



ADVENTURERS:

EARLY YEARS MUSIC INTERVENTION

EVALUATION REPORT

July 2021

KEY FINDINGS

- Adventurers has successfully contributed to families' music making: their enjoyment of music, expanded the kinds of music making children are doing, and stimulated an increase in music making at home.
- The music making sessions have achieved the non-musical outcomes families were hoping for: parents gaining confidence at attending groups and meeting new people, children developing their speech and language, opportunities for social interaction during lockdown, and a fun way of parents and children spending time together.
- The contribution to social interaction, speech and language, and enjoyment of music has been particularly important to families when music making and everyday opportunities for social interaction have been curtailed due to coronavirus.
- Adventurers reached its target participants (families considered disadvantaged and needing support), due to the thoughtful and rigorous referral process by the children's centre staff
- The children's centre staff valued having an activity to offer families which complimented their other services and groups. As a small group or one-to-one activity, Adventurers could support families for whom large or busy group activities were not suitable. Adventurers offered an additional way for families to have contact and support whilst they were on waiting lists for other children's centre services. The children's centre value the partnership with Evolve Music and welcome working together to provide more music making for families.
- There are some improvements which could be made to the recruitment and referral process which may increase the number of families referred who then go on to participate.

EVOLVE MUSIC: ADVENTURERS

EVALUATION REPORT

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Adventurers is an early years music making project for families which aims to support early childhood development and family bonding. The project is a partnership between Evolve Music and Radstock Children's Centre, funded for two years by charitable trusts the Ragdoll Foundation and the St John's Foundation (from September 2019 to August 2021). Project activities were initially designed to be weekly small group music making sessions for up to eight families at Radstock Children's Centre, led by an experienced music leader and an assistant leader. The group sessions were interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic and the first UK lockdown in March 2020. Evolve Music moved to offering families online group and one-to-one music making sessions relatively swiftly from 16th April. Group sessions remained online until May 2021 when face-to-face activities at the children's centre resumed, although one-to-one sessions continued to be online only until the project end date.

The project was not open-access, but focused on families who needed additional support for whatever reason. Children's Centre staff and Health Visitors referred families to Adventurers who were then contacted by Evolve Music's project manager and encouraged to attend. Participation in the Adventurers group was initially intended to be time-limited to one 12-week term for each family, although flexibility for families to continue for longer if they wished was introduced.

Alongside Adventurers, Evolve Music also run Explorers, a paid-for, open-access weekly music making group for families with children aged from birth to five years. Whilst Explorers also aimed to support early childhood development, it accommodated a larger number of families and was therefore less tailored to specific family needs. Explorers sessions initially took place at Radstock Children's Centre, transferring to Radstock Community Library and Hub, and then moving online

due to the pandemic. Evolve Music provided bursaries for free places in Explorers to families who had taken part in Adventurers, providing a pathway for them to continue participation in a music making group if they wished, with the potential to meet more families in their community and further develop friendships and support networks.

The Adventurers music making sessions were designed by the music leaders to follow a structure which became familiar to families: a hello song, traditional well-known early years songs mixed with songs likely to be new to families, a "show and tell" activity, and a closing goodbye song. Toys and props (such as scarves and puppets) were used in the music making. The session activities were planned to support children's learning and development such as speech and language, numeracy and emotional development, in addition to promoting parent-child interaction and playfulness.

ABOUT EVOLVE MUSIC

Evolve Music is an educational charity, established in 2017, whose stated mission is to enrich the lives of families, young people and adults using sound and music. Evolve Music is a team of staff and freelance workers who devise, manage and deliver a variety of music making projects for different groups in the community, often with intended social or learning outcomes. The charity has grown from a geographical focus on Bath and North East Somerset, particularly the Somer Valley area, to working more widely across the South West of England. More information about current projects is available from: <https://evolvemusic.org.uk/>.

Adventurers was initiated and managed by Evolve Music, who engaged a project manager and freelance music leaders to deliver the project activities.

ABOUT RADSTOCK CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Radstock Children's Centre is one of three Bright Start Children's Centres run by Bath and North East Somerset Council. The centre provides services for families across the Somer Valley area including open-access groups, courses, referral-only programmes and tailored family support.

Radstock Children's Centre, as partners in the project, were instrumental in recruiting families to take part in Adventurers. Children's Centre staff referred families to the project, supported families to attend and carried out evaluation activities.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Evolve Music commissioned an external evaluator (Nell Farrally) in autumn 2019 to oversee the Adventurers evaluation process, design an evaluation plan and framework, support data collection, and create interim and final evaluation reports. The evaluation approach combined several theoretical positions on evaluation:

Collaborative – with “a substantial degree of collaboration between evaluators and stakeholders in the evaluation process” (Rodríguez-Campos and Rincones-Gómez, 2013, p.15). In a collaborative approach, the Evaluator's role is to lead and co-ordinate the evaluation, whilst fostering a collaborative ethos amongst those involved.

Outcomes evaluation – in outcomes evaluation “the basic notion is that... something is supposed to change as a result of the program and outcome evaluations seek to assess whether or not this has happened” (Robson, 2017, p.49). The intended outcomes articulated at the start of the project are placed in an *outcomes framework* to help identify how they will be measured.

