

Case study

1. Project title

Youth Music - Beats & Pieces

2. Introduction

Beats & Pieces had aims to develop the musical, personal and social skills of young people aged between 11-16 living in East Durham by providing access to informal percussion music making opportunities. The pilot project has supported a series of workshops facilitated by a music delivery team from The Sage Gateshead and supported by youth workers from the two trusted community venues hosting the sessions. The sessions have made use of simple percussion 'instruments' made from everyday objects, therefore negating any financial or social barriers to participation in fun sessions whilst offering the opportunity for young people to gain Arts Award Explore accreditation.

3. Project information

Project aims

Beats & Pieces had broad aims to use music as a means to engage young people from East Durham in order to develop their musical, personal and social skills and aspirations whilst laying the foundations for sustained arts engagement.

More specifically, the project sought to meet the following aims linked to the Youth Music funding matching the support provided by the East Durham Creates Creative People and Places (CPP) programme:

- **Musical** - To develop young people's musical and performance skills through opportunities to participate in supportive music making environments and performance opportunities.
- **Personal** - To support the personal and social development of young people attending group music making workshops; and to increase confidence, self- esteem and aspirations through participation.
- **Organisational** - To embed regular, accessible music provision for young people in an area which faces significant deprivation and a lack of cultural infrastructure; and to increase local community venues' capacity for offering music-making as part of their provision.

This evaluation case study focuses, to a large degree, on the third of these outcome areas - organisational, with a view to informing potential legacy outcomes from the East Durham Creates CPP programme.

Target participants

Beats & Pieces meets Youth Music's¹ 'Coldspots' funding priority in targeting 'children and young people who face barriers to accessing diverse music-making opportunities as a direct result of where they live in England'. The project had an initial targeted of engaging up to 60 young people aged 11-16 years old from two deprived communities in East Durham - Dawdon and Blackhall, with little or no experience of playing music and who wouldn't normally have access to these kinds of structured, but informal, arts activities.

¹ <https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/>

East Durham Creates is managed by

Project partners

The key partners in the project included:

- **East Durham Creates** Creative People and Places (CCP) programme as commissioner;
- **Youth Music** as funder alongside East Durham Creates;
- **The Sage Gateshead** as lead music delivery partner;
- **Dawdon Youth & Community Centre** as host with support from management and youth workers;
- **Blackhall Community Centre** as host with support from management and youth workers;
- **Sage Gateshead Music delivery team** - including a Sage Gateshead music leader and an emerging local music leader; and
- **Music delivery team** for the project extension period between Oct-Dec 2017 - Ben Seebuufu and Michael Baines.

Project activities

The project began with two taster sessions for young people identified as potentially being interested and able to benefit from the opportunity to participate in the workshops. The taster sessions alternated between Dawdon Youth and Community Centre and Blackhall Community Centre for two weeks before the first of 25 core sessions, running on a fortnightly basis, commenced at each venue.

Each session was facilitated by two music leaders - Finlay McDermid, an experienced musician from Sage Gateshead's CoMusica programme² and James Dougherty, an emerging music leader based in East Durham who has completed a community music degree at Sage Gateshead. The workshop leaders worked with the young people to develop their confidence, self-esteem, group work skills and musical potential through a variety of exercises and games focusing on improvisation techniques and listening, technical and coordination skills. The skills and confidence developed through this process represent a key outcome of the project and a strong feature in the creation of the groups' performance material.

The combination of structure and freedom offered to the young people to lead aspects of the workshops enabled young people with varying abilities to feel comfortable playing in a supportive environment which allowed individuals to develop at their own pace. Workshop activities therefore focused on empowering the young people to drive their own musical development and direction from choosing an instrument through to starting a rhythm to be followed by rest of the group.

The workshop sessions were complemented by opportunities for the groups to benefit from events and activities with the potential to not only inform the workshops, but crucially inspire longer term engagement with the arts. These included 18 young people taking part in a percussion masterclass in August 2016 with Brooklyn-based musicians So Percussion and a visit to The Sage Gateshead.³

The masterclass with So Percussion provided the young people with the opportunity to see 'real musicians' performing pieces in a similar style and similar instruments to those used in the workshops (i.e. simple percussion instruments and clapping techniques). The number and variety of comments and questions in response to this experience highlighted the impact and value of these inspiration activities to the group with the techniques showcased in the masterclass evident in subsequent group work in the following weeks.

