



Community Chest Report

Introduction

SoCo Music Project was awarded funding through Southampton City Council's Community Chest Grant in 2017 to provide creative opportunities for vulnerable adult groups. This has seen us deliver weekly music-making sessions for adults with physical and/or learning disabilities in partnership with local day service groups: R Community and Way Ahead Day Services.



Our Outcomes

Of the four grant priorities, SoCo focused on the following priority area:

Priority: People in Southampton live safe, healthy, independent lives e.g. projects that help residents to live safe, active, healthy lives and live independently for longer, that intervene early and take a preventative approach.

In order to achieve this, SoCo's primary objectives were to:

- Improve sense of wellbeing amongst adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.
- Increase skills and awareness of Music Leaders and support staff to reduce or remove barriers to music-making for adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.
- Increase the musical composition and performance skills of adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.

A number of outcome indicators were established and these form the basis of the evidence sought throughout the evaluation of the project.

Our Approach

Our music delivery programme was framed by consultation with partner organisations in order to establish learner interests and any specific learner needs/requirements before the commencement of each course. Having previously delivered music engagement programmes at each setting, and in some cases with the same participants, our music leaders already had a good awareness of learner needs and were confident in planning an effective delivery model.

Delivery

Throughout the course participants were introduced to multiple music-making techniques with each session designed to encompass a range of musical activities using both live instrumentation and music software that would be accessible to all learners. Sessions were participant-led and enabled learners to progress at a pace that was comfortable for them.

Music leaders encouraged active participation and typically, each session covered three main elements: group performance, improvisatory activities/games and songwriting or recording.

Performance

Participants engaged in sing-alongs, requested by participants, performed DJ sets using iPad apps and took part in the 'Hello' and 'These Are My Friends' songs. Using a variety of percussion, guitars, ukuleles and voice, participants learned to perform as part of a group and performances typically featured improvisatory elements through the use of solos.

Improvisatory Activities/Games

The conductor and live madpad games provided opportunities for participants to lead group activities, taking control of dynamics, speed and musical arrangements. Alongside these, rhythm games were introduced and participants also took part in the hotter/colder game, whereby members of the group were directed to a specific location through only the volume of noise created by other participants.

Lyric & Songwriting

Each group wrote several sets of original lyrics through a number of collaborative techniques/activities, these were then developed and arranged into songs using live instrumentation and/or software instruments. Each group also re-wrote the lyrics to Pharrell Williams' 'Happy', to relate them to their own lives.

Recording

Music leaders supported each group to record several songs that almost exclusively featured participants. Each group recorded their own versions of 'Happy' using live instrumentation, vocal recordings and software instruments on the iPad. Service users from Way Ahead recorded a live version of their original composition 'The Sunshine Ship', which featured singing and instrumental performances from all participants. R Community service users also engaged in interactive storytelling, completing and recording the storyline, along with sound effects and an accompanying music video.

“The programme was designed to encourage musical expression and social cohesion. Each week the participants were supported through a number of music making activities that encouraged both the development of musical confidence and individual social interaction skills.” - Jim Chorley, Music Leader, SoCo Music Project



Reflecting on our outcomes

Improve sense of wellbeing amongst adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.

This project has brought together groups of adults that might not usually interact and work together. Through fun and interactive activities, participants were able to develop strong bonds with one another in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. For some, the sessions not only provided opportunities to socialise with peers, but also to build independence, vital support networks and reduced social isolation. An additional benefit of the sessions that were delivered at The Point for Way Ahead service users, was that they supported integration into the local community, as many had not previously accessed this facility.

Due to the relatively short timeline of the project, it is difficult for us to say that these sessions have afforded and supported an increase in wellbeing of all our participants but we can certainly identify clear examples of where these music sessions have improved collaboration, social skills and vulnerable adults to connect with their peers.

There are many examples of increased confidence, self-esteem and development of interpersonal skills over the lifetime of the project. One of these developments was illustrated during one session when Kyle arrived upset; he isolated himself from the rest of the group and refused to take part in the first activity. However, encouraged by his peers, Kyle put his initial issues behind him and rejoined the group, going on to play a full and active role in the remaining activities.

The overall effectiveness of the course to provide enjoyable and

meaningful activities for the user group was verified by Way Ahead support workers who stated that the music-making sessions were the most subscribed activity on offer for their service users.

Key Successes

SoCo's music leaders encouraged active participation, supporting participants to engage in activities that they would not normally do. For some participants this seemed intimidating or daunting, however, the supportive nature of the sessions enabled those participants to develop the confidence and skills required to partake. Paige, who during the first few sessions was extremely shy, reserved and who relied heavily on fellow participant Lisa for support, grew in confidence as the course progressed, taking part in singing communally and recording her own vocal lines for the collaborative compositions.

"I've enjoyed the sessions and the highlight was spending time with each other."