Illuminative evaluation – illuminative evaluation differs from outcomes evaluation in that it does not foreground pre-defined intended outcomes for groups or individuals but uses an inductive approach to capture the actual effects of the project: “illuminative evaluations are based on... the importance of understanding people and programs in context, a commitment to study

naturally occurring phenomena without introducing external controls or manipulation, and the assumption that understanding emerges most meaningfully from an inductive analysis of open-ended, detailed, descriptive data gathered through direct interactions and transaction with the program and its participants” (Patton, 2015, p.207).

To provide a focus for the evaluation, an Evaluation Plan included four questions which the evaluation seeks to address:

1. To what extent have the project aims and outcomes been achieved?
2. What factors have influenced the achievement of aims and outcomes?
3. What is most valuable or important about Adventurers to those involved: children / parents / families, music leaders, children's centres and other partners, Evolve Music as an organisation?
4. What are the key points of learning or reflection from the project?

The aims and intended outcomes of the project were revised as part of creating the Evaluation Plan in consultation with Evolve Music's trustees and staff:

Project aims (the overall effect of *what* the project hopes to achieve)

We aim to:

- Support our local children's centre to improve young families' engagement in their services, through providing music activities as an intervention for disadvantaged young children before they start school.
- Establish regular child-centred music sessions for children aged 0-5 years, designed to enable fun and creative exploration of sound and music, which supports their learning and development.
- Provide access to high quality cultural activities for the most deprived in our community, whilst reducing social isolation for families with young children.
- Support the development of early years music leadership in the area, increasing the skills and experience of the local freelance music leaders.

Project outcomes are grouped into two areas: 1) outcomes for children and families; and 2) outcomes for Evolve Music and project partners.

Outcomes (changes which a project hopes to affect)

Outcomes for children and families

- Children will have increased confidence at taking part in group music making.
- Parents/caregivers will have increased confidence at music making with their child.
- Parents/caregivers and children will make more music at home due to musical ideas and activities learnt in the group.
- Families will have developed parent-child communication through musical play and activities which enhances children's communication, speech and language development.
- Parents/caregivers will have increased confidence to attend groups at the children's centre and increased awareness of other services which could support them.
- Families who are experiencing social isolation will have reduced social isolation through opportunities to meet other local families and build new social connections.

Outcomes for Evolve Music and project partners

- Establish effective partnership working between Evolve Music and Radstock Children's Centre which supports both organisations' objectives.
- Successfully involve families who are considered disadvantaged (according to children's centre criteria) in music making groups and enhancing social connections between families from different social backgrounds.
- Increase opportunities for arts/cultural activity in the Radstock area and increased valuing of arts and cultural activities in communities.
- Increase families' engagement with children's centre services and enable signposting for families to other activities and services.
- Establish effective partnership working between Evolve Music and higher education partners leading to successful placements which enhance students' learning and meet Evolve Music's objectives.
- Undertakes robust evaluation of the work, which improves practice, and provides evidence and data which could support the development of further early years music making activities.

The evaluation planning included an Outcomes Framework that identified outcome indicators and methods of data collection for the intended outcomes.

The coronavirus pandemic fundamentally changed the nature of planned project activities and potentially the project's ability to achieve all the detailed intended outcomes and target participation numbers. Evaluation activities also had to be revised due to lockdowns, government working from home advice and the move to online music making sessions. The evaluation activities described so far in this report concern plans made at the beginning of the project. Rather than continually comparing planned project activities and evaluation with what has actually taken place, from this point forwards, this report focuses on understanding what has been achieved and the learning from the project: articulating where outcomes have been met and what else can be understood from the illuminative evaluation approach.

Evaluation data and evidence which have been collected and considered for this report are:

- Referral records (includes details of families' circumstances and support needs)
- Attendance records
- Music Leaders' session notes
- Children's Centre evaluation forms (includes pre and post scale-level questions and qualitative questions)
- Online and phone interviews with parents by the evaluator (4 parents)
- Interviews with children's centre staff members by the evaluator
- Online interview with placement student by the evaluator
- Written question responses from higher education partner.

Qualitative data from each of these methods are summarised into themes using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020) to identify meaning relevant to the intended aims and outcomes and the "illuminative" approach to evaluation.

Information from the interviews was used to create a written case study about a selected family (with their permission) with a more in-depth narrative about one family's experiences of the project. This family were

chosen because the Evolve Music team identified that the project had significant effect for them, but it is not suggested that this family's experiences are typical across all participants.

To accommodate each family's needs for support, there was flexibility to have one-to-one online sessions and to stay in the Adventurers for longer or shorter than 12 weeks before joining Explorers. There were six families who joined the Explorers group following participation in Adventurers. The scope of this evaluation is limited to the Adventurers one-to-one and group sessions.

Any evaluation has limitations which need to be acknowledged. For Adventurers, there are a number of limitations which should be considered in the overall judgements about the project. Firstly, many families were referred to the project who chose not to take part. It has not been possible to seek the views of these parents in the evaluation process for ethical and practical reasons. Secondly, there is a natural attrition of participants in most group activities. The children's centre senior early years practitioner endeavoured to contact families who discontinued taking part to complete an evaluation form, but they have not always responded to contact, therefore not every parent's views are represented in the evaluation. The result is that feedback from parents is likely to slant towards the positive – parents who contributed to evaluation activities are mostly those who chose to participate for a sustained period of time. A third limitation is due to the circumstances of the pandemic. Many evaluation activities relied on remote communication and observation by the evaluator. Whilst phone and online interviews are a good method of collecting feedback, and online communication with project workers is effective, evaluation often benefits from an evaluator building relationships and trust with people who contribute to evaluation. Without in-person meetings and participation this has been more difficult due to social distancing guidance and restrictions on people gathering.

