

Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

Case Study – Young Music Makers in Edinburgh



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

“Helping young people believe in themselves.”



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 Young Music Makers project in Edinburgh. This project began in 2011 and provides group and individual music making opportunities. It is delivered in a specialist school for young people who are experiencing significant social, behavioural and educational difficulties and who cannot maintain a full-time place in mainstream education. Many are also looked after away from home or in kinship care.

This case study was developed through discussions with the project manager and the local authority service manager. It also includes information from a variety of evaluation materials compiled by the project manager, including a video evaluation featuring interviews with staff members, stakeholders and young people.

The approach

The school where the programme is delivered provides education and social care for young people aged 13 to 16. It offers core subjects, but with fewer regular opportunities for pupils to access the arts than in mainstream schooling.

Young Music Makers began in 2011 and provides young people with group and individual music making activity. Individual work is mainly focused on song writing. For young people electing to include music in their curriculum, the group music activity forms part of their course work. The project aims to:

- provide long term, practical music tuition;
- work with young people who do not have access to music making activities;
- promote expression through music and develop talent and creativity;
- encourage the development of transferable skills for learning, life and work including confidence, self-discipline and team work; and
- work with community music providers.

For many pupils, Young Music Makers is the only music making opportunity they have ever had, and at present it is the only musical activity offered in the school.

The young people involved generally have chaotic lifestyles outside school, mental health issues and difficulty communicating. Some have caring responsibilities. With this in mind, the project works a great deal on building positive relationships with pupils through music and does not set a prescribed programme of activity.

“They need the time, flexibility and effort that community musicians can provide.”

The project integrates Curriculum for Excellence outcomes. As well as the main outcomes for the expressive arts the programme provides an ideal platform for interdisciplinary learning. Pupils are able to improve their health and wellbeing and listening skills throughout the project and many who would not engage in a traditional classroom setting have developed their literacy skills through song writing.

This YMI project costs between £15,000 and £20,000 each year. The project has received funding from both the formal and informal funding streams. This covers the cost of music tutors, instruments, venue hire, learning materials and recording time in a professional studio. The project also receives financial and in-kind support from City of Edinburgh Council Education Authority as well as in kind support from music tutors at the recording studio.

Activities

The project is delivered by three trained and qualified community musicians, one of whom is also the project manager. Sessions take place twice a week and participation is always voluntary although every effort is made to encourage sustained participation.

Group sessions last for one and a half hours and individual sessions last for one hour. Group work is usually a mixture of singing and song writing. Individual sessions focus on instrumental tuition and song writing. Instruments available to learn are voice, guitar, bass guitar and ukulele. Pupils are also taught music production and sound engineering through computer programmes such as Logic and by spending time in a professional recording studio. Introducing the technical side of music making has encouraged more young men to join the sessions, some of whom have also moved on to singing and song writing. It has also helped with other areas of the curriculum such as technologies and numeracy.

Pupils may attend as many sessions as they wish and can receive up to five hours of music per week during school time. In addition, the pupils are encouraged to record their music in a professional recording studio and to share their CD's with friends and family/carers. Although there is a loose structure, sessions are mostly participant led.

In 2014/15 the project worked with around 35 pupils aged between 13 and 16. This represents around 75% of the total school roll. The project also supports staff to learn

instruments alongside the pupils. This helps reinforce to the young people that learning can be lifelong and helps to build strong relationships between teachers and pupils.

At the end of each term tutors, staff and students perform a concert for the school, to which friends and family/carers are invited. The concerts have been very successful and provide pupils with an opportunity for their achievements to be recognised.

One of the project tutors also works with a local youth organisation. Pupils leaving the school can continue music making through local authority Activity Agreements with this organisation. Activity Agreements are a national programme for those young people who may not, without additional support, make a successful transition to work, further education or training. This helps the participants maintain a level of continuity with the project, which is important to keep them engaged at a potentially turbulent time of transition.

Support and training

Last year, in line with YMI guidelines, the project took on a trainee to support the programme of music delivery. This has been a great success and the trainee is now formally employed as a music tutor on the project, providing the majority of instrumental tuition and digital music teaching.

Both the project manager and the trainee undertook a significant amount of training to help deliver the project. This included training sessions on child protection, working with looked after children and song writing with children. In addition they have attended a number of sessions delivered by the Edinburgh Youth Music Forum (also YMI funded), whose members deliver training and peer support for musicians working with young people.

The new tutor receives regular appraisal sessions with the project manager. All three music tutors take time to debrief after each session and are encouraged to reflect on their work and learn from each other.

Working with others

The partnership between the music tutors and the school staff was deemed to be vital to the success of the project. The project manager and teaching staff created a dedicated database for sharing information to keep both parties updated. These positive relationships helped create more positive outcomes for young people as teachers were actively engaged in many aspects of the programme and were happy to provide support for music activity on days when the music tutors were not present.

Impact on children and young people

The project manager found that too much emphasis on evaluation through traditional techniques such as questionnaires had a detrimental effect on the carefully built relationships between tutors and pupils. Instead, pupil views are gathered informally

and regularly during the project and through conversations and interviews, which are recorded on video and used for evaluation reports.