- Phil, participant from Way Ahead

Another participant, Rich, suffered from a stammer, and although he was keen to participate in recording his own vocal lines, he initially lacked confidence/conviction in his delivery. However, with support and encouragement from the music leaders and his peers, Rich's confidence grew and he was often the first to volunteer to record or perform.

These sessions supported all participants to stay mentally active, which is vitally important for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing. It was particularly pertinent for Jackie as support staff at R Community informed our music leaders that Jackie suffered from dementia and struggles with tasks and communicating coherently.

However, Jackie was fully engaged in each session, contributing her vocals to recordings and responding well to questions and lyric writing activities; support staff commented that this was an unexpected outcome.

The improvisatory activities and approaches provided participants with space and time for individual expression. They also supported wellbeing within the context of group music-making through participants' exploration and responsiveness to communicational exchanges.

“I found the sessions fantastic and playing the instruments was very good. I’ve learnt how to play all the new instruments. I’ve enjoyed everything, but in particular the company, talking and meeting new people like Mark and Jim, and I’d love to come back and work with them again”

- Rich, participant from Way Ahead

Increased skills and awareness of music leaders and support staff to reduce or remove barriers to music-making for adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.

This project enabled SoCo to strengthen our relationship with both R Community and Way Ahead Day Services, having run music-making courses for both groups several years previously. Of the three music leaders delivering across the project, two had not worked with this user group before, and so the project provided an opportunity for them to gain valuable experience and an understanding of the wide spectrum of needs and challenges of engaging with adults with physical and/or learning disabilities. The project has developed their confidence in working with this user group and in designing bespoke music-making programmes that respond to participant needs.

In addition to this, this project enabled SoCo to provide one of our newest volunteers with hands-on experience of supporting music-making for vulnerable adults.

The sessions fostered an increase in engagement and enthusiasm by support staff to use active music-making (as opposed to simply listening to music) as a stimulus and demonstrated a variety of ways in which music-making can be made accessible to support wider developmental outcomes for those with multiple and complex needs; and in the case of R Community, using equipment they already retain. This increase in knowledge and skills of support staff will have reduced/removed some of the barriers to music-making for adults with physical and/or learning disabilities.

“Through these sessions I’ve grown more confident in working with this user group. I’ve learnt to embrace the different needs of participants and structure and deliver workshops in an all-encompassing manner.”

– Olly Lewis, Music Leader, SoCo Music Project

Key Successes

Over the duration of the course, support staff gained a better understanding of the diverse music-making techniques and processes that could be implemented following the conclusion of the project. This included the integration of multiple arts activities when lyric writing, recording, crafts and film were combined within the storytelling activities.

Our music leaders spoke/met regularly to plan sessions, reflect on participant needs and to create and implement new and original musical engagement ideas/activities. The allocation and implementation of developmental time enabled music leaders to improve their own creative practice, adapt previous skills/knowledge and explore new techniques and ideas.

“Mark and Olly joined us for 10 weeks and introduced us to some new concepts in song-writing and ways of using music technology. They introduced everyone to software and equipment that the group had not seen or used before.” – Mandy Jones, Support Worker, R Community

Increase the musical composition and performance skills of adults with physical and/or learning disabilities

During the first few sessions with each group, the music leaders initiated several introductory/ice-breaker exercises to gather an understanding of participants' musical experiences, abilities and interests. All participants expressed an interest in music and most had taken part in performance activities such as drumming workshops or sing-alongs previously, however musical ability was wide-ranging and musical preferences were diverse.

It was difficult to obtain direct feedback from some of our participants as to what their previous musical experiences and interests were, as they were either non-verbal or semi-verbal. Therefore, we were reliant on support staff to provide us with relevant information about individuals.

This initial assessment allowed our music leaders to identify participant strengths and areas for improvement. From this, they planned unique activities and created an environment that would support and nurture musical development.

Many participants were confident in performing together or in front of one another, however some were less confident when singing/vocalisations were involved or when trying out new activities. In addition to this, most participants lacked confidence in musical composition, having not explored this previously.

A key part of SoCo's delivery model is responding and being flexible to the needs of individuals and adapting activities where necessary. The emphasis within the first few sessions for each course was on participation in games, introductory activities and writing/recording an alternative version of 'Happy'. Along with building their level of

skills and knowledge, this enabled the music leaders to build a level of mutual trust and camaraderie, and led the group to develop original lyrics, compositions, performances and recordings in the latter sessions. By the end of the course, the sessions became more and more participant-led, with all members contributing lyrics and discussing ideas for songs and music.