WHO TOOK PART?

Key measures of participation in Adventurers are shown in the box below.

80 families referred to the project

24% percent of families were referred by health visitors

76% percent of families were referred by children's centre staff

34 families took part in at least one session

22 families had sustained engagement *

50 group music making sessions took place (30 online and 20 face-to-face)

143 one-to-one online music making session took place

6 families moved on to taking part in Explorers following participation in Adventurers

*Evolve Music considered sustained engagement to be attending at least 3 sessions or over a period of at least 2 months

All families who were referred had experiences or circumstances which meant they were seeking support from professional services. These circumstances included: domestic violence; victims of trafficking; living in temporary accommodation; bereavement; lack of family support; post-natal depression; other mental health needs; experiencing debt and/or poverty; concerns over children's emotional, behavioural or speech and language development; families with Child in Need plans; children with autism; and medical conditions which affect childhood development. Some families had multiple support needs. All the families referred to the project live in the Radstock Children's Centre reach area.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION EVIDENCE

Referral records

A spreadsheet with records of families referred to the project was updated by both the children's centre senior early years practitioner and Evolve Music's project manager. The records included parent contact details, ages of children and some information about why the family were being referred. The spreadsheet was primarily a project management tool to keep track

of contact made with each family following referral, but also contains a wealth of information showing the difficulties experienced by families, children's additional needs, and what support they were currently receiving. This information is useful in considering if the project has successfully reached families who are experiencing disadvantage, deprivation or circumstances which require additional support. Due to the confidential and sensitive information contained within the records, the details are not going to be discussed in this report, other than to recognise that all families referred to the project were in need of support beyond universal services available to all families. Many families were experiencing very difficult circumstances which likely impinged on their quality of life and their children's potential to thrive.

Attendance records

Again, although primarily for project management purposes, the attendance records show patterns of participation which provide useful information for assessing achievement towards outcomes. Parents' choices to take part may indicate that Adventurers is meeting their needs and expectations, and could signify outcomes such as: *increased confidence at taking part in group music making* and *increased confidence to attend groups at the children's centre*. Of course, a choice to not participate could indicate the opposite – that parental needs and expectations are not being met. The project was conceived as having the potential for families to meet the intended outcomes through participation in 12 weeks of sessions. The attendance records show that:

26% (n=9) of families who attended at least one Adventurers session completed a 12-week term.

59% (n=20) of families who attended at least one session attended 50% or more sessions their 12-week term.

Although some families attended only once and did not return, the longest participating member joined Adventurers for the very first session and then moved on to attend Explorers, continuing to participate over 20 months almost until the end the project. The mode

average number of sessions a family attended Adventurers is six.

Whilst it was always the intention that Adventurers would involve small groups (between four and eight families), patterns of attendance meant there were small numbers taking part each week. Whilst the face-to-face groups were meeting before the pandemic, this meant that occasionally only one or two families were present on weeks where there were high levels of absence. The greatest number of families attending a face-to-face session was five. For the online sessions, a smaller group was preferable and the intentional format of offering some families one-to-one sessions worked well for those who were reluctant to join an online group activity.

Music Leaders' session notes

The music leaders were asked to keep notes as a record of each music making session, to aid their own planning and to capture evidence for evaluation which might demonstrate how the intended project outcomes were addressed. The evaluator did a thematic analysis of the music leaders' sessions notes. Thematic analysis is a method of coding qualitative data to aid interpretation, reduce large volumes of data into core themes, and to highlight patterns in data. The music leaders' notes were largely their own observations of how children responded to the activities but also included documented verbal feedback from parents.

The evaluator coded the text in the notes which enabled creating themes to summarise how families were benefitting from group music making activities, evident from the notes. The main themes from this analysis are:

- Enjoyment and engagement
- Benefit to parent/caregivers
- Musical development
- Social interaction
- Communication, speech and language
- Emotional and behavioural development
- Exploration and developing own interests
- Motor skills

The theme of Enjoyment and Engagement notes how children are observed by the music leaders to be enjoying the activities in the music sessions, engaged with the music making and actively participating. In contrast, the notes also document when children do not participate in planned activities with consideration of reasons why this might be, for example, distractions in the room, and the music leaders' strategies for addressing or accommodating children's lack of engagement. Examples of how the music leaders are responsive to children's engagement includes changing an activity to a song they know has engaged that child before, or ending an online session earlier than planned if the child is distressed. In addition to in-the-moment adaptations, the notes contain actions the music leaders intend to take in future sessions, such as observing that a child is not vocalising, therefore the music leader intends to incorporate more signing to support communication in future sessions. When the music sessions moved online due to the first lockdown, one interesting aspect of the session notes is the difficulties the music leaders experiencing in engaging children in music making via Zoom and actions they took to adapt their activities to maximise children's engagement with online music making, thereby demonstrating child-centred practice. The notes capture the reflexivity of the music leaders, including when they found things difficult and they felt sessions did not go well.

The second theme, *benefit to parent/caregivers*, included indicators of adult wellbeing such observations of parents appearing uplifted or relaxed. There were observations of how adults joined in with the music making, that they appeared comfortable in the group (prior to the pandemic) and where they were confident to communicate with others. The notes record where parents' communication is not confident, for example, if English is an additional language for them, and how the music leaders intend to support communication for them. Notes of face-to-face sessions which took place before the pandemic show that parents were seeking and finding social support in the group – both from other parents and the music leaders. The face-to-face group also provided opportunities for parents to share parenting challenges with each other. The final benefit to parents is that occasions of parents reflecting on

their children's participation were noted, for example, parents being surprised or pleased at how their children responded or joined in. This shows parents' awareness of their child's development, for example:

At the end C. said that she felt D. was growing in confidence each week to move away from her and play and that this is his only contact with children his own age.

