

# The SoundWaves Network 2018 - 2021

## Summary Report

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Caroline Barnes on behalf of Take Art



# Overview

The SoundWaves Network is an Early Years Music Network delivering in the South West, with a concentration of activity in three Music Education Hub (MEH) areas: Somerset, Bristol and Plymouth. The overarching aim has been to strengthen regional Early Childhood (EC) music practice. Central to the programme's outcomes have been expanding a tried and tested model of high quality provision that combines delivery (case studies), continuing professional development (CPD) and networking. Supported by Youth Music and MEHs, The SoundWaves Network grew out of two previous Youth Music programmes. It continues to build upon a growing network of interested musicians, practitioners, Setting Managers and leaders - all of whom have become increasingly invested in this valuable area of work.

A total of **728 children aged under five**, supported by **165 Early Years Practitioners (EYPs)** have taken part in over a **100 music based sessions** over the course of the programme. Behind these statistics there has been careful targeting, partnership development and key relationship building between setting staff, music leaders (MLs), MEHs, local authority (LA) advisors, members of the network, academics, researchers, trainers and experts in EC music and development.

MEHs and our LA Early Years advisors have been instrumental in supporting Take Art to effectively target settings in the three counties. These partners have worked with Take Art to deliver on case study projects as well as supporting MLs in their locality to access CPD, broadening and strengthening the EY and music workforce.

Each case study project involved pairs of musicians co-delivering musical based play through 10 half day sessions delivered alternate weeks over a 20-week timeframe. The sessional activity varied over the different projects (12 in total with one unable to be completed due to Covid-19) but all rooted in a style of work that was child-centred, exploratory and reflective. Bringing a varied repertoire of styles, skills, instruments and activities, the MLs worked alongside Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) to scaffold learning and development in their rooms or nursery groups. The age range of children involved was from babies to 4 year olds.

Parallel to the case studies, a programme of **40 CPD events with 970 attendees** was developed and delivered. EYPs started their project with a CPD session that introduced the MLs and Jane Parker, exploring what music in EC looks like, how to nurture, develop and capture it. Towards the end of the sessional activity, the whole setting led a sharing event presenting their findings and learning to their colleagues and peers. These CPD events have significantly contributed to an increase in musical confidence and skill levels felt by EYPs, MLs and Setting Managers. The restrictions enforced upon the EY community through Covid-19 meant networking and CPD events were moved on-line. The introduction of regular "Sounding Boards" Zooms helped to grow and deepen the network further during this time.

CPD has also been central to supporting MLs engaged with project delivery - with five musicians completing their Certificate Music Educators: Early Childhood (CME:EC) course at The Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC). This learning community has become a key driver in quality and shared understanding of pedagogy and effective practice. MLs have welcomed the opportunity to work over long contracts and in pairs, enabling each to develop and grow their practice through a supportive model of delivery and mentoring.

The third element of the programme focused upon strategic development, looking carefully at how to sustain and grow Take Art's position in the EC music sector. With strengthening relationships across the three MEH partners, targeted events including "Are You Early Years Ready?", coupled with a place at national advisory tables, Take Art and its role in EC music has become more and more visible at a local, regional and national level.

Although the programme has come to an end, the relationships and partnerships continue to grow, with an increasing number of MEHs wanting to engage in future activity. Some of our most loyal supporters have moved roles or institutions and are now advocating for EC music to be a key component in course delivery at regional universities. These universities are looking at the role of music and MLs delivering both through EC-focused CPD but also music based degrees/courses. By supporting practitioners and musicians at an early stage of their careers, The SoundWaves Network could engage a wider audience and also introduce a whole new potential workforce to the EC sector going forward.

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## The Objectives

### **To enhance the creative and expressive and musical ability of the early years**

Children have developed their musical ability with MLs and staff providing exciting and curious opportunities for children to experiment and express themselves. Staff have used time and expertise in the reflective discussions to identify changes in behaviour and learning in the context of music, often for the first time. For some children, the music sessions have created opportunities to gain confidence, experiment with leadership and enjoying having their voice heard and valued. New musical languages have supported communication and behavioural challenges, where recorded, this has reduced the risk of development delay for identified children.

Children had sustained opportunities to explore voice play in new ways with new adults. They have also accessed a wider variety of instruments in their setting and have been encouraged to explore new sounds as individuals and with their peers. Appropriate repertoire of songs, materials and resources have all increased and staff have a clear understanding of what type of simple songs and rhymes are suitable for very young voices.

### **To improve EY communication, skills and empathy**

During the project, staff and MLs felt confident that music was a strong and positive vehicle with which to support communication, skills and empathy. They witnessed numerous interactions where children, particularly non-verbal or those with EAL, found new ways of communicating through sound, rhythm and musical play, finding and communicating their voice. Staff noticed behavioural changes with children being more considered about their interactions with adults and their friends, taking time to listen, respond and collaborate. New interests and learning styles were developed or recognised with children making connections, improvising and creating together. Through a more reflective approach staff were able to gain new insights into how each child was developing and learning.

### **To increase Take Art's resilience to external circumstances to enable it to deliver a continuing music making programme for early years**

Through a regular programme of CPD, networking and representation Take Art has successfully engaged with strategic partners across the Education and Early Years sector in the South West. Staff have lobbied, trained and been consulted at a national level helping to position Take Art in this specialist area. Events such as "Are You Early Years Ready?" consolidated Take Art's position further and paved the way for continued funding applications with a wider network of MEHs across the South West. Partnerships across three regional universities have facilitated a closer delivery and understanding of the HE sectors and workforce development for EYPs. The relationship with CREC continues to thrive with new students being supported and mentored by project manager, Jane Parker.

### **To improve setting abilities to provide a good quality and accessible musical environment to EY**

Across the participating settings, staff and MLs have seen an improvement in the musical environment for very young children. From the introduction of new instruments, changes to how, where and when they are accessed through varied and interesting provocations regularly being introduced. Staff are more informed and confident about using music in their setting. They also have a clearer understanding of how music relates to each child's development. They are more sophisticated about how provocations are invited and more conscious of their role as adult partners in musical play. Most settings have reviewed their provision and have worked collaboratively to change, adapt, expand and refresh how music is utilised on a daily basis.

### **To increase MLs skills and confidence in working with EY children in challenging circumstances**

MLs delivering on the project have experienced sustained and supportive periods of employment, delivering sessions in collaboration, by working in pairs. Each has developed their skills and confidence in EY music delivery and all feel part of a wider learning community. Most MLs have successfully completed their Certificate in Music Education. New collaborations, friendships and projects have begun as a result of these pairings. Through their work with EYPs, MLs have increased their knowledge of the Early Years Curriculum, using music across most learning areas.

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Supported using public funding by  
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Take Art, The Mill, Flaxdrayton Farm, South Petherton, Somerset, TA13 5LR  
[www.takeart.org](http://www.takeart.org) | @TakeArt | 01460 249450  
Registered Charity No: 298671