

Mini Music Makers Summary and Evaluation Report

Prepared by Kayte Judge for Hilary Lawson - 26 Nov 2023



Parent and children play in the sound garden



Exploring the violin during circle time



Music and movement led by violin and beatboxing



Beatboxing call & response during circle time

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1. Introduction

1.1 Methodology

This evaluation has been undertaken in the spirit of the Youth Music evaluation guidelines, in that it includes information that is useful primarily for the reflection and professional growth of Inspiring Music. The audience for this report is Inspiring Music. Quantitative data comprises the number of and demographic make-up of participants as submitted to Youth Music. Qualitative data includes summaries of reflective conversations between the evaluator and project lead, and between the project lead and the delivery team and partners. It also includes reflections gathered from questionnaires provided by the participating children's parent or carer. They are presented here under the headings of Phase 1 (**section 3**) CPD (**section 4**) and Phase 2 (**section 5**). We also include case studies and observations (**section 6**). This report comprises part of Phase 3 of the project, and through discussions with the Inspiring Music Team initial ideas for future plans are included in **section 7**. A summary pulling out key learnings from each of these sections in relation to the six key questions relating to the objectives of the programme is available in **section 2**. Project objectives, project team, proposed activity, actual delivery and methods of reflection and evaluation are found here, in **section 1**.

We acknowledge limitations to our research as the participants were largely self-selecting, being those who attended the sessions, or were asked face to face, although all participants were invited to respond to questionnaires.

Abbreviations used throughout are:

MMM – Mini Music Makers

IM – Inspiring Music

FSW – Family Support Workers

1.2 Project objectives

Mini Music Makers (MMM) aimed to provide an inclusive musical play space for families with children under 5 who are facing barriers, in the Dunstable South area. The core aims of the project were:

- to provide high-quality musical opportunities for families in an area of high disadvantage within Dunstable.
- for CBC's 0-12s Family Service to build lasting trusted relationships with families facing barriers who are currently not taking up services, supporting the EYPP offer.
- for Inspiring Music to pilot a new type of Early Years offer for music making within the community.
- to develop the skills of musicians and other practitioners working in the Early Years in the area.

1.3 Team and partners

- Inspiring Music Project Lead - Hilary Lawson
- Music leaders – Oz Azubuine (Ozzlebox), Amanda Britton (Sinfonia Verdi), Stephanie Waite (Sinfonia Verdi)
- CPD consultant - Sophie Fox, Magic Acorns
- Family Services representative - Claire Roberts, Dunstable Locality Manager
- Evaluator - Kayte Judge, Creative Freelancer

1.4 Project Structure (Proposed)

The project plan comprised 3 main phases:

Phase 1 (Sept-Dec 2022)

- Consultation with target families with support from HomeStart Central Bedfordshire
- Recruitment of music leaders and delivery of CPD programme
- Recruitment of pre-school to partner with the project

Phase 2 (Jan-July 2023)

- Delivery of music sessions as a child-led musical play space for children under 5 and their carers

Phase 3 (July-November 2023 and beyond)

- Evaluation: what have we learned and how will it inform Inspiring Music's EY approach?
- Identify a sustainable model for continuing this approach to family music-making.

1.5 Project Delivery (actual)

Phase 1

Community engagement

- Musical play session was delivered in partner pre-school to test child-led approach (child consultation, also served as CPD and observation opportunity for music leaders).
- HomeStart conducted parent focus groups in two pre-schools.
- Children's Centre team, local settings and schools helped to identify and encourage relevant families to participate in consultation and attend sessions.
- Children's Centre also promoted via other routes e.g. health visitors, local hotel housing asylum seekers. Worked with council Communications team on a campaign to recruit families for the sessions (social media, flyers/posters in schools, settings and other routes, word of mouth amongst families attending other Children's Centre sessions).

Recruitment & workforce development

- Recruited a community musician (beatboxer) from one of the target cultural groups to work alongside two instrumentalists from project partner Sinfonia Verdi.
- Magic Acorns facilitated a CPD programme for 23 participants including the MMM music leaders, Family Services team plus a wider group of EY practitioners and EY musicians.
- CPD included mentoring for music leaders. Project manager worked with music leaders to plan sessions and held additional 'song share' sessions during delivery phase.

Recruit an EY setting.

- Partnered with two settings instead of one: Downside Pre School and St Mary's.
- Downside hosted the musical play event; music leaders participated as part of their own CPD.
- Both settings hosted parent consultations and promoted the sessions to target families.
- St Mary's EY teacher participated in the CPD programme; supply cover costs covered by the project budget.

Phase 2

Music session delivery

- Session delivery started on 28 February, later than planned due to researching the profile of the target audience and finding a new venue after original venue was condemned.
- Planning sessions for the music leaders were added into the timetable so agreed to deliver 17 session days instead of 20.
- We had planned to deliver 3 sessions/ day however we started with 2 sessions/ day and were prepared to add a third session if there was demand or if we needed to focus our targeting. Participants per session were lower than expected so we stuck to 2 sessions and adjusted timings in response to families' feedback.
- Therefore delivered total 35 sessions instead of planned 60 sessions, however reach was greater than anticipated (83 children in total compared with predicted 50, 38 core participants compared with predicted 25).
- At music leaders' request, to support their own skills development and teamwork, wherever possible we used three music leaders instead of two to facilitate sessions. We put the grant uplift towards this additional cost as it supported the team's wellbeing.

Data collection, review and reflection

- Demographic data on families collected as part of session booking process by Children’s Centre and analysed at interim point (end March) and end of delivery (mid-July).
- Music leaders had a joint reflection session every week during delivery and recorded reflections on a padlet shared with project manager and evaluator.
- Project manager visited sessions regularly, spoke informally to parents, music leaders and Children’s Centre team and captured key feedback on the padlet.
- Parent feedback questionnaires distributed at 3 sessions and by email to all booked families and reviewed during end of project review and by evaluator.
- CPD feedback questionnaires distributed by email to all participants and reviewed by evaluator.
- Project manager led structured reflection sessions with music leaders at interim point (end March) to review how sessions themselves were going, and with both the music leaders and Children’s Centre team at the end of delivery (mid-July) to reflect on what we had learned from the whole project.

