the individual and their stage of music development.

“They do most of the preliminary planning of their programme and we work to make their vision possible.”

Working with others

The mentors and regional co-ordinators (who are also mentors) have strong professional backgrounds in music usually with one or two areas of expertise.

Local community partnerships are important for the Music Plus programme in all regions and especially for regions covering a large geographical area. Most areas do not have their own premises or dedicated facilities from which to conduct meetings, rehearse or perform. The resources required are found in the community through local music hubs, youth centres and community centres.

“We can’t do it on our own. We definitely need partners to pool resources in order to give young people the best of what is around.”

Community partnerships also help to promote Music Plus and help to recruit new participants, particularly in areas of deprivation and to recruit young people at risk or in care. Seeing partnership working in action also helps introduce young people to the idea of networking and collaboration in the industry.

An important lesson learned was to choose partner organisations carefully and to build and maintain these relationships. Because of this approach they have successfully built an active network of industry professionals and can “mobilise anyone at anytime, across the country” and can provide mentoring on anything from “the accordion to DJ’ing”.

“If you don’t have a fixed hub or venue with resources it is important to make connections with existing services and form partnerships.”

“The key is relationships.”

Support and training

The Scottish Music Centre has a training programme for new mentors called ‘Train the Trainer’. This involves shadowing, observing lessons and a high degree of feedback and reflection. Eight people have undergone this process and last year three of these trainees were in the Highlands. Some have also been former participants that have returned to the programme having had such a positive experience of it themselves.

The Scottish Music Centre also provides opportunities for training and continuing professional development and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) for mentors working with vulnerable young people.

Some mentors expressed that continuing support or training could be beneficial and that it might be valuable for mentors to meet and learn from each other.



Impact on young people

All participants are asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of their period. Feedback is usually very positive. Regional mentors also gather feedback more informally through the workshops and showcase events, where parents and relatives also comment positively on the effect of the programme.

“Some parents are really, really appreciative of what we do, especially if they have no clue about music and would not have been able to provide this help for their child.”

Recently they have also been working on video evaluations. These work well to capture important aspects of their work that are more qualitative in nature and are easier for young people to contribute towards in an informal way.

“The video evaluations work well to measure the non-tangible things.”

Young people involved in this case study expressed an increase in confidence. For some young people Music Plus has provided them not only with the confidence but also the practical opportunity to use their skills in their local community.

“I feel like I know what I’m capable of and I know what I can do if I try.”

One participant stated that it has helped her to succeed in her prelim exams and to proceed to the next stage of a national talent competition. Others have appreciated the practical support they receive to perform at local venues alongside seasoned performers and to promote their music to a wider audience.

“[Mentor] helped with my audition for Teen Star and now I’m through to the next round!”

Music Plus has also encouraged participants to express themselves in a non-judgemental environment. This ties into the pastoral aspect of the programme which provides general support as well as music industry mentoring.

“It gives you someone to talk to. If you have any questions they’re the ones to ask.”

“She [Mentor] has been really encouraging and gets us out of our comfort zone and trying new stuff.”

Many young people from Music Plus go on to pursue further education in music or to work in the industry. Young people stated that they felt more aware of the industry and how to work in it and promote themselves. Some young people have used the programme and its resources as a stepping stone to further progression in the industry with great success.

Music Plus evaluations found that around 40% of participants intended to take up further education in music and around 30% were looking into employment or training opportunities.

“It’s good for promotion and making contacts, networking. It’s got us a lot of gigs which is great because more people have heard our music and we’ve made more money.”

Impact on deliverers and the youth music sector

Mentors and regional co-ordinators felt that their work was satisfying and encouraged them to further expand their own skills. The main benefit was felt to be that they were providing young people with a service that covers a wide range of areas in the music industry and is bespoke to the individual.

“I like seeing what people are capable of, it’s inspiring and makes me want to develop things myself.”

The greatest difference for the youth music sector was felt to be in areas that are remote or do not currently have much youth music provision. In these areas Music Plus creates a high quality and safe music scene for young people to be part of. And young people that have gone through Music Plus are now organising their own events.

“We are bringing gigs of a certain technical standard to places that wouldn’t normally get it.”

One of the more practical aspects of the programme is encouraging industry standard practice and addressing a lack of knowledge in certain areas for young people e.g. standard rates of pay.

“For freelance musicians it’s about knowing what they ought to be earning and increasing knowledge and resources so they can set up as a freelancer. So we can provide industry specific information on tax, insurance, setting up small business...etc... which is not being done elsewhere.”

The work of the programme has created an awareness of the variety of options available to young people and that this in turn may have an impact on music related courses and course providers.

“It is important for young people to know the different ways in which music can be involved in their lives: formal music education and qualifications, a job or even career in music, employed/self-employed or a hobby that they can enjoy.”

Successes

Key successes of this programme include:

- the national scale of the programme, providing music provision and mentoring for young people regardless of their geographical location;
- the migration of skills to areas with previously little opportunity for young people;
- the wide remit of the programme involving every aspect of working in the music industry;
- the high standard of provision and access to working industry professionals;
- the informal approach and long term structure; and
- the holistic approach that caters for the wellbeing of young people as well as their musical interests.

“One of our strengths is that we can take it out to young people.”

“What separates Music Plus from other music programmes is the people that run it; their background and the fact that they are all well respected musicians in the wider music community.”

Lessons learned

The geography of Scotland means that some young people live in remote areas that are difficult to access and do not have many resources. This can make it difficult for mentors and participants to meet and to pursue the activity of their choice. Making opportunities accessible to these young people can be difficult but still remains a high priority for the programme. Music Plus ensures that young people are never out of pocket for programme related expenditures.

“I work a lot on finding safe and central spaces that are easily accessible for young people.”

Because the age range of participants spans from adolescent to adult, there can be difficulties in organising venues for rehearsing and performing. For example, some rural areas do not have many opportunities for under 18's to perform and conversely some youth centres are not keen on allowing over 18's on the premises. Because of this, some areas felt they might benefit from having their own physical hub.

“I would love to have a dedicated centre like the one in Glasgow where people could get together and we could have our own identity.”

As the programme is self-directed, mentors sometimes have trouble reaching the young people to organise meetings and maintaining good communication can be time consuming.

“We need to be sure that people are dedicated and have a good attitude because it's frustrating to have travelled all the way in only to have nobody show up.”

Although they have many ideas, expanding the programme can be a challenge as planners do not have a great deal of time to work on new projects or funding applications whilst managing Music Plus.

Those involved in planning the programme noted that they do not have a proportionate level of applications from minority and ethnic communities. It was felt to be difficult to target them, without discriminating against other young people and the programme remains open to young people from any background.

The project manager advised that time is required to build a successful national programme and that it is best to scale up gradually. It was also noted that for this programme to be successful, the mentors and co-ordinators were very carefully chosen not just for their practical skills but also for their interpersonal skills and suitability for working with young people.

“A big part of our success is the area co-ordinators. They make the project work and advertise to the right people in the right places.”

What's next?

The programme is always aiming to reach more young people and hopes to continue growing over the coming years.

Music Plus is also in the process of becoming ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) accredited so that young people can receive a formal qualification through the programme. The ASDAN awarding body is particularly inclusive and can be tailored to individual abilities.

Ideally the next stage for Music Plus would be to create a record label that would be run by professionals and shadowed by young people that could eventually take over and continue to run the label as a productive and income generating business.

Music Plus also hopes to expand and create a legacy by working at a European level with Erasmus+. This would involve an exchange programme for young people coming to Scotland and going to mainland Europe to share music and benefit from a cross-cultural mentoring programme.