² <http://www.sagegateshead.com/comusica/training-and-resources/>

³ <https://sopercussion.com/about/>

The value of the sessions in leading to formal qualifications is highlighted in the young people being supported to complete Arts Awards Explore accreditation. Led by the Arts Awards-trained Sage Gateshead music leader with support from the local music leader and youth workers, time was allocated within each session for the young people to complete their Arts Awards Explore booklets, combining narratives of their activities with photographs, audio and video recordings to document their progress.

At the end of the scheduled Youth Music sessions East Durham Creates maintained the Beats & Pieces group with the help of project underspend, commissioning two music practitioners with skills in working with young people living in challenging circumstances to extend and value to group activities between October - December 2017. The Beats & Pieces group continued to play and make instruments from everyday objects including tins, cans and pots, but also gained experience of African instruments including drums, percussion, string instruments and some wind instruments.

The continuation funding also supported the development of a second group drawn from young people attending Dawdon Youth and Community Centre's 'Safe Place 2 Talk' group. This group, made up of younger children with very limited experience of music, enjoyed six sessions of making instruments from everyday objects, recording sounds and creating tunes based around their names and a Christmas song. Both groups performed to friends, family and staff at the centre at the end of the activity just before Christmas 2017.

Key challenges

Beats & Pieces has addressed a number of challenges:

- A project working in an area suffering from multiple aspects of deprivation must adapt to the ability of participants to both attend sessions and maintain participation in the longer term. By focusing on using everyday objects to create an ensemble, and supporting young people with food and refreshments, the project has ensured that participation is not affected by financial pressures.
- Working with young people with a range of barriers to engaging with music activities on a sustained basis requires a combination of technical and participatory skills and experience. The combined support of the music delivery team and youth workers provides a combination of skills and experience which can build on the established relationship between the workers and the young people.
- Although trusted community venues used by young people on a regular basis provide a safe and convenient location to host informal music activities, the design and acoustics of many community buildings do not necessarily lend themselves to a quality of musical performance to match the quality of the engagement and delivery.
- It is difficult for even a high quality music delivery team to make a sustained difference in just six or seven sessions or on a fortnightly basis as momentum is slowed, or even lost if a young person misses even one session.
- It is more difficult to establish a new group of young people (e.g. in Blackhall) as opposed to building on an existing group (e.g. Dawdon) which already has established relationships, structures, rules and routines.

4. Outcomes and impact – what changed as a result?

Project outcomes

Beats & Pieces has provided the opportunity for young people to access a range of informal music activities that they otherwise would not have benefited from. Consultation with the young people highlights that the project has either started or reignited an interest in music, especially amongst those who had started to play an instrument in school before having to stop, mainly due to cost. The strength of the outcomes from the project is highlighted by the sustained engagement and consistently high attendance rates for the project, as well as the increased levels of attention and concentration observed when directed to focus and practice their parts by the music development team.

The project has crucially provided a wealth of experience and learning for a range of partners of what is possible in terms of both delivery of, and impact from, the provision of informal music activities in community venues. The experience provides a template from which to inform approaches to engaging a range of young people from deprived areas of East Durham by a wider range of partners. It also highlights the potential for these and other arts projects to achieve a range of not only musical, but also personal and social development impacts and outcomes skills in addition to providing the inspiration for young people to sustain their engagement in the arts.

Project impact

Feedback from the music delivery team and assessment of Youth Music Musical Development questionnaires completed by the young people reveal a range of progression in the group's music and performance skills that can be attributed to participation in the project. This ranges from building the skills and confidence to lead the group by initiating a rhythm or singing to younger group members maintaining the rhythm for longer periods of time or keeping the beat.

“She’s been banging on everything in the house with her drumsticks” (parent/guardian)

“I’ve been banging out the rhythm on the dinner tables at school!” (young person)

“He really likes being able to lead rather than being told what to do” (parent/guardian)

The results from 15 completed Youth Music Evaluation scales used to evaluate Musical Development and Citizenship & Agency [amongst the Beats & Pieces group](#) provided a slight upward trend overall with some negative results in some individual responses judged to be linked to the range of ages and experience within the group.