1.6 Background to the approach taken.

Magic Acorns is an early years organisation based in the east of England. They create spaces where children, families, and artists flourish together. Their approach to professional development is to create experiential and reflective spaces for artists, musicians, and educators to explore listening, musical interaction, improvisation and play as fundamental skills that we might need as creative facilitators in early years settings or community groups. Bringing attention to adult-talk in musical play spaces opens the possibility for children and babies to create sound that is heard and responded to musically - this requires sensitive attuned adults who are ready to play. Magic Acorns nurtures this practice of playfulness.

The Mini Music Makers sessions were shaped by our work with Magic Acorns. Each session followed the same basic structure: a ‘soft’ start where children entered a sensory sound garden created from scratch each week, met by adults ready to play in a child-led, adult-responsive way, mostly non-verbally. Then a transition using a ‘Tidy up’ song to clear away the sound garden and ‘Kelele’ to move from the sound garden into a circle. It ended with a short (15-20 minutes) adult-led circle time blending traditional children’s songs using movement and hand-held instruments with playful interaction with the violin and beatboxing. We aimed to create a ‘yes space’ within the sessions where responsive adults followed the children’s lead and anything the children did in the space was ok, as long as it was safe. Within the structure of the sessions there was lots of scope for flexibility and following the children’s lead, so that the sessions were co-created between the music leaders, the family workers and the families participating in the sessions.



Mini Music Makers sound garden – invitations to play

2. Summary of findings

Project objectives were:

- to provide high-quality musical opportunities for families in an area of high disadvantage within Dunstable.
- for CBC's 0-12s Family Service to build lasting trusted relationships with families facing barriers who are currently not taking up services, supporting the EYPP offer.
- for Inspiring Music to pilot a new type of Early Years offer for music making within the community.
- to develop the skills of musicians and other practitioners working in the Early Years in the area.

Our questions here, then, are:

1. Did the project reach families facing high disadvantage?
2. Was the music opportunity offered of high quality?
3. Were new or better relationships built between the Family Service and families who were not engaging with them before the project?
4. What were the key lessons for the Music Service from the new type of Early Years community-based approach?
5. What skills were developed by musicians and others during the programme?
6. And, as always, what unexpected findings were there?

This summary will take each question in turn and refer to evidence in the body of the report and appendices.

2.1 Key Questions

1. Did the project reach families facing high disadvantage in the area?

An early and key learning was that incorrect assumptions had been made regarding the demographic in the geographical area and therefore the target group of people were not present in the area of the project (3.1). The project was refocused to meet families in areas of disadvantage, which were present in the area. The demographic data shows that 39% of participants were from non-white background, and of the 78 children booked on some of these children had barriers to participation including being an asylum seeker, refugee, having English as an additional language, coming from a family in economic deprivation and having SEN (8.1). Data needs more interrogation when applying for funding to ensure the key participants are present in the area. Participants came from neighbouring regions also (Sandy, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis), and there was an appetite for more pre-school music making activities (5.1, 5.4)

Confidence and trust built over time for core attendees (those attending three or more sessions) which was evident in both parent and child (5.1). Children's engagement, enjoyment, and willingness to try new things grew over time and regular attendees would have liked the sessions to continue (5.1, 5.4). Parents were not willing to miss out on pre-school sessions to attend, both through fear of losing a place, and due to losing precious 'child-free' time in the week (5.1).

2. Was the music opportunity offered of high quality?

Feedback from all participants was universally high. Interestingly the feedback from families mentioned social development of their children as the most striking element of the programme, which was done through a non-verbal, child-led approach to engaging with music making. This is evident in the parent and carer's responses in 5.4 and can be seen 'in action' in the case studies and observer snap shots held in section 6. Families held the violin and the beatboxing in high regard, with different children responding and engaging with both at different times. The inclusion of the instruments, and having the children being able to touch and play with the professional level instruments was seen as a strength (5.4). One participant in the CPD session reflected that this approach would work well in conservatoire and universities, which provides a strong hint to the quality and impact of the approach. The depth of response of the children, and the practitioners was remarked upon throughout - all stakeholders were surprised at the positive impact it seemed to have on the children (5.2, 5.4). The process engendered deep learning, with the music leaders' reflecting that after that first block of 5 weeks they were on a steep learning curve. They reported that the early sessions became chaotic and didn't feel 'safe' either for them or for parents. The music leaders became more attuned to each other and to the energy within the space over time, which raised the quality of the musical opportunity to a very high level (5.2). There was genuine collaboration between the music leaders.

3. Were new or better relationships built between the Family Service and families who were not engaging with them before the project?

The attendance data (8.1) showed that 18 children not previously signed up to Family Services booked to attend, 13 did attend and 9 attended more than three sessions. Parent consultations undertaken in Phase 1 challenged assumptions about what time and day sessions should take place, with Saturdays being a marked preference over

weekdays (3.1, 5.1, 8.2), although in practice Saturday sessions were not possible (5.1). Lower income families are often working families and there is a desire for weekend activities (5.1, 8.2). Families seemed nervous to begin with and keen to be seen as 'doing it right' in front of Family Service workers (5.1). The MMM approach (child led) was markedly different to the other Family Services groups which were parent led (5.1, 5.4), and this was welcomed (5.3). One FSW remarked '*Child I's mum has been coming to lots more Children's Centre activities since coming to Mini Music Makers. Child J also started coming to other Children's Centre activities after coming to Mini Music Makers*'

The partnership with Family Services was problematic, affected by staff turnover, capacity issues and the loss of one key member of staff. This led to low take up of CPD and low levels of 'buy in'. There were marked differences in professional expectations and communication between the two services, with 'non-formal' approaches being needed to engage (3.1). However, once Phase 2 was underway there was a marked improvement to engagement from the Family Services. They shared the view that MMM was having a positive effect on the development of the participating children (5.2). The real testament to this is that the Family services have adopted some of the approach for their current sessions and have signed up to future support from IM to continue the MMM programme (section 7.)

4. What were the key lessons for the Music Service from the new type of Early Years community-based approach?

Community based and informed interventions require community consultation and adequate time to respond to the needs/ wants of those consulted. In this case inadequate time was allowed for between consultation and delivery. Community based projects require genuine relationship building, sometimes outside of professional norms, and may require people to overcome their own barriers to engagement. Self-reflection is crucial and should be supported (3.1), not only that of the project lead but of all the involved professionals. The approach was new for many and a challenging way to work, which led to positive results and profound shifts in self and practice (5.3).