Musical development was the next theme with many aspects of musical skills and musicality included. The notes document children's exploration of instruments, child-initiated musical play and their musical responses to stimuli. Specific instances of children showing musical understanding and skills are noted, for example, when a child is showing a good sense of pulse or responds physically such as clapping or wiggling. Children's musical preferences are documented such as a preferred song, seemingly so that music leaders can incorporate and build on children's interests. The notes recount when parents indicate that they are making more music at home, such as singing songs they've learnt during the sessions, at other times, for example:

H. said that R. had being singing and doing the actions to this [song] at home.

The theme of social interaction had several aspects. Interaction between children in the face-to-face groups was noted, for example:

Friendly exchange between A. and B. B. stroked his head and wanted to give him shakers.

Observations of parent-child interactions were also noted and interactions between children and music leaders. The notes comment on families' capacity to be in the group environment (for face-to-face sessions). Children's increasing confidence and independence from their parent is noted regarding the face-to-face sessions (eg. moving away from sitting on mum's lap) and in the online sessions (child unmuting themselves to speak to the music leader). For both the face-to-face and online sessions, children making choices not to

participate is noted, demonstrating that children’s agency is respected and to document progression.

As enhancing children’s communication, speech and language is a key intended outcome of the project, there are many examples of music leaders making notes about aspects of children’s speech and language – where they are vocalising and singing, joining in with actions and using signing, and noting a lack of vocalising so the music can support language.

There are many aspects of emotional and behavioural development which are observed in how the children participate: sharing, turn-taking, understanding and following instructions, listening, coping with transitions between activities, and maintaining attention on activities. The music leaders note the progression children make regarding the enculturation into the norms and expectations of group activities (such as turn-taking). The notes show the music leaders’ sensitivity to children’s emotions – noting when an activity seems to overwhelm a child and a move to using music to create a change in mood, for example, singing Twinkle Twinkle to create a calm atmosphere.

The penultimate theme is exploration and children developing their own interests. This theme concerns noting what each child is interested in (for example, animal), harnessing these interests to engage them in music making whilst also supporting learning in these different areas. A “Show and Tell” time becomes a regular part of the online sessions which allows children to share their interests with the music leader and other families.

Observations of motor skills are the final theme from the session notes.




Children’s Centre evaluation forms




An evaluation form for parents was created collaboratively by the evaluator and children’s centre staff. The format of the form included “pre” questions which asked parents what they hoped to achieve from taking part when they first joined Adventurers, and “post” questions to ask them to reflect on their experience at the end of their participation. The forms were primarily completed by the children’s centre senior early years practitioner by verbally questioning

parents in person or over the phone. 16 forms were completed with both pre and post questions answered – out of a possible 34 parents who took part in at least one session. The practitioner’s efforts to contact families to complete the form were not always successful, sometimes after repeated attempts to make contact.

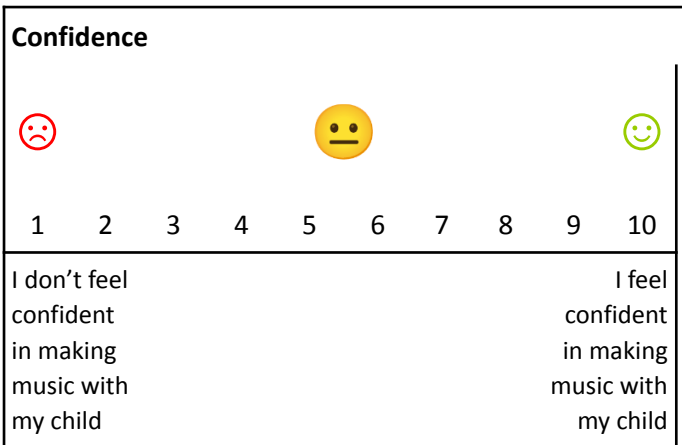
Parents’ answers to the qualitative questions were thematically analysed by the evaluator to group responses into themes. This method of analysing data was also used for the interviews with parents (the next section of this report). As the method of analysis was the same and there was a great deal of overlap in the coding and themes for the questionnaire and interview data, the themes from the two methods were combined into one summary of parents’ views of the project.

In addition to the questions which required qualitative responses, some questions involved rating scales to help parents to reflect on how they and their child may have progressed. Parents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10, at the start and end of their participation, where their family were in three areas: children’s learning, social networks and confidence at making music. Descriptors and sad/smiley faces for the rating scale were provided:

| Supporting learning | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | | | | |  | | | |  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| I am concerned that my child is missing out and is delayed in their learning | | | | | My child is learning well and I have no concerns | | | | |

| Social Networks | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | | | | |  | | | |  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| I am isolated and | | | | | I have the social contact I | | | | |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| struggle to know who to talk to | need and want to talk to |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|



When aggregated together, the parents' responses show for how many the project had a positive impact in these areas and indicates what is the most impactful aspect of the project for families.