Along with developing musical skills, this project had a significant impact on young peoples' personal and social development, life skills, self-esteem and confidence.

“It’s helped me become more confident with standing in front of crowds of people. It’s made me confident about my voice, and sharing it with people.”

The project has provided a safe way for young people to begin exploring their personal issues, many of which they may never have addressed before. One to one song writing sessions provided a chance for young people to explore their emotions more deeply than in group work. These sessions were key to the trust and relationship building with young people. It was also crucial that the community musicians engaged in the project had the professional skills and knowledge to build and develop these relationships constructively.

“In song writing, it seems to hit a vein therapeutically. Particularly for young women they are immediately writing songs about their inner world and the most meaningful things that have happened to them.”

A particularly noticeable change in young people was in their behaviour and attitudes. Over the course of the programme young people learned to take constructive criticism and to persevere with plans until an end goal is reached. The concert performance helped young people raise their aspirations, develop coping strategies for dealing with fear and challenge, and build confidence instead of walking away. For some pupils, this was the first time that they had worked towards something, achieved an end result and received positive feedback from adults.

“Some young people would have struggled to engage for ten minutes and now they’re spending six hours in a recording studio.”

Group working was previously seen to be a challenge for many of the pupils at the centre. Young Music Makers has helped young people to improve their team working skills a great deal. Young people have formed positive relationships with each other and with adults, using music to find a common ground. For many, this was the first time that they had been able to develop and maintain this kind of connection.

For some young people, the music project gave them something to look forward to and encouraged them to keep attending school regularly.

“I think there are lots of benefits in terms of attendance it’s been really motivating for young people...it might just be one small part of their day but it means they come along for the whole day.”

In some cases, the music project has helped to nurture the relationship between the pupils and their family/carers and friends. Family/carers and friends are invited to attend the concert staged by the pupils. This is often the first time that the young person has performed for an audience and also the first time that their family/carer has heard them play music. The experience was often emotional but positive.

“The best thing I’ve ever done.”

“I know now that this is what I want to do with my life.”

Last year two pupils went on to pursue music; one at college and another through a local skills course. The project manager stated that the positive effects are “not a fix for everything” but that a positive musical experience is something that the young people can take with them, wherever they go.

“For the ones who engage it is a unique opportunity where money, time and love are poured into them and they respond to that eventually.”

Impact on deliverers and the music sector

Feedback is gathered from teaching staff regularly through questionnaires distributed at in-service days.

Initially many of the teaching staff were sceptical about the merits of a group music making project with this group of pupils. However the success of the project showed staff that with the right approach, this type of project can engage young people in a meaningful way with real impact.

Learning and performing instruments alongside the pupils has been a positive experience and has helped to strengthen the relationship between teachers and pupils. Being actively involved in the programme has allowed teachers to fully appreciate the value of the work and their positive attitude towards the project has encouraged young people to be involved.

One individual who planned and delivered the project felt that she had learned a great deal from being involved in the project. She has improved her project management skills, such as time management, funding applications and partnership working with the local authority. More importantly, she felt that she had learned a lot about working with young people in a genuine way and understanding the dynamics of those relationships.

“I have no qualms in saying that it is fundamentally life changing.”

Successes

Key successes of this programme include:

- achieving sustained engagement from young people with the programme;
- forming positive relationships, particularly between young people and adults; and
- young people learning to take constructive criticism, developing motivation, building confidence and expressing emotions in a positive way.

These successes are because the programme was flexible and able to react to young people and their needs. The programme also insisted on taking a very

professional approach by recruiting highly qualified musicians as tutors and using professional recording spaces. This gave young people a rich experience, making them feel valued, sometimes for the first time in their lives, and that will potentially help them make positive choices about and in the future.

“When I first started I didn’t think I was going to come to a recording studio and actually work with a real band, so it’s quite amazing that you get to work with people like that.”

The project manager and music tutor both spent much time and effort “going the extra yard” to ensure that young people had the best possible experience.

The project manager felt that one great thing to come out of the project was the way that music helped some of the young people to believe in themselves.

Lessons learned

The biggest challenge faced by the project is insecurity over the future, due to uncertainty of funding. Over the years, the project has received varying amounts of funding. This has meant that it has not always been able to provide a consistent year-long programme of activity. This has an impact on the longevity of the programme and how it is delivered. Although it is possible to deliver activities for short periods of time it was agreed that this programme has most impact when delivered over a full year. This gives tutors time to develop genuine trusting relationships and the young people benefit more from a sustained and predictable routine than a short term project with no follow up activity.

“It needs longevity otherwise it is an injustice to the kids. They need to know that they can believe in it and engage with something solid.”

Communication with teaching staff was difficult to begin with but through good communication the project manager has developed a positive working relationship with them, which benefits all involved.

“Communication with staff is key to this project working.”

Having the right music tutors on the project was agreed to be very important to developing the relationships that led to sustained engagement with programme.

What next?

In the future, the project hopes to focus more on young people transitioning out of school, as this is a pivotal time in their lives.

The local authority is keen to implement this project in at least one more school next year with a view to extending the project more widely in the future.