5. What skills were developed by musicians and others during the programme?

In total there were 23 CPD participants: including EY practitioners, music tutors, professional and community musicians, EY music practitioners, child development officer, family support workers (who attended a discrete online CPD session for 5 Children's Centre team members). The feedback from these sessions showed that this approach was liberating, freeing, and gave participants a new approach to engage musically with children. For some this led to changes in their own practices, with some introducing creative and exploratory warmups to the sessions, and others introducing child-led music sessions into their formal education settings. Unfortunately, Family Services did not attend the early CPD sessions. The findings from the focus group were clear that the skill development very much continued into the delivery phase, through learning by doing. They needed to experience co-creation to fully understand it (5.2, 5.3). The deep level of teamwork required within the session, one which required all leaders to put up their 'antennae' for one another, is reflected in the interim report (5.2).

6. What unexpected findings were there?

The social impact of the musical activities was of very high importance to participants, and this was linked directly to the child-led and responsive approach (5.3, 5.4). In order to be fully present in an adult-responsive, rather than adult-led, space bravery and confidence are needed, and this should be supported through reflection and deep teamwork (5.3) In short, authentic engagement requires genuine connection.

3. Phase 1: (Planning)

The Project Lead was fully responsible for planning of the programme in Phase 1. This included two parent consultations (appendix 8.2) and a children's consultation undertaken as part of the 'Musical Play' session which also served as CPD for the Music leaders. Phase 1 also included the beginning of CPD sessions, recruitment of the community music leader, and the logistics of Phase 2. The parent consultations highlighted that many parents worked and would prefer a session on a Saturday, and that a younger age group would be better, as their older children were in nursery. An in-depth reflection conversation was held to capture the significant learning of Phase 1, summarised below. Please note that CPD evaluation is captured separately, even though this began in phase 1.

3.1 Project Lead Reflections (14/03/23)

Early data insights revealed that the project was aimed at a group of people that weren't present in the intended geographical area. Initial data and optics had suggested that the diverse communities were in the target area but on interrogation it emerged that whilst diversity was not present, disadvantage was. The Project Lead looked at a different area and found diversity but not disadvantage. A decision was made to go for the area for disadvantage.

Project planning brought up illuminating reflections on the professional and non-professional relationship building required for community-based interventions. For the project to be run in places that families would feel comfortable in (especially those currently not engaging in council run programmes) the Project Lead had to make connections with people and places outside their professional 'comfort zone', without knowing what the parameters are in those initial conversations. Without the acknowledgement and commitment to overcoming this barrier community-based opportunities may have been missed.

Professional partnership working proved difficult at first. Due to a change in staff and staff shortages there was a lack of ownership from council partners, Family Services. There was no response to email or phone calls. Turning up to the department without an appointment worked well. This led to reflection on the 'professional' way of communicating. Family services, once engaged, were not fully engaged in Phase 1. They didn't attend the two first CPD sessions as planned due to staffing issues. One Family Services representative planned to attend the last CPD session. Their difficulty accessing the session due to technical problems created an unexpected opportunity for a dedicated online session for the whole Children's Centre team, which helped enormously with buy-in. There is an imbalance of importance given to the project by the key partners; this was not a priority for Family Services and is one of many projects. For Inspiring Music this is a key priority.

Assumptions that weekdays would work were challenged by the parent consultation which suggested Saturday mornings would work best. Saturdays were thoroughly investigated, and it couldn't be made to work with the Family Services contracts, and music leader availability. There is a need to do something on Saturdays - this will be taken forward in other projects.

Venues were an issue and availability of venues became a key aspect of the decision making. Inspiring Music hadn't anticipated paying for a venue but had put a venue cost in the budget as a contingency. However, the free venue was unusable by the time the project started and finding a suitable 'neutral' venue became a priority in phase 1. A local boxing ring didn't have the right space whereas a local church was very keen to host the events but had to charge. Utilising a church raised questions of cultural sensitivity in using a religious space, but this had to be balanced with the only other available space being the children's centre (which may have provided other barriers to engagement). The decision was made to start in the church and then move to the children's centre once trust was built. A budget uplift

allowed the hall to be hired. Data collection proved much easier than thought due to the Family Services processes, but these weren't known at the beginning due to lack of communication.

The timeline of the project proved problematic, with little time between the initial parent consultation and delivery dates. This caused issues with being able to plan in line with the results of the parent consultation. Further to this, there was no time for the music leaders to meet and plan. Delivery time was pushed back by one month. There has been a deep realisation of the need for adequate time to build the relationships required for collaborative project work and to meaningfully respond to consultations.

Key reflections:

- Data needs more interrogation when applying for future funding to ensure the key participants are present in the area.
- Ownership from partners is crucial, and in this case was reliant on one member of staff.
- Partners, even professional ones, may have very different communication culture.
- Time is needed for consultation and response to consultation before planning is done for delivery.
- Community based projects require genuine relationship building, sometimes outside of professional norms, and may require people to overcome their own barriers to engagement. Self-reflection should be supported.
- Consultation allows for assumptions to be challenged, and this requires built in time to adjust to meet the needs of potential participants.

4. CPD

4.1 Description of approach

The core purpose of the CPD was to develop the skills of the music leaders to deliver the Mini Music Makers sessions. An objective for the CPD was to develop the skills of a wider group of EY practitioners and musicians in the area, thereby upskilling the EY workforce in Central Beds. This was done through formal and informal ways:

Formal sessions led by Magic Acorns

- Two 'PlayDays' led by Magic Acorns (open to a wider group)
- Two twilight Zoom sessions (including wider group)
- A musical play session in the preschool in November including working with Oz and a Sinfonia Verdi musician (who ended up not being one of the core music leaders)
- A group mentoring session with the music leaders.
- 1:1 mentoring sessions with each of the three music leaders.
- 1 online CPD session for Children's Centre team

Informal CPD

- Peer to peer reflection was undertaken through joint reflection sessions led by the Project Lead and through the use of the padlet app.
- Sophie Fox from Magic Acorns observation of sessions and verbal and written feedback



Mini Music Makers music leaders participating in 'PlayDays' led by Magic Acorns

Below is a summary of the CPD participants' evaluation questionnaires.