The percentages and number of families who indicated an increase of one point or more on the rating scale from the start to end of their participation was:

| | Parents who increased one or more points on the rating scale | Parents who increased three or more points on the rating scale |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Supporting learning | 75% (n=12) | 25% (n=4) |
| Social networks | 63% (n=10) | 19% (n=3) |
| Confidence | 56% (n=9) | 13% (n=2) |

The numbers in the table suggest that overall, parents felt that the area where Adventurers made the most difference to them was regarding their child's learning, followed by increasing their social networks and then their confidence at making music with their child.

Out of the 16 completed questionnaires, 94% (n=15) of parents indicated an increase of one or more points on the rating scale in at least one area. The parent who experienced no change at all had attended one online session. All 16 parents said they would like to take part in more music making in a group in the future. Many qualified their response by saying they would only wish to take part in a face-to-face group.

Another question asked about the frequency music making at home and if there had been any change from the start to the end of families' participation using four descriptors: rarely, sometimes, often, consistently. 38% (n=6) of parents said they made more music at home at the end of their participation than at the start. Of the 10 parents who said there was no change to the amount of music making at home, nine already made music at home "often" or "consistently" at the start of their participation in Adventurers.

Online and phone interviews with parents by the evaluator

A total of four families took part in online or phone interviews with the evaluator which asked them to talk in more detail about their experiences of Adventurers. Following coding and thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews, the themes were amalgamated with those from the parent questionnaire qualitative data. A table of themes and coding from the questionnaire and interviews is shown in full in Appendix One.

The first group of themes concerned parents' motivations for taking part in Adventurers and what they hoped to gain from it, which included:

- Social interaction
- Children's speech and language development
- Children's emotional and behavioural development
- Nurturing the parent-child relationship
- Making music
- Coping with the circumstances of lockdown
- Parental learning

Regarding social interaction, parents wanted to increase their own confidence at attended groups, meeting new people and talking to others. Some wanted a reason to get out of the house (before the pandemic). Parents also wanted their children to have opportunities to interact with others (both other children and adults) and make friends – this applied to both face-to-face and online activities. There were several aspects of speech and language in parents' motivations. Some children had identified speech and language delay and they had been referred to the group by their Health Visitor because of this.

Some parents wanted their children to be in an environment where they could experience hearing and speaking English, as many languages were spoken at home. A parent whose child had special education needs wanted them to develop more sensory awareness and gain experience of using Makaton for communication. The theme of children's emotional and behavioural development included parents hoping their child would gain more confidence to join in and become familiar with the norms and expectations of participating in a group, in addition to learning to share and having fun. Some parents wished to use the music making as a time to bond and interact more with their child. There were hopes specifically about music making – parents wanted their children to enjoy music and to join in with singing. Parents spoke and wrote about how the music sessions might help them cope with the circumstances of lockdown by offering a sense of normality and giving them ideas of activities they could do with their child at home whilst nurseries were closed. Finally, one parent wrote that she wanted to improve her own English, which was an additional language for her. Parents' range of motivations and hopes shows they have a good awareness of the potential for music making to support their family.

The second group of themes described the actual effects of taking part in Adventurers for families.

- Social interaction
- Speech and language
- Children's emotional and behavioural development
- Music making
- Wellbeing
- Parenting skills

There is a great deal of alignment with what parents hoped they would get from the music sessions and what effects they did actual have. Parents did experience social interaction in the face-to-face groups. They met other parents with whom they kept in contact outside of the group. They did increase their confidence to go to groups with people they did not know. The online groups did not achieve much social contact with other parents, although parents did appreciate what little interaction with others outside of the home there was. One parent gained more confidence of talking to people online. Aspects of speech and language Adventurers

supported was more and improved verbal communication by children including: clearer speech and better articulation of words, increased vocabulary and more making sounds. One parent spoke about how the one-to-one online session helped their child's speech:

We were worried because he's a bit behind with his speech. He's not talking at all. And so the health visitor pointed us in the direction of the singing class... to try to help and encourage because, especially with covid, those no meetings, so they said how about a zoom meeting...

Well, I can't fault the results. We signed up 10 weeks ago, we we're worried about A – he wasn't talking at all or babbling. And probably in the last few weeks, he's just started babbling. So that's a positive. He is saying mama now when he wasn't before.

Parents reported that their children were more confident around other children and adults due to the music sessions. Children missing out on being with other children during lockdown was a concern for parents. One example from a parent evaluation form:

M. interacted with Esther [music leader], she started making choices and has become more confident and copies actions to songs.

There were many aspects of music making parents recognised. They felt more confident in themselves to join in singing and dancing. Parents were singing more at home, had learnt new songs and had gained more understanding of what songs and music their child preferred. Adventurers had introduced more ways of making music at home to families such as using scarves and instruments. Parents valued that their children were enjoying music, copying actions, choosing songs and spontaneously singing at home. One parent felt that the sessions had helped their child to develop their imagination. A small number of parents gave information about aspects of their wellbeing. For one parent, attending the face-to-face group had helped with her anxiety. For another, she found that the online session gave her time 'to chill' as she found the

constant need to provide stimulation and activities for her toddler at home during lockdown was difficult. The final theme in this group is termed parenting skills which refers to a parent who had gained confidence in her existing parenting through being with other parents and children in the face-to-face group. Her concerns about her child's development were allayed. The children's centre staff wrote on the evaluation form:

Seeing how other's were has made S. realise how patient she can be and that she doesn't have to worry about D.'s focus as he's still learning.

The next group of themes focuses on parents' responses to a question about what was most valuable or important to parents about Adventurers.

