

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – Edinburgh Youth Music Forum



**“Working with
Edinburgh’s youth music
providers.”**



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 Edinburgh Youth Music Forum (EYMF). It was set up in 2008 along with forums in every local authority area as part of the YMI strategy. The Forum has a broad membership but also has many opportunities open to non-members.

This case study was informed through discussions with six Board members and the EYMF Development Manager.

The approach

EYMF aims to:

- strengthen and support musicians working with young people;
- promote and develop skills for best practice; and
- provide a hub that can share information and job opportunities.

In 2010 EYMF, which was previously part of the local authority, became a registered charity and limited company. It is managed by the Development Manager; the only paid staff member whose role is to “hold the Forum together”. It is run by a Board of 12 members has a wider membership of around 40 members. The membership is mixed, including individuals that are both self-employed and formally employed and organisations. EYMF also has a mailing list of over 100 individuals and organisations who are invited to participate in Forum activities.

The Development Manager organises events, manages the budget and liaises with partner organisations with some support from Board members. She also handles membership, incoming queries and all administration for EYMF. The post is part time and funding covers one day per week.

Some of the work undertaken by the Forum falls under national strategies by default,

such as strands of Curriculum for Excellence and Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) but currently there are no formal links. The Forum is planning to incorporate this into its work by having formal training sessions on these national strategies.

The Forum received £15,400 from YMI in 2013 which funded the costs of the development manager, events, media development, research and administration. It also received a separate fund of £2,400 from YMI towards continuing professional development. These funds have now been exhausted and the Development Manager will continue to give a significant portion of her own time voluntarily until further funding is secured.

Activities

Edinburgh Youth Music Forum (EYMF) hosts a range of free events providing training and support to people working in the youth music sector. This includes continuing professional development, peer support, practical support, residential events and SwapShops. SwapShops are peer-to-peer learning events where participants can learn from each others' skills and experience.

Topics covered at the events vary from improving teaching skills and managing funding applications to facilitating group work and dealing with children at risk of self-harm or suicide. SwapShops are open to anyone interested in the topic but EYMF also holds some events for members only.

Reflection is an important aspect of all the work and participants are encouraged to take time to reflect on their work and new learning.

Much of the delivery is geared towards helping practitioners to provide best quality support and engagement as well as managing circumstances that may arise in the youth work sector.

“We do a lot of ‘non-formal’ work, which is not always about the music directly but about how to work with people and deal with situations.”

Many of the Forum members, by the nature of their job, are not always available to attend the workshops/events that are usually held on Tuesday evenings. The Forum now holds full day Saturday workshops. These provide more detailed insight into the subject area and hope to encourage more people to attend.

The Forum works hard to remain relevant and continuously adds to its bank of knowledge and contacts. Where possible the Forum will invite artists to hold events or workshops while they are visiting Edinburgh on other business.

Locally the Forum is developing a library of shared resources including books, instruments and equipment.



Working with others

Partnership working is extremely important to EYMF. It works closely with a number of partners around Edinburgh and across Scotland, including educational institutions, the local authority and youth organisations.

“It is important to bring together the formal and informal sectors of music making.”

Many EYMF members also deliver or have their organisation deliver training and workshops for the Forum.

“Working with partners is essential for the EYMF and means that the training and events that we can offer can be stronger than if we did it ourselves...a lot of the organisations signed up as members do offer training...so it is sort of in house but equally supporting local organisations.”

Members were very positive about the ability of EYMF to connect community musicians to one another.

“Meeting people through the forum has been helpful to reinforce links to musicians I can use in my own project.”

Impact on Forum Members

Feedback is gathered at all events. Recently, for example, EYMF conducted a survey with its members from which feedback was generally positive. All respondents stated that being a member of the Edinburgh Youth Music Forum was beneficial to them or their organisation.

The most significant impact that members appreciated was the ability of EYMF to create a community and support system for individuals and organisations that work with young people in music.

“I began to feel part of a community of youth music practitioners, which I hadn’t felt before...you can find yourself operating in a bit of a vacuum, especially if you’re really busy.”

The Edinburgh Youth Music Forum has enabled networking opportunities which help members to raise the profile of their own work and share useful information.

Members felt that meeting like-minded people was especially valuable and gave them the sense that other musicians were dealing with the same issues.

“It’s good to know that other people are facing the same challenges as myself.”

Members spoke highly of the events, SwapShops and particularly the most recent residential event, which covered many different topics. Members stated that they

appreciated understanding what other musicians in the youth music sector were doing outside their own field.

“I enjoyed being able to spend full days with lots of people to get to the root of some of their common issues.”

Members appreciated that the events are free, providing an opportunity to try things they might not have otherwise. In some cases, this has led to new partnerships and collaborations.

“I feel I’ve become more of a practitioner over the past few years...the training provided by EYMF is the most useful asset.”

“It’s beneficial to see what other people are doing and I’ve strengthened my links with other musicians.”

The role of being on a formal board also provided beneficial experience for members, some of whom have no prior experience of this type of activity.

“It’s brought practitioners who don’t normally work in an organisational or governance setting into that role. It’s an added level of experience for them.”

Impact on the youth music sector and wider community

Members felt that the all of the work of EYMF was contributing to enhancing the youth music sector. Improvements in their knowledge and skills has a subsequent impact upon the young people that they work with. It has particularly strengthened skills around working with hard to reach and at risk young people.

“For every member who learns something new from one of our sessions, that new knowledge can only impact on the young people they work with for the better and continue to strengthen youth music in Scotland.”

Members we spoke with felt that the Forum was helping to raise the profile of community music.

“The EYMF is helping community music to get recognised as an important and valuable part of human endeavour that is important for well being.”



Successes

The key successes of EYMF include:

- **Responding to demand** - members can submit requests for workshops or training as their needs arise and EYMF works to ensure that wherever possible, this need is met.
- **Providing musicians with a community** - the one great thing agreed upon by most was the “vibrant community of musicians” that allowed for “lots of stimulating conversations and people from diverse backgrounds.”
- **Offering a variety of training and resources** – EYMF regularly engages with local and international musicians to provide a diverse array of opportunities.
- **Expanding to a wide reaching audience including the formal sector** - there are now a number of school teachers attending the events in order to learn new ways to engage their pupils. This expansion and relationship building with the formal sector was felt to be important for ensuring that community practitioners are recognised as talented, proficient and professional to work with young people.

“Community practitioners can be a very isolated group of people and I’m glad that that the EYMF is working to tackle this.”

“The best resources of the forum are the members themselves and the opportunities to meet people and get talking”

Challenges

Aside from having a limited budget, the main challenge faced by EYMF is bringing people together at events. Due to the nature of their jobs, many members work evenings and weekends and it is rare that they are all able to attend together. Member stated that they wished they could attend more but that they simply could not always make themselves available.

“I can’t go as much as I used to due to other time commitments but I would if I could.”

The Development Manager aims to accommodate schedules as much as possible by running SwapShops on weekends as well as weekdays.

Some members were keen to see more community musicians attending regularly to keep up standards of practice across the field of community music.

What's next?

EYMF hopes to continue progressing toward improved links with formal music sector by working with schools and school teachers.

Members are currently involved in discussions about the future direction of the Forum. Along with many ideas, EYMF would like to consider the possibility of working more directly with young people, particularly those interested in a future in music.

Upcoming events include co-hosting the Community Music Activity Commission Symposium event with the International Society for Music Education and involvement in the Edinburgh Youth Music festival.