4.2 Summary of questionnaires

CPD participants, when asked to describe their experience in one word chose the following words: *Liberating*, *Enriching* and *Inspirational*.

CPD participants valued the ‘open-ended, accepting, accessible nature’ of the approach, and felt it enabled them to get into the ‘mindset of a small child and come up with spontaneous games and ideas’. The sound garden was seen as a practicable and good idea that could be utilised in other areas. Participants liked that this approach could be led by musicians and/or non-musicians and be undertaken with everyday materials. It opened them up to non-verbal ways of connecting. They liked being able to focus on the process rather than the end product, with one feeling that this approach would be very valuable to highly skilled and professional musicians,

“It occurred to me that this kind of work would be enormously beneficial to conservatoire and university students/graduates or adult professional musicians (or indeed amateurs) who may need a bit of help finding the fun in playing again... finding different ways of using their instrument (good for composers too), and losing some of the fear and self-consciousness around their playing, whether or not they go on to work with early years.”

When asked what else they would have liked they responded that they would have liked more group activity ideas, and some new songs, more focus on SEND provision (in ages above EYFS), and to have been able to share songs and examples.

They reported that they had made changes to their practice as a result: one reported that they were reassured that not every session had to end with a performance and *‘The confidence to step out of my comfort zone and allow children to take an active lead in the sounds & activities they wish to participate in. A greater understanding of the benefits of immersive sound making and shared imaginative worlds.’* Others had incorporated more creative warm ups into their classes as well as more spontaneity. Others were reassured that they were already on the right path. One participant has introduced an open-ended explorative music session called ‘music welcome sessions’, and has been very pleased with the results,

“We’ve had songs, marching, snowball fights, construction, quiet listening, loud drumming, hoopla, crunching sponges, costume creation, puppet sketches, etc. – it has been fantastic to see the children collaborating and growing in confidence as they participate.”

5. Phase 2 (Delivery)

The delivery phase involved all partners including the project lead, the delivery team, and parents and carers. Due to the age of the children their responses were gathered through the observation of their adults, the delivery team, and the professional observer. Here we begin with the reflections of the Project lead (5.1), an interim group reflection from music leaders (5.2) and a final focus group reflection, which included the project lead, all delivery team members (music leaders and the family services workers) (5.3.), as well as feedback from parents and carers (5.4).

5.1 Project Lead Reflections

There was a marked difference between the Mini Music Makers (MMM) approach and other services led by the Family Services. MMM involves non-verbal child led communication in contrast to Chattertots which encourages parent-led verbalisation. Family Services did not attend all the CPD sessions, so did not understand the approach at first. When they saw the approach, they were very quickly very intrigued and very committed. Some participating families seemed to have low confidence in themselves as parents - they seemed to be unsure if they were doing ok, what the Family Services might be thinking. The Project Lead reflected on issues of power and authority, and wondered if removing lanyards might be a good idea.

Confidence and trust were built over time, with the sessions just gaining momentum as the funding ended. The parents that became core participants (attending more than 3 sessions) valued the sessions and the different approach (sound garden, child led, and access to 'real' instruments). Family Support Workers (FSWs) and music leaders noticed the sessions having a significant impact on children's engagement, interactive play, confidence, and willingness to try/explore things – especially for those who come regularly and most especially for those children with SEND. A sense of community was built between core attendees.

The most common word used to describe sessions when chatting informally with parents in the social space is 'unique'. Parents take their children to other activities, some musical but not in this area and much more adult-led. As a result, there was a strong call among regular participants – and FSWs involved in the sessions – for them to continue beyond the funded sessions. The child-led sound garden approach with a short circle time at the end could be easily replicated within the Children's Centre.

An assumption that parents would be willing and able, if encouraged by preschools, to bring their child to MMM sessions and then drop them into preschool was incorrect; Parents proved unwilling to do this: some were worried they would lose the preschool place, there were communication issues (EAL) with some, we assume others were unwilling as the preschool time was their only time to work/ do other things.

5.2 Interim focus group (Music Leaders only)

An interim reflection conversation took place after five weeks of delivery between the music leaders and the project lead. Reflection notes are available in full in appendix 8.4. During later reflection the project lead remarked that this meeting felt like the moment that the music leaders genuinely started co-construction of the session. Some things were going very well; music leaders had a shared understanding of the structure of the session, different elements of the session were working very well, families were coming back, and FSWs taking an active interest and role in the sessions. The notes reflect that the 'Music leader team started to come together properly this week', as the team reflected that they needed to 'build the teamwork' through '*lots of eye contact, have 'antennae' up for what other*

music leaders are doing. In the sound garden, watch for if there is an interaction with a child you could support...but also check in case stepping into someone's interaction would break it." (8.4). There was a sense of being on the edge of chaos at times, and that excellent and responsive teamwork was the antidote to this, 'Strong teamwork and communication between music leaders makes everyone feel safer and brings focus into the circle at circle time and reduces sense of chaos' (8.4). There was an agreement that having all three music leaders present was very useful, and this was subsequently built into the budget. Some practical changes were made to some elements of the sessions (namely the beatboxing section and adding other elements).

Later, when reviewing the notes the project lead reflected on this discussion,

"The focus of that discussion was much more around the music leaders' own development in running the sessions, how they worked together and were building themselves into a team. That in itself was a journey, occasionally bumpy and they reflected on the fact that some of the early sessions were very chaotic and maybe the parents hadn't liked that so didn't come back. Later they reflected that the sessions had to almost reach that point of chaos for them to pull it back and shape it into something that worked so well for everyone. It shows that point when co-creation really started to happen".