- Welcoming atmosphere
- Social interaction
- Speech and language
- Fun and being together
- Structure during lockdown

Parents valued the welcoming atmosphere created by the music leaders being kind and friendly, putting people at ease and not pressuring parents and children to participate.

Everyone was really kind and friendly and F. wasn't made to do anything he didn't want to.

The theme of welcoming atmosphere also included how the one-to-one sessions were tailored to each child's development and mood at that time. The most valued aspect of Adventurers for some parents was the social interaction during lockdown, even though it was online. How the group helped their child's speech and language was the most valuable for some parents. Having fun with their child and being together was valued. Parents enjoyed seeing their child have fun and the music sessions provided a focused time to be together and bond. Simply giving a structure to the week during lockdown was an important aspect for some families and Adventurers gave them something to look forward to.

It was nice to have something to engage the children and have interactions with other people. Something to look forward to each week.

Other things which featured in the interviews were comments about the nature of online sessions. Some parents felt that their child did not enjoy the online sessions and they struggled to engage or understand what was happening. On family's only digital device was a mobile phone, so the small screen made it difficult to see what was taking place. Some parents spoke of how the pandemic had particularly been detrimental to their family: one example is a mother being in hospital for a week after giving birth with the baby's father not being permitted to visit. Another family's concerns about their child's speech and language delay were exacerbated by everyday social interaction, such as going to the shops, being curtailed.

Parents were asked if they had suggestions of how the music sessions could be improved. There were very few comments and there was a high level of satisfaction. Some parents said that they wished for a return to face-to-face groups would be better but acknowledged that getting out of the house is more difficult and a change of routine doesn't always fit with existing family schedules (nursery, parents' work etc).

The experiences of one family who took part in Adventurers and then moved on to Explorers are described in a case study, based on two phone interviews with the evaluator.

Family Case Study (names changed for anonymity)

Jake was 18 months when he first joined Adventurers right at the start of the project (four months before the pandemic). His mum, Sarah, wanted Jake to have the opportunity to make music with instruments and to get used to taking part in a group. Although they often made music at home, during music time at the end of the Play and Explore group at the children's centre, Jake did not want to sit down and take part and would run around the room.

Sarah was keen to take part in the online sessions when they were first offered. She recalls that Jake didn't want to sit in front of the laptop at first and

would move around the room playing, not particularly engaging with the music leader on the screen.

“He’s never really been into technology so, when it first started, even talking to family was quite difficult to get him to sit on the webcam.”

Sarah would move the laptop around the room to where Jake was playing to encourage him to get involved in the music session. This continued for a few weeks, but Sarah persevered, and Jake gradually got used to seeing the music leader on screen and joined in.

“He did do most of the session today – he went and ran off at some point. And he starts the songs as well. Some of them, he will start the song, which yeah, shows he’s learning and taking part. He has been taking part more and more each time which is quite nice. He likes the sessions because there is a structure and he had to sit down, and then he gets to move, and it was good to get him into that and being able to listen to someone that wasn’t me!”

Sarah spoke about how, as a parent, the music sessions helped her during lockdown.

“It’s great at the moment, just being able to see someone else for a bit. Just having that 15 minutes... Although I’m there, I don’t feel like I’m in charge, as Clara’s leading it. It’s just 15 minutes for my mind... where I just take part and not have to find something for him to do – if you know what I mean.”

Sarah and Jake moved on to taking part in the Explorers group and participated almost right up to the end of the project when he was three years old. When Jake started attending nursery, Sarah did consider ceasing with the online music group, but she gave Jake a choice and he wanted to continue. As parents were not allowed into nursery because of coronavirus, Sarah had no sense of what her child was doing whilst he was away from her, so Explorers was a way for her to keep connected with what he was interested in.

Jake particularly enjoyed the Show and Tell part of the music sessions where he would get to share things he enjoys.

“He loves finding something to show. He gets his bugs out now, his bug bag.”

Sarah also valued the social contact the online group provided for Jake.

“I still feel that it’s his social time, really. Even though it is online and there’s not much outside of the group... He does know each person, each child, he’ll go, ‘oh, where are they’ and he’ll point to them on the screen. He really likes it when a little girl called Anna turns up. He’s like, ‘oh, Anna’ and has some sort of bond, although they don’t talk outside of it, there’s like a nice little bond with different people.”

Sarah feels that the group has developed Jake’s enjoyment and understanding of music.

“It’s given us more ways of making music, like with the scarves, songs and stuff, and more action songs. I’ve got recordings of him at his keyboard, playing and singing songs. I feel it has helped him understand how instruments are involved in the music as well.”

Sarah stressed how much Jake enjoyed the music making and she expressed thanks for the opportunity to take part in the music sessions.

Interviews with children’s centre staff members by the evaluator

Towards the ends of the first and second year of the project, two members of staff (children’s centre manager and senior early years practitioner) took part in an online interview with the evaluator. The interviews included their reflections on the intended project outcomes and opportunities for improvement and development of the music sessions.

Although some of the outcomes had not been achieved due to coronavirus, such as signposting to other children’s centre services, overall, the staff felt that the outcomes for families about increased confidence, making more music and enhancing communication

through music had been achieved for the families who took part and gave feedback through evaluation forms. They also felt that the partnership between the children's centre and Evolve Music was effective and that the music groups were a valuable additional service to offer families which fitted with the children's centre priorities of supporting early language development.