“Overall, the slight upward trend in responses supports the broadly enthusiastic comments, varied creative responses and musical development of all who took part.” (Music Delivery Team)

“The comments and evaluation scales indicate that the project succeeded in offering participants experience of successful engagement in creative music making, with heightened interest, increased confidence and newfound skills.” (Music Delivery Team)

Feedback from the young people attending Dawdon Youth and Community Centre's 'Safe Place 2 Talk' group was also positive with participants reporting improved scores after the final sessions in terms of how they picture their life. The results from Youth Music Evaluation scales also reflect the qualitative feedback from the young people in terms of their enjoyment of and ability to make music, their work as a group as well as general attitudes and behaviours.

Participation in the project is acknowledged to have had a strong impact on the personal and social development of the young people attending the workshop sessions, with community centre staff and parents/guardians both recognising increased levels of confidence, integration and ability to express themselves which they link to participation in the project. The music sessions have seen the young people grow both individually and as a group by working as a team to produce a piece to perform and develop their musical interest and abilities.

“Music really helps with her ability to express herself verbally” (parent/guardian)

“There’s no judgement from the others in the group – everyone is accepted for their ability”
(community centre staff)

“You can see a difference in their emotional wellbeing – even the quieter ones are talking more and interacting with the group” (community centre staff)

“It’s been so good for him with his autism and helped him to make friends” (parent/guardian)

“It’s allowed the children to express themselves more - more than they can with something competitive like sport” (community centre staff)

“It’s been amazing and really helped him to integrate into school” (parent/guardian)

“We noticed big improvements in young people’s ability to listen and follow instructions as they became more engaged in the project” (Music Delivery Team)

“When we were in the centre working as a big group as I think that helped us to work better as a team, also all of us got along better after every session as we understood each other more”
(young person)

However, one of the biggest impacts of the project has been a change in the outlook and activities supported by the community centre’s involved. Although touching on the arts in lots of activities, this pilot project has highlighted the value of music in achieving a range of outcomes for the centre and young people alike. Staff and management at Dawdon Youth and Community Centre in particular acknowledged the value of arts activities and expressed an intention to seek additional funding in order to maintain provision and build on the progress and inspiration with the groups.

“I’d really like for them to keep going and produce their own composition complete with lyrics and bass” (community centre staff)

Legacy

East Durham, as an area suffering from multiple aspects of deprivation, has suffered from a lack of investment in public services over many years. Extending this to participation in music, several of the young people involved in Beats & Pieces stated that they had started to play an instrument, typically at school, but had to give it up due to the cost. This project provides an accessible route for children and young people to re-engage with music in a trusted environment without the barriers of costs to them and their families.

This project provides a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence to make the case for further investment in East Durham in projects which support informal music provision based on learning related to both delivery and impact. Crucially, it highlights the potential for progression to formal learning outcomes and the potential for partners to replicate the Beats & Pieces model to sustain activities in the area in the future independent of funding from East Durham Creates.

“Question: Would you like to go back to The Sage to see a performance?” “Answer: No, I’d like to perform at The Sage!”

Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities across East Durham include:

- Initial engagement and sustained participation in the groups have been achieved by delivering activities in venues (and staff) which are familiar and local to the target audience.
- As a key delivery partner, The Sage Gateshead offered both extensive experience in projects funded by Youth Music and the opportunity for added value activities. The role and input of music practitioners with experience of engaging with 'at risk' young people in challenging circumstances possessing both the technical and participatory skills to deliver the workshops provides a firm foundation for success.
- Youth workers have played an increasing role in assisting with the delivery of the project overtime, moving from mainly ensuring discipline is maintained to supporting artistic delivery. This highlights the potential to incorporate training and professional development into future project with the potential to build capacity to support future activities.
- The project has benefited from being hosted in a supportive and familiar environment that encouraged the young people to contribute their own ideas and develop new skills through working as part of a team.
- In an area of deprivation such as East Durham, the provision of a meal or snack for project participants can help to support engagement.
- Projects providing informal music activities need not spend large amounts of money on instruments with young people enjoying playing the comb and paper, shaking a tin of dried peas or banging a pot, glass bottle or even a bed pan!
- The impact of a masterclass with an international artists including direct interaction and 'up close' experience of a performance can have a major impact on the content of sessions, sustaining engagement and increasing aspirations for young people with little exposure to quality live performance.
- Weekly sessions in one location may have been more productive overall in terms of maintaining momentum than sharing relatively scarce resources between two centres. However, the young people reacted well to meeting and working with the other group with potential outcomes linked to community cohesion.

Young person trying new types of drumming at Dawdon Youth centre



Dawdon Youth Centre performance Dec 2017