5.3 End of project Focus Group Reflections (Music leaders and Family Workers)

The project lead, music leaders and FSWs all participated in a focus group to reflect on the programme. The Project Lead made reflection notes which can be found in full in appendix 8.5. Post it notes were also collected during the focus groups, and these are summarised below. Firstly, the reflection notes (8.5) showed that profound learning had occurred in the music leaders, as the process took them into previously uncharted waters, undertaking approaches that felt scary until they fully formed as a working group. This sense of group work was most acutely felt between the music leaders, but also extended out to include the FSWs as they got more involved. The music leaders reflected that they needed to have confidence in themselves in order to be fully present and observe and respond to the group. The journey was about moving from 'adult-led to adult-responsive' which requires acute observation skills. The FSWs also reflected that the MMM approach was out of their comfort zone, but they had seen positive results in the children and felt part of a wider team. They mentioned learning a lot from the approach and already applying some of the techniques in other sessions. The Project Lead reflected that whilst her focus on the music leaders, the collaboration went so much further. The sound garden allowed all adults to observe how other adults interacted with the children, which helped them learn new techniques themselves. The 'yes space' was particularly powerful. The wider development of the children was also mentioned,

'The impact of the sessions on the children came out very strongly throughout our discussion, it was mentioned time and again. All the participants commented on how many children gained independence and confidence through the sessions... the family workers' perspectives on that indicate that the impact of the sessions was stronger than we realised' – HL.

It was also an inclusive space and approach,

"There were a lot of children with additional needs who participated, and it was felt that both adults and children (and practitioners) developed skills in non-verbal communication. Having the sound garden and then a shorter circle time meant that children who might otherwise struggle with joining in an adult-led music session were able to participate – this was put down to the 'yes' space. The sessions were very inclusive, the families who came regularly accepted the children with additional needs so it was accessible to everyone." – HL

There seemed to be a significant impact on wellbeing, with the Music Leaders, reporting a shift in both themselves and their practice. The videographer, when recording the legacy video noted that both family workers and music leaders spoke about the positive impact the session had on their wellbeing. In one case, the only male music leader spoke about feeling rather lonely in that position, but of also becoming more of a sensitive practitioner as a result, noting that the children responded to him because he was different, and also, male parents or carers relaxing when they saw that one music leader was male. Families seemed to leave happier than when they arrived, and there were no significant 'meltdowns' from any children in any session.

A whole group delivery team meeting before the sessions would have been really valuable and is something that would be done if the project ran again. Parents would be better supported to really understand the concepts of the 'yes space' and the non-verbal approach. It needed more than modelling.

It is also important to note that one family chose not to come due to the religious nature of the venue.

During the reflection session a post it note activity was undertaken and the responses to this activity have been summarised below, according to the questions asked in the session:

What will you treasure from the project?

Three key themes emerged from this discussion: magical moments, the professional experience, and the development of skills. One person said that they would treasure the 'the program legacy'.

Magic moments - Respondents mentioned particular memories to illustrate the strength of individual 'intense interactions' between the children and musicians, such as 'Child X stopping being busy for a moment and listening to the violin.' Moments are described as 'special', 'magical', 'intense' and 'lovely'.

The professional experience - Of equal importance to respondents was 'the experience' in total. People referred to the power of the teamwork, meeting the new people and being able to 'have regular colleagues and build a way of working together'. How the team worked together was of high value especially 'working with a great team of people with different skills' with one remarking on 'how big, how strong the whole team is'.

The development of skills - Respondents valued the professional development provided by the 'journey', with one respondent mentioning the 'profound impact it had on us as individuals'.

What dismayed you about the project?

Whilst the word 'dismayed' did not resonate with the participants, this discussion was used to describe the challenges faced at various points in the project. These can be summarised as; supporting the families, the structure of the session, practical issues, personal adjustments and disappointment in partner engagement.

Supporting the families - Respondents were invested in the success of the project and wanted families to come back, which meant they were pleased when they did, and disappointed when they didn't. Supporting the parents through the non-verbal approach was difficult for some, this approach was new for the practitioners, and they empathised with the parents not quite understanding the approach at times. They wanted to be able to offer more support. They wanted the parents to engage and sometimes they didn't (in the sound garden, rather than circle time, which they

found easier to engage with). There is an interesting reflection from the parent feedback that the child led parts of the session allowed the parents to have a break (something that might be extremely beneficial to parents facing challenges).

The structure of the session - Some respondents didn't like having to end the sound garden when the children were so engrossed but understood why the session was structured in the way it was. The freedom within the sessions was alarming at times (early on) with '*moments of open-ended chaos when it felt as though we nearly lost the group*'.

Practical issues were difficult at times; data, venues, reaching the right audience. One respondent would have liked to have had better access to the data to see if they were heading in the right direction.

Personally, the respondents had to adjust to working in a team, being in a minority within the team, and understanding that they were facilitators rather than leaders.

There was disappointment in partner engagement, namely that Family Services didn't attend the full CPD (this was shared by the Family Services department and was caused by circumstances beyond their control).

What surprised you about the project?

The depth of response, and the strength of relationships were the two key themes that came out of the discussions.

Depth of response - Respondents were surprised at how well the sessions worked, and the depth of response from the children and families especially to the sound garden, They remarked - '*How the music affected some of the children and families, the swaying, the stopping, the magic of the music.*', '*How amazing the sound garden is, incredible concept!*', '*How powerful the sound garden was*'. They felt joy at the responses of the children, '*I loved that they loved it*'.

Strength of relationships - Relationships between the children and the leaders, and the parents with each other, and the children's services workers and the music team were all cited as things that surprised respondents.

What delighted you about the project?

The progression of the children, the playfulness of the approach, relationships and the positive response delighted the participants.

The progression of the children - The progression of the children was by far the aspect of the project that delighted the respondents, and this was especially so for the SEND children. Respondents reported witnessing the children's 'development', 'confidence', 'delight', and 'progression' in response to the sessions. The growth in confidence of the parents and carers over time was also noted.

The playfulness of the approach - the 'weirdness and unexpected' nature of the sessions, and realising that they were authentically 'co-created'. Silliness was built in, and took people out of their comfort zone, and making mistakes being part of the process.

Relationships - Again relationships were seen as really key part of the project, within the team, and between the parents, and '*Those amazing moments of connection between child and adult*'.

Positive response - They were delighted to see a positive response from parents, and that families kept coming back.

What would you do differently?

They would choose a different venue, prepare the parents more fully, work together as a team before delivery, and make some adaptations to the sessions, to add variety.

A different venue would work better, not a church, but rather a large open space, and a more inclusive age guidance would work well (children walking and above). Healthy refreshments or snacks could be given.

More preparation for the parents and carers before the session, in order to prepare them, and to manage expectations.

More preparation for the music leaders and family service workers - attending the CPD but also an opportunity to work as a team before the sessions.

Adaptations to the sessions were suggested, such as longer sessions, rotating the items in the sound garden every few weeks, or creating an environment with different levels and play spaces.