Adventurers complemented other services the children's centre offers such as Play and Explore group which is open to all families. Having Adventurers as a small group or one-to-one online session meant that it was something to offer families for whom a large busy group such as Play and Explore may not be appropriate, particularly parents who are lacking confidence to attend a group activity. Families in need of support are discussed at an "allocations meeting" to ensure that referrals are appropriate for the group and are the best way of supporting each family's needs. Referrals to Adventurers being included in this process shows the thought and care children's centre staff gave to families and the music group. The staff were also appreciative that Adventurers was an additional service they could offer to families who were on a waiting list for one-to-one family support, enabling contact with the family to be maintained.

They [parents] know they're going to have that time with them [music leaders] and their children, and having contacts and seeing people... actually it's kind of been holding them rather than it being escalating for them. So, it's been really helpful in the fact that we can be reassured that those families are having contact, that they're doing OK, and it's an opportunity, if things have escalated, to feedback to the Evolve group or to children's centre staff. So, it's a support in that family journey, obviously at a very challenging time.

The children's centre staff were very satisfied with the quality of the music sessions and regarded the music leaders very highly, valuing the training and qualifications they had.

The challenges of recruiting families for Adventurers were discussed in the interviews, particularly how families who are referred then go on to participate. The

"conversion rate" of families from referrals to participants was around 25% – slightly less than for other groups at the centre. Even with these difficulties, and sometimes low attendance from families, the children's centre staff had a commitment to the project, continuing to invest time in referring families and following up with getting feedback through evaluation forms. They were understanding that the circumstances of the pandemic also made engaging families in groups and activities more challenging. There was some discussion of why families might not take part after being referred or why they might cease to attend after only a few sessions. The staff did not have any knowledge of why families did not engage, other than when it was practical reasons such as changes to parents' work schedules or children starting nursery at the time of the music groups.

In summary, Adventurers is highly valued by the children's centre staff and they recognise the contribution music making has to children's development and learning, which fits well with the ethos and purpose of the children's centre.

From the children's centre perspective, it ties in really well with what we're working towards. And I think going back to the face-to-face work, I think it will have a greater significance going forward for us.... I think with capacity in the groups and the cuts in services, working in partnership with other organisations is even more important now because there isn't that same resource out there.

We know the value of music and the impact it can have on communication. So, I think it's one of the key elements for us to explore because we know that there is a speech and language need out there. And I think even more so coming out of this, we can say we are seeing more and more of that. Yes, I think it's really important.

Online interview with placement student by the evaluator

A student from Bath Spa University undertook a 6-month placement with the Adventurers group. It is a requirement of the BA Music course's community music module for students to experience 10 hours of contact

time working on a community music activity. The student took part in an online interview with the evaluator to give feedback about their experience.

The student was very positive about their experience. The quote below summarises their overall learning from the placement.

I've definitely learned that it's more about... the music that we're doing is a tool to help the participants in with whatever they need help with, really. And I think before doing it, I definitely had an idea in my head, that community music was about the music rather than the people. And I think I've realised actually, it's the other way around.

They went on to talk about how they felt included and supported by the music leader who enabled them to contribute their skills and ideas to the sessions, and held a debrief at the end of every music session to discuss what had gone well with them.

Written question responses from higher education partner

The course leader for the BA community music module was asked to respond in writing to some questions related to the outcome concerning higher education partnerships. Her responses were positive about various aspects of the placement. She felt the placement had been well organised, including communications with the project manager. Evolve Music were clear about what could be offered, in terms of hands-on experience, and the commitments made were honoured. It was valued that the student was included in the reflective debrief with the music leader as this was not always offered to placement students by other organisations.

The course leader also commented on the quality of the mentorship provided by the music leader who showed care and guidance to the student and offered her feedback. She valued the contribution that Evolve Music made, both to this particular student's learning and more generally as an opportunity to be offered to students who study the module.

It has been a wonderful addition to the placement opportunity and valuable to the student's learning, particularly through the pandemic when many projects and therefore placement opportunities were precarious.

A suggestion was made that Evolve Music could further develop the partnership with the university by including staff more in the planning stages of a project and by making contact with other course leaders, which may yield students with different interests who may benefit from a placement.

CONSIDERING THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

To what extent have the project aims and outcomes been achieved?

Adventurers has achieved the majority of project aims and outcomes, albeit for a smaller number of families than planned for at the start of the project.

What factors have influenced the achievement of aims and outcomes?

The coronavirus pandemic is clearly the most significant factor to have impeded the achievement of aims and outcomes. The intended outcomes concerning signposting were not achieved due to the change in children's centre groups which also converted to online provision. The intention that the groups provided social contact for parents was achieved in the first months of the project with face-to-face activity, but was only achieved in a limited way for some parents with online sessions. However, Evolve Music have successfully adapted their practice and found a new way to support families with music making through online activities.

The pandemic also created a new need for families whose day-to-day activities were dramatically limited during lockdown with opportunities for social contact and support greatly reduced. Parents spoke of valuing having an activity to look forward to which provided structure to their week. Therefore, in some ways the pandemic created a situation that made achieving

outcomes for families more essential and the contribution the project made was valued highly.

What is most valuable or important about Adventurers to those involved: children / parents / families, music leaders, children's centres and other partners, Evolve Music as an organisation?

Various aspects of the project were valued by families including the improvement to children's speech and language, the opportunity for social interaction and increasing confidence at meeting new people and the structure it provided during lockdown. It is important to note that families valued the welcoming atmosphere and no-pressure environment created by the music leaders – a vital element to maintain in engaging families in music making. Families valued having fun and spending time together.

