



Soundwaves Case Study

To what extent can music enhance communication? Salisbury City Children's Centre

To find out about *Soundwaves Extra* visit www.takeart.org or contact jane@takeart.org

Case study

Project name: Soundwaves Extra: Music Box

Setting: Strategic partnership development with Liv McLennan (freelance musician), Wiltshire Music Connect, Wiltshire Family Learning, and Spurgeon's, based at Salisbury City Children's Centre

Type: Family groups in Children's Centre who met the criteria for Family Learning courses

Dates: 18/09/17 – 04/12/17

Average number of children and age: 6 months – 20 months

Average number of adults and type: 4 adults on average: 2 adults leading the session (music leader and FL tutor), 2 - 4 parents

Research question: "To what extent can music enhance communication?"

Through this project we hope that we will:

- Empower parents to use music at home more with their children by developing their confidence and resources to take home with them
- Develop the communication skills of the children who attend between the parent and child and with each other
- Make a 'music box' resource that participants will be able to use at home with their child (to include songs, stories, homemade instruments)

Activity: A series of 12 sessions, which focused on music-making with parents and children. We explored a range of music including singing, instruments (especially musical free play), and recorded music as background for relaxation. We used props and sensory/tactile activities to engage the younger participants in the session. We discussed the musical preferences of the parents and children and incorporated these as much as possible into the project, including in songwriting activities. We also created a music box resource that parents could add to and develop in the future with their children.

Research findings: The project tested the development of a strategic working partnership between several organisations that work with families and the Under-5s across Wiltshire. Wiltshire Music Connect are the music hub in Wiltshire and are looking at developing their Early Years strategy/strand of work. Spurgeons are commissioned by Wiltshire council to run the majority of children's centres across Wiltshire and Wiltshire Family Learning works with parents to aim to improve their skills and prospects, helping them understand

their role as their child's first teacher, and therefore improving the achievements of children.

The project was ambitious in terms of the length of time it was running as a complete course and with involving as many agencies/partners as it did. Although there was an initial bringing together of people, there was no clear lead on the project after it started initially, which made recruitment and retention of participants challenging. However, this was addressed on an ongoing basis throughout the project and measures put in place to mitigate the challenges.

The initial parameters for the age of the children were set at 18 months – 3 years to try and capture families before pre-school provision started, but this proved very tricky in terms of recruitment. The actual age of the children that attended were between 6 months and 2 years, with the most regular attending being 6 months – 20 months.

Another challenge was continuity of attendance. Some learners attended most sessions, others attended only 1 or 2 sessions and did not return. When new learners entered several weeks into the project, it did disturb the group dynamics and had a big impact on learners and children.

However, although the project did not work with many families, the impact it had on regularly attending participants was considerable. It had an impact on the amount of music-making they did as families and the way in which music became more prominent in children's play. The parents found the environment welcoming and relaxing and felt confident to sing in front of us. The children become more vocal and the older ones were singing back parts of the songs we used in the project.

The Family Learning team now have a scheme of work and session plans (as well as concrete ideas) to be able to use in their work after the project. So far, the Family Learning tutor has delivered another course called Number Box to parents and young children and has incorporated some of the musical play activities and songs into that course. Some of the techniques used in the sessions that embed music making, creating lyrics and recording songs have already been used in other Family Learning sessions.

The Music Box course will be incorporated into the Family Learning Curriculum for delivery in the future as a 5-week course and as a session. The methodologies used in using music for storytelling, musical free play and song creation can be embedded into a number of Family Learning courses such as Box of Numbers, Story Box, Keeping up with the Children, Maths and English and Confidence and New Directions. The Family Learning tutor has gained invaluable experience in planning and delivering a course alongside an experienced Freelance Musician. This experience will be shared with other members of the Family Learning team.

For the freelance musician, the project has had an impact on different elements of her practice, namely incorporating parents' favourite music into the session and making it appropriate and accessible for children, the confidence to do songwriting as an activity with this particular group, and working with a very mixed age group.

Quotes:

Participants were asked if making music in the course has changed the way you communicate with their baby / child? And if so, how they have changed.

E said: "I get annoyed a lot and coming here chills me out and sets me up for the week ahead. I don't get annoyed with O as much."

L commented that she hasn't really changed the way she communicates with C but has started singing more. "C loves scarves and laughs a lot here at the sessions. That's why I sing to her more and I'm learning new songs"

Parents commented that sessions have a "relaxing effect" on them and the children.

"It chills me out". E does listen to music at home but due to lack of resources, sometimes feels that she can't leave the house. She commented that making shakers was really fun for both of them and gave them something to do at home as this week she couldn't leave the house due to lack of finances.

L said that the course "Gets me out, gets me to open up and enjoy time with C."

They also noticed the positive effect the music sessions had had on their children's communication:

"O is now trying to learn words to sing."

L observed that C is very chatty in the sessions. "The course is getting her talking and using instruments".

Parents commented that they were singing more with and to their children. They are less self-conscious singing in front of their children and us as course leaders, but would not sing in public. L said she would sing in a group situation, E wasn't so sure but thinks that her confidence is growing.

Data:

Number of children that attended at least once over the course of the 12 sessions: 6

Number of parents that attended at least once over the 12 sessions: 6

Practitioners: 1 music leader and 1 Family Learning tutor

Conclusion: Although the project did not work with many families, the impact it had on regularly attending participants was considerable. They valued the time they spent together as a group, the 1:1 time with their children and the tools and ideas we gave them to try at home. They remarked that they were singing more with their children and the children themselves had increased vocabulary, vocalization and enjoyment of music. They were able to thread more musical activities into their daily lives and felt it was positive that it was so financially accessible.

In terms of strategic working, the project happened over the timeframe allotted, and managed to work with several families. Therefore, it could be considered successful.

The families benefited and noticed changes in their children and found it a welcome and safe environment to attend. They were aware of how much more singing their children were doing at home and how this had an impact on their vocabulary. Of those who had continuity of attendance, it made a big impact in their lives.