Oz in the sound garden



Mandy in the sound garden



Circle time



Circle time with Oz and Stephie



Last session team: music leaders and family workers

5.4 Participants

12 parents/ carers filled in the questionnaire, (with two requiring help due to having English as an additional language) (8.3) and one provided feedback by email. There were very few responses to the multiple-choice questions. Their responses to the other questions are grouped under 8 key questions below. We begin with the last question, which was a free text box asking for any other feedback. The quotes are universally positive, although we do acknowledge that all feedback was from a self-selecting group of participants, and whilst every attendee was given the opportunity to feedback, only those who came to the sessions in which feedback was sought, did. They are worth listing in full as they provide a snapshot of the spirit of the feedback:

- *“We are very lucky to have this session and the more we come the more my daughter progresses. She lights up with excitement as soon as we pull up outside every time. The staff are amazing and do a really good job with the children.”*
- *“Really loved the session and how opened my children up to music in a new way... I have now bought lots of percussion instruments and really want them to continue”*
- *“Great relaxing friendly sessions. (My child) really enjoyed gaining confidence each week.”*
- *“Most mornings (my child) asks if we can go to mini music makers that day”*
- *“Every member of the team is fantastic with the children. They know how to reach each child where they are and help them to explore the various sounds and textures. Thank you for starting this project.”*
- *“It is the highlight of (my child’s) week. She loves mini music makers. Thank you”*
- *“She definitely enjoys it as she comes away singing the songs for the rest of the week. Thank you!”*

How has participating in Mini Music Makers sessions benefited your child(ren)?

The benefits of the Mini Music Makers sessions were enthusiastically expressed by the parents and carers, and can be divided into two key themes: social confidence and musical confidence. Social confidence garnered more responses than musical confidence.

Social confidence - Respondents spoke about how their children had gained confidence through the sessions in interacting with other children and non-family members. The word social and sociable was used a few times. They talked of their children looking forward to the sessions, loving the sessions, and also the value of meeting the other parents. The social aspect, and the growth in confidence of their children to interact with others was seen as the biggest benefit as the quotes below illustrate:

- *“My daughter has become very open to meeting new people that are not family. It has also taught her about rules, and we use the tidy up time song at home.”*
- *“She has become more sociable and really looked forward to it. She has gained confidence more and more every week”*
- *“...what was most important was she was involved with other people and play with the staff.”*
- *“I noticed him become more interactive with others and more focused on tasks”*

Musical confidence - The music aspect was also important, allowing the children to gain ‘a little knowledge of various instruments’ and growing in confidence to sing and play inside and outside of the sessions:

- *“She is enjoying music more wherever she hears something”*

- *“(My child) has learnt how to use almost anything as an instrument and enjoy making up short songs to sing along to the beat. She has also learned how to tidy up after herself and sings the song at home”*

What do you MOST like about coming to Mini Music makers sessions?

Responses to this question can be loosely grouped as ‘watching the children engage and enjoy, watching the children develop, experiencing a new and different approach and the staff/ child interactions:

Watching the children engage and enjoy - Interestingly the word love was used in five times in six responses, when describing how their child loved the session, and how they loved to see the children so happy, for example *‘Watching my daughter love making sounds with instruments and playing with other children’* and *“having musical fun with my child – love to see children happy”*. Specifically, they mentioned ‘circle time’, ‘the violin and dancing’, the ‘variety’, and the beatboxing. One respondent said they liked *‘All the fun and the music and the noises too.’*

Watching the children develop - further to the joy of seeing their children enjoying themselves a couple of respondents made a comment about seeing their child develop over the course of sessions:

“Before coming to mini music makers (my child) was very clingy and would not leave my side at other groups we attended. She has become much more independent while exploring all the different equipment.”

A new and different approach - The sessions were identified by five respondents as offering something new, something they have not experienced before in terms of the approach and the musical opportunities. Exposing their children to beatboxing and violin, whilst giving the children a space where they *‘can explore different sounds, colours, textures without restrictions’* was seen as a really fresh approach. It was described as wonderful, and *‘quite magical for the children (and the adults).’*

Staff and child interactions - The staff, and how they interacted with the children was seen as a real strength of the session.

What do you NOT like about coming to Mini Music Makers sessions?

Seven participants gave the answer ‘nothing’, four asked for longer or more sessions and one participant reflected on needing time to adjust to the new approach:

“At first I as the adult was the one stressing about the noise and mess, but I soon learned to relax and let the children be children.”

What would make Mini Music Sessions better for you/ your child(ren)?

Four respondents wouldn’t change anything, and seven asked for longer or more sessions, some specifying that would like longer singing and more time exploring the instruments. Two respondents suggested more variety of activities and instruments. The timing and location were mentioned by two respondents, with one asking for the possibility of doing sessions outdoors and one suggesting timings that would fit around preschool and nursery. It should be noted here that one family didn’t attend the sessions as the sessions were in a church and they were of Muslim faith. One parent acknowledged that the children can be independent in the sessions which allows a ‘nice break for the parents’ - this links back to the disappointment felt by musical leaders that not all parents engaged.

Do you have any feedback on the social space (teas/coffees etc.) provided around the music sessions?

Seven respondents mentioned how welcome the refreshments were in helping them feel comfortable, and one mentioned perhaps having something for the children.

To help us plan future sessions, what aspects of the Mini Music Makers sessions are the most important to you/ your child(ren)?

Respondents valued the variety, the routine, the social aspect of the groups and the balance between the freedom and the song session. The interaction from the musicians was seen as important, as was the music, singing, instruments, and freedom to explore the equipment provided. The sessions being free was noted as important by one respondent.

“My children are so happy, and they enjoyed everything, so I am happy too. The most important thing I liked more is that every staff member was entertaining with every kid.”

If you came just once or a couple of times, why did you not come again?

Only two people responded to this question - one ticking the ‘Personal/ family issues’ and one other specifying work commitments.

6. Case studies and professional observer ‘snap shots’

Here we provide case studies on three children, through feedback gathered throughout the programme from various sources. All information has been anonymised. Further to this we include some ‘snap shots’ provided by Family Support Worker Sarah Flint. These are included to provide insight into the progress of different families, and a glimpse of the ‘magic moments’ reported throughout. Please note that Child A and B in the case studies, are also Child A and B in the snap shots

Child A

3-year-old with additional needs whose family has EAL. Attends with mum and baby brother.