“It was fantastic to see how much of an active role the participants were able to play in the creative process as they became more vocal, confident, expressive and creative as the course progressed.”
– Olly Lewis, Music Leader, SoCo Music Project

Key Successes

Throughout each course, music leaders were able to introduce a diverse selection of accessible music-making activities and instrumentation, which supported an increase in musical composition through improvisation and performance through sensory interaction. Alongside traditional instrumentation such as drums, percussion, guitars, ukuleles and vocals, assistive technology in the form of iPad apps played a prominent role in the music-making activities.

During a number of activities for R Community service users, participants utilised instrumentation from the day centre, which enabled the music leaders to highlight ways in which music engagement could continue beyond the course either individually or as a whole group.

“I’ve enjoyed the sessions and spending time with everyone - they’ve made me happy. I’ve learnt

chords on the ukulele and I've got more rhythm than I thought, as I was told when I was younger that I didn't have any rhythm and couldn't sing properly and that now I can follow a beat much better than when I was younger when I was told I was tone deaf."

– Michael, participant from Way Ahead

During several activities and games, participants were encouraged to be responsive and reactive to their fellow participants; developing their listening skills through an understanding of group music-making.

Each course also demonstrated a number of ways in which independent learning could take place. Having been introduced to a multitude of music-making activities and instruments, several participants were keen to continue their learning. In particular, Mike was excited to utilise the apps that were used and that were compatible with his device, whilst Michael had shown real talent and an interest in the ukulele.

Challenges

Range of Participant Needs

Within each learner group there was a wide range in participant needs and abilities, from those that had moderate learning difficulties to those that had additional needs such as severe physical disabilities, dementia and those who were non-verbal or semi-verbal.

Environmental Factors

Both settings (St Denys Community Centre and The Point) were often busy and noisy environments that lacked additional 'breakout' space. This sometimes made it difficult to achieve specific session aims to the highest quality, such as recording. In creating a responsive environment it was essential to create a quieter atmosphere and we could often rely on support workers to help with this.

An additional issue that arose during the course for Way Ahead Day Service users at The Point was that sessions were often delivered under the pressure of schedules and timings due to participants arriving at different times and from different centres. It was important that participants didn't feel rushed during the sessions and could freely express themselves and progress at their own pace, therefore SoCo's music leaders adapted the session plans to become more efficient and achievable by reducing some of the course goals/activities.

Inconsistencies of Participant Attendance

The course in partnership with Way Ahead Day Services that took place at The Point in Eastleigh enabled service users from their

three centres: Woolston, Testlands and Shirley Warren, to come together to take part. However, each support worker was responsible for several service users and so needed the majority of them to want to travel over to take part or otherwise they would do a different activity on site. Despite the fact that participants enjoyed the sessions, several participants would choose to take part intermittently, meaning those that did want to take part every week would also have to miss out. This meant that our music leaders would have to be flexible and adapt session plans to fit the participants that were in attendance. Our sessions ranged in numbers from 8 to 13 in this group, whilst the course for R Community, delivered at their own base, had a consistently high turnout.

Case Study 1: Harroon



Background

As a service user at R Community, Harroon attended SoCo's Community Chest funded 10-week music making course that took place at St Denys Community Centre.

In His Own Words:

I liked playing the drums, singing and the keyboard. I like using the iPad to make music - the microphone is the best, I used it to sing and record. Music makes me feel happy inside.

Layla Sawjani, Harroon's Mother:

Harroon started showing an interest in music from a very young age. It was all very natural, we didn't teach him music, but it was something that he really took to. He has a couple of keyboards up in his bedroom that he plays every day, as, although he is interested in trying other instruments, the keyboard is his favourite. When he's in his room he just plays along to different music. As soon as he hears a new song he will try and replicate it on the keyboard and picks it up very quickly.

Music is something he really enjoys and even if we are out at a restaurant or a hotel and he hears music, he will start to dance, smile, laugh and be happy. It really does make him happy and it calms him down if he is tired or irritated or if he's getting worked up. Sometimes he has anxiety attacks and so will go to his room and play his keyboard to calm himself down.

Appendices

Support Worker Feedback

Mark and Olly joined us for 10 weeks and introduced us to some new concepts in song-writing and ways of using music technology. They introduced everyone to software and equipment that the group had not seen or used before.

In the first session Mark and Olly introduced themselves and involved the group members in some group activities to help them get to know the group and for the group to get to know them. They quickly built up a good rapport and assessed for themselves their best strategy going forward with quite a large group of individuals, in order to accommodate and include everyone.

Each week Mark and Olly brought a different experience for the group to be involved in; they made up song lyrics and created a song to sing; used software to create sounds; used percussion and voices with the software to create sounds for the song they were writing; created an innovative, video, with sounds, props and even a little bit of acting.

Each week was different and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Highly Recommended. – Mandy Jones, Support Worker, R Community

Practitioner Feedback

Olly Lewis

Over a 10 week period, Mark and myself provided music workshops for an adult learning group at St Deny's Community Centre. We typically had around 15 participants per session with some variety as to who was present every session. Our aim was to promote the emotional and physical wellbeing of these adults through music.