For the children's centre, how Adventurers complemented other groups and services they offer to families was valued. Having an additional way of supporting families, which they were confident was of high quality, was appreciated. The value of music making in supporting children's early language development was recognised and fitted well with the children's centre's purpose.

As part of the evaluation process, Evolve Music were asked to reflect on the initial findings of this report and articulate what the most valued aspects of the project have been for them.

“This project has enabled Evolve Music to develop a strong working relationship and partnership with Radstock Children's Centre and through this, enabled us to provide a more targeted and bespoke programme of work for vulnerable and hard-to-reach families, which may not have been possible otherwise. The expertise of the Children's Centre and the referral notes provided for each family enabled us to tailor sessions so that they would be more impactful for participants.

The project has also supported Evolve's music leaders to gain further valuable experience of working with families with multiple and varying needs. It has enabled us to provide more focused and meaningful engagement through adapting

and tailoring the delivery programme according to these needs”.

What are the key points of learning or reflection from the project?

Coping with the circumstances of the pandemic has been hugely challenging for everyone: community music organisations, children's centres and families with young children. One key point of reflection on the project is that Evolve Music have adapted well to these challenging circumstances and have successfully kept going to meet the commitments made to the families, the children's centre, and freelance music leaders who rely on work from projects like this to make a living.

Delivering early years music activities online has been successful at meeting the majority of intended outcomes for families and this should rightly be celebrated, given it is a major shift in ways of working for the music leaders.

Another key point of learning is the amount of time which needs to be invested in recruiting families and supporting them to attend cannot be underestimated. Consideration of how Evolve Music could improve this aspect of Adventurers may include reviewing project management time and resources for future work.

One aspect of the project that Evolve Music are unlikely to have explored, had it not been for the pandemic, are the 1-2-1 sessions to support families with higher levels of need, parents with anxieties about engaging in group activities, or parents with more severe mental health needs. The 1-2-1 format was developed out of necessity but proved to be a valued element of the programme for several families, offering them an introduction to structured music making with the intention they would then progress to participating in a group.

Another key point of reflection for Evolve Music, which they consider to be an essential element of the project's success, is having two music leaders to co-deliver sessions. Earlier in the project, sessions were often led by one music leader or by a Music Leader and an Assistant Music Leader. The music leaders felt that co-delivery significantly enhanced participants' experience by providing a richer, more-rounded session.

In addition, the music leaders also gained from this way of working, enabling them to further develop their skills and knowledge from each other.

KEY FINDINGS

The Key Findings of the evaluation process are shown on page one at the beginning of this report. The Key Findings summarise the main achievements, challenges and learning from the Adventurers project.

CONCLUSION AND WHAT NEXT?

This evaluation report considers two years of project activity, supported with time-limited funding from charitable trusts. Evolve Music have submitted funding applications to continue the Adventurers group at Radstock Children's Centre. As the outcome of these applications won't be known until early 2022, the Evolve Music trustees have approved using the charity's reserves to continue Adventurers in the autumn term 2021 until further funding is in place. Plans are being made for a face-to-face group to meet from September and for taster sessions to recruit families over the summer.

Evolve Music have met their overall aims of establishing a partnership with a children's centre to support children's learning and development through music, with a focus on disadvantaged families. Whilst there are some areas of project management identified for improvement, these are of a practical nature. The strength of the partnership, the quality of the music leaders' practice, and the benefits of Adventurers experienced by families are evident from the contributions to the evaluation.

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CONTACT DETAILS

LOGOS

APPENDIX ONE

Themes and coding from analysis of parent questionnaire and interviews

Motivations and hopes for taking part

Social interaction

Increasing parental confidence: at attending groups, talking to others, meeting new people

Get out of the house and meet other parents

Socialising / interacting with other children / meeting new children / making friends

Children's speech and language development

Improvement in speech and language (inc for children who use many languages)

Parent seeking ideas to support child with S&L

Child will have more sensory awareness

To use Makaton to support communication

Children's emotional and behavioural development

Confidence (to join in, get involved)

Learning to share

Have fun

Child becoming used to norms / expectations of group participation

Nurturing the parent-child relationship

Making time to bond with child and have time together

Interacting with child more

Making music

To learn more songs and song actions

For child to enjoy music and join in singing

Coping with the circumstances of lockdown

Maintain some normality (related to lockdown)

Help with activity ideas (nursery closed)

Parental learning

To improve speaking English (English as an additional language)

The effect of Adventurers for families

Social interaction

Met other parents and in contact outside of the group

Increased confidence to go to groups by themselves or with people they don't know

More confident at talking online

Speech and language

More and improved verbal communication (saying more words, clearer speech, increase in making sounds)

Learnt new songs in English to sing with child (EAL)

Children's emotional and behavioural development

More confident around others (adults and other children)

Music making

Parents more confident joining in singing and dancing
Parents have learnt new songs and gained understanding of what songs their child prefers
Parents singing more at home
Introduced more ways of making music at home (using scarves, instruments)
Children are enjoying music, copying actions, choosing songs and spontaneously singing at home
Developed imagination

Wellbeing

Helped with anxiety
Time to relax

Parenting skills

More confident or aware of own parenting skills and/or child development

Most important about the group

Welcoming atmosphere

Made to feel at ease and MLs supportive
Kind and friendly
Not pressured into participating
One-to-one sessions are tailored