Week 9 music leader reflections: Child A played with building blocks with Oz (music leader). Her mum actively played with her which made Child A seem calmer and more engaged in the activities. It seems that she engages with people when she is shown what to do. Her mum's attention seemed to have a positive impact on her and she integrated into the session a lot easier than in previous weeks. She showed emotion when the violin was played.

Week 10 music leader reflections: Child A was amazing. Interacting with adults and children! She was also vocalising right from the moment she ran in.

Week 11 music leader reflections: Child A is becoming increasingly engaged with each session and seems mesmerised by the violin.

Week 12 music leader reflections: Child A was amazing - she was singing all the way through the sound garden and interacting with lots of the adults. She was happy and playful. Her mum was super happy. Baby G is relaxing too, and really enjoyed the scarves.

Week 12 music leader reflection on circle time engagement: Child A amazing here too - she was really involved in the circle and even sat down for a while!

Week 13 music leader's reflection: Child A was happy and engaged and really excited to be here - she couldn't wait to come in. She tried the bells, she interacted with us, she came and sat next to Stephie (music leader) for a while and cuddled, and she joined in Circle Time. Baby G also loves it. Mum looks so happy and relaxed.

Week 14 music leader's reflection: Child A: mesmerised by violin, was also interacting more and making eye contact.

Week 15 music leader's reflection: Child A mum a bit stressed but Child A happy and singing, and completely mesmerised by the violin!

Week 16 (moved to Children's Centre) music leader's reflection: Child A also keen to go outside but able to be distracted. She also knew where the other resources were kept in the room and pulled aside the curtain in a cabinet until Anum (FSW) gave her a toy from the cabinet. She also tried to access the resources that had been pushed to the end of the room. Otherwise, Child A happy, vocalising.

Week 17 (Children's Centre) music leader reflection: Child A liked to envelop herself in foil. Struggled with not being able to pull out toys from shelf - made it a “no” space.

Child B

3-year-old child with additional needs. Recently arrived from abroad, attends with a relative.

Week 12 music leader's reflection: Some new faces – Child B's carer was quite nervous but really warmed up and they both had a great time. Communication with flashy balls rolling and throwing really worked for him - lots of laughing and jumping and interacting.

Week 13 music leader's reflection: Child B engaged and happy. Lots of play with balls. Runway used as a tunnel - fun!

Week 14 music leader's reflection: Great use of Oz's (music leader's) deep voice e.g. in echo of names in hello song. Gives others confidence e.g. Child B's carer felt confident to sing last week. Child B vocalised more today and responded to specific sounds Stephie (music leader) was making. His carer was delighted with his interaction!

Week 16 music leader's reflection: Child B twirling with arms stretched and a beater in each hand. He took several different adults by the hand and led them to the door, pushed our hand to the handle to try to persuade us to open door to garden!

Week 15 music leader's reflection: Child B's carer discussion with Stephie (music leader): he is particularly excited that Child B has been interacting more each week. He has been reflecting those interactions at home. Both Child B and his carer have learned how to communicate much better as a result of the sessions. Carer said, "Our home life has been transformed by coming to these sessions".

Child C

2-year-old, shy and nervous of new people/situations. Was initially overwhelmed by the larger, more boisterous late morning session and tended to stay very close to her mother at the edge of the room. After a few weeks her mum switched to the early session which usually has fewer families attending.

Session 9 project manager discussion with Child C's mum: We're trying the earlier session as heard it's quieter as Child C can get a little overwhelmed by the big noisy space.

"I know she enjoys it because she sings all the songs during the week. I'm persevering because she gets a lot out of it."

She takes Child C to other stay & play sessions "but we've never been to anything like this. It's unique"

Session 10 music leader feedback: Child C was like a different child - hugely interactive with other adults and children.

Session 15 project manager reflection: Another child's mum commented that Child C started out really shy and has really flourished and gained confidence through the weeks - parents are noticing how other children are responding to the sessions.

Session 16 music leader feedback: Child C came with Nonna (grandmother) again, a little shy but liked the non-verbal interaction with both Oz and Hilary (music leaders), responded well. Big glockenspiel popular with some children, Child C and Child H liked to put the chime bars in their buckets.

'Snap Shots' by observer Sarah Flint, Family Support Worker

"Child A has additional needs. Observing her reactions has been interesting. During one session Mandy noticed that Child A responded to the violin music. She had observed Child A stop, (she) is very busy during the sessions, look and sway when the violin is playing. After the session, Mandy and the girl's parent spoke and Child A's Mum said that even when she was a baby she would respond to music, not people. Mandy put a phone playing classical music next to her ear and she sat in her buggy and listened to it. During the group, her eye contact has improved. We have all commented on that. They have attended every week. Child A will often carry around 2 beaters. (She) chooses to lay on the foil blankets and put them on her."

"A carer of a boy that has attended the group for around 2 months, with additional needs, noticed him playing in a way he had never seen before and responding to adults. The carer needed some support to allow the boy to throw balls or follow his interests. He threw balls and all the practitioners would throw the balls back. Child B looked for the adults to throw the balls back. The carer began to relax and understand that this is a safe space where Child B can be free to be himself."

"A child and her Mum attend each week. The child weekly picks up the plastic chains and puts them around her neck. They both smile as she does this."

"A parent and her child join in with such big smiles during the Kelele song. The parent has talked about buying musical instruments at home, as a result of attending these sessions."

"A memorable moment during the session was when Oz, was holding a child in his arms and he fell asleep when we were singing at the end. We sang a quiet goodbye song!"

"The families all have smiling faces as they join in with moving to the violin music moving fast and slow. Having that live music is so powerful."

"The children are mesmerised by Oz with his microphone. The section at the earlier sessions where the children, 'Pass the microphone round... don't make a sound', the children were growing in confidence and beginning to make more sounds in the microphone. The section that Oz leads now where he beat boxes a beat and the children copy engages everybody in the group, even the youngest children."