Over the course of 10 weeks, we wrote several songs, created a music video, an interactive story and with plenty of other forms of music expression. Over the 10 week period we were able to see the adults become more vocal, confident, expressive and creative. It was fantastic to see how much of an active role some of the participants were able to play in the creative process. As some of the participants were much older than others, we were able to hone in on some of their old musical favourites. For instance, we might sing songs by The Beatles or Abba and on one occasion, we made a song and music video that incorporated a group favourite: Tom Jones.

One of the challenges I encountered was that as we were working in a day centre, the members of the group had incredibly varying ability with regards to mobility and communication. This proved to be an obstacle when aiming to involve everybody equally in the creative process. It also proved to be an issue when attempting to gain qualitative feedback at the end of the project. With regards to areas of improvement, as the group have complex needs that vary considerably, it would help to meet the group prior to teaching them. It would help to have personal accounts of participants so that we know what to expect from different members of the group prior to our start. The nature of the sessions meant that around 25 participants came and went as they wanted to. It would be great to standardise who is in the group and who is not to make it easier for us to plan and to involve everyone. As I have not done much work with adults with learning difficulties in the past, one of the aims of these sessions was for me to shadow Mark and learn from his delivery with them. This worked fantastically however I believe in different circumstances, having more than one practitioner works best when responsibilities are shared more and delivery is divided more so. I did not necessarily find this to be an issue with this session in particular as the plan from the very beginning was that I

would assist Mark as he lead the sessions. I just thought it was worth a mention.

In terms of practitioner development, I would say that I have learnt to improvise around workshop plans. If one segment of a workshop is not received as well as intended by participants, we frequently had to change things up. I have learnt to embrace the different needs of participants and structure and deliver workshops in an all-encompassing manner. I have expanded my knowledge of music technology apps as tools for accessible music-making and have grown more confident in working with such a specific demographic.

Overall, the sessions have been an absolute pleasure to partake in. It's been great fun working alongside my colleague Mark. I'm very proud of all that the group has created together and it has been wonderful to meet and get to know each and every member of staff and participant at St Deny's Community Centre.

P.S. The staff there were incredibly accommodating, never shied away from getting involved and they played an essential role in us getting to know the participants quickly in such a limited amount of time.

Jim Chorley

Over the course of ten sessions, I helped to co-deliver with Mark Scott, a project for a local community L.D group called 'Way Ahead' at 'The Point Arts Centre' in Eastleigh in Hampshire.

The participants had varying needs and the programme was designed to encourage musical expression and social cohesion through the art of songwriting, recording, and taking part in a variety of exciting and inspiring iPad apps and technical processes.

Each week the participants were encouraged and supported through a number of music making workshops that encouraged both the development of musical confidence and individual social interaction skills.

Using innovative songwriting stimulus and utilizing state of the art music making technology, the group was exposed to a number of creative music disciplines that produced original songs and recordings.

A number of the participants overcame challenges and achieved successes within the project. For some it could have been overcoming communication barriers by singing and recording vocals. For others, physical disabilities meant that playing percussion instruments was a challenge, but with perseverance and 'one to one' support from SoCo practitioners they were able to take part, express themselves, produce and record music individually and as part of a group.

The songwriting workshops produced joyful songs that the group was able to perform as a community. In some instances the participants were spontaneously inspired to dance and ad-lib vocals and percussion when they listened back to the finished playback of the recordings.

As a practitioner, this was my first project working with adults with learning disabilities and over the lifetime of the project I developed another strand to my professional abilities. I found the sessions to be rewarding and the enthusiasm of the participants was infectious and life affirming. I enjoyed being able to utilize my supportive and patient personality so that each person had a full and rewarding musical experience.

The project was a resounding success and is summed up by the number of attendees every week (the support workers told me that it was the most subscribed activity on offer for the group) and by the verbal feedback given by the participants.

Participant Feedback

It was interesting writing the songs. I liked singing all the different songs, like the Happy song and the Who broke the Door song and meeting and making new friends.

- Abbie, participant from Way Ahead

I've enjoyed the sessions and spending time with everyone - they've made me happy. I've learnt chords on the ukulele and I've got more rhythm than I thought, as I was told when I was younger that I didn't have any rhythm and couldn't sing properly and that now I can follow a beat much better than when I was younger when I was told I was tone deaf.

– Michael, participant from Way Ahead

I found the sessions fantastic and playing the instruments was very good. I've learnt how to play all the new instruments. I've enjoyed everything, but in particular the company, talking and meeting new people like Mark and Jim, and I'd love to come back and work with them again.

- Rich, participant from Way Ahead

I've enjoyed the sessions. The highlight was spending time with each other. I've learnt different musical instruments and how to use recording apps.

- Phil, participant from Way Ahead