7. Key Learnings & Future Plans

The ‘Three Key Learnings’, as shared with Youth Music, are

1. Need to allow more time for adapting to consultation findings, also relationship building and session planning – and responding to the unexpected. If starting again with what we know now, we would allow much longer for phase 1 and aim to run sessions across a longer period of time to properly establish them. Building relationships takes time and the project was significantly strengthened as relationships between the partners developed.
2. Although the reach of this pilot project is small its impact is both wide and deep and it has generated its own legacy. The impact on children and families participating, especially those with SEND was so noticeable that it is influencing not only how other services are delivered by the Children’s Centre that worked on the project but also other Children’s Centres within Central Bedfordshire. Inspiring Music is continuing to work with the Family Services team to support delivery of music sessions following the Mini Music Makers model.
3. The child-led, playful approach to music making informed by the open-ended CPD led by Magic Acorns has scope for application across a much wider range of activities. CPD participants reported profound shifts in their own approach to music making not only with Early Years – and even in non-musical areas such as working with adults with learning disabilities. We are looking at how to incorporate aspects of it in our broader Early Years music offer.

Future plans

Many stakeholders and participants expressed a desire for the MMM sessions to continue. The Family Services team have continued to run sessions inspired by the MMM sessions at Downside Children's Centre since September following the MMM sound garden plus circle time model. After half term they will move to a church hall on the other side of Dunstable to extend the reach. The Children's Centre team are keeping the sessions small and limiting the number of families per session which enables a closer connection with the families. In the Children's Centre they have up to 8 families per session and are regularly turning people away (if there is not space one week then that family gets an automatic place the next week). The church hall will accommodate up to 12 families. They will take a view on day/time/venue for sessions from January onwards before they publish the timetable in December.

Staff from other Children's Centres are already visiting the sessions on a rota basis to observe and find out more about this approach, suggesting the potential for this approach to be rolled out to other children's centres over time.

Inspiring Music made a proposal to the Family Services team to continue to support the development and staff confidence in these sessions. Claire Roberts, the Children's Centre Manager has agreed to the Inspiring Music proposal for ongoing involvement in Mini Music Makers and delivery has begun. This proposal is as follows:

1. IM provide a musician to participate in the sessions run by the Children's Centre, on a monthly basis. The first of these happened in October, and November's session has been booked. Two of the three music leaders are involved so far.
2. We are loaning instruments to the Children's Centre, and they are also using the sound garden resources that we purchased for the project.
3. HL will be running a CPD session for the Family Support Workers on December 13th. Claire has requested that is open to staff from the other Children's Centres.
4. HL will visit the session once a term to catch up, provide support and an ongoing link between the Family Services team and Inspiring Music.

8. Appendices

8.1 Demographic data

Total CPD participants: 23 including EY practitioners, music tutors, professional and community musicians, EY music practitioners, child development officer, family support workers (online CPD session for 5 Children’s Centre team)

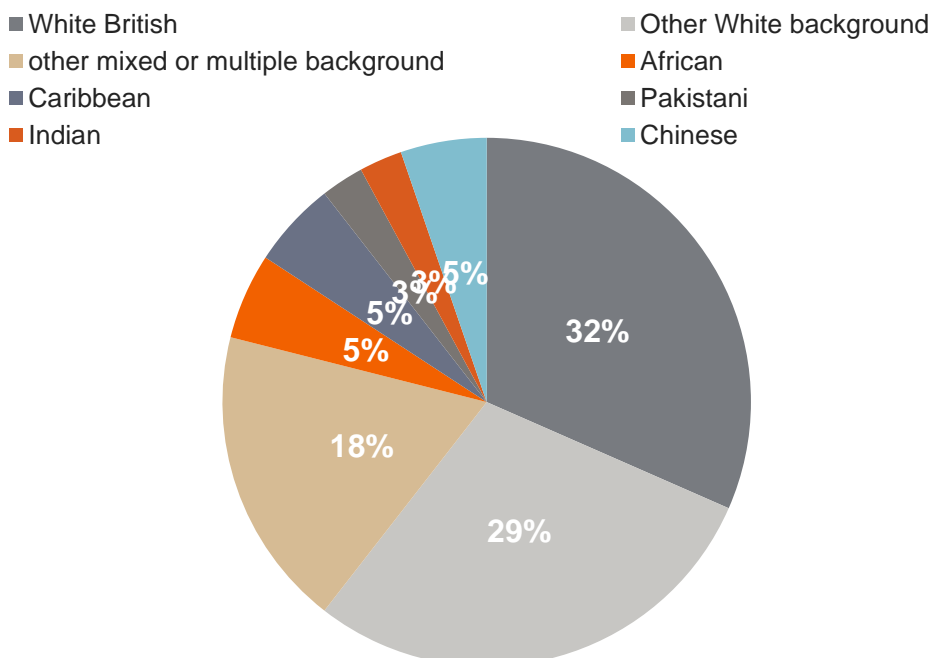
- Total number of individual children worked with during the project: 83
- Individual children attended musical play taster session: 15
- 78 individual children were booked on to attend a MMM session
- 68 individual children have attended one or more MMM sessions
- 18 individual children who booked onto sessions were not registered with the children’s centre, 13 of those attended a session.

Core Participants:

- 29 families, 38 children have attended the sessions more than three times.
- Of these core participants 16 are female and 22 are male.
- Of these core participants 29 were previously registered with the children’s centre 9 were not registered.

Some of these children had barriers to participation including being an asylum seeker, refugee, having English as an additional language, coming from a family in economic deprivation and having SEN.

The demographic make up of the group is as follows



This compares to the general population of Central Bedfordshire, which is 83.5% White British, 9.8% non-white, 6.7% white non-British, 3% mixed, 3.5% Asian, 2.4% Black 0.8% other ethnic group, and 10.8% households with multiple ethnicities (source: Local Insight report for Central Bedfordshire, 2023). Whilst the data is not a straight comparison it is clear that the MMM programme reached a more diverse demographic than the general local population.

8.2 Parent consultation

[Appendix 8.2.1 MMM Parent Focus Group 22nd November 2022.pdf](#)

[Appendix 8.2.2 Parent focus groups 24th November 2022.pdf](#)

8.3 Parent Questionnaire

[Appendix 8.3 Mini Music Makers parent questionnaire.pdf](#)

8.4 Interim reflection session

[Appendix 8.4 MMM Interim Reflection Session Summary.pdf](#)

8.5 End reflection session

[Appendix 8.5 MMM End of Project Reflection Session Summary.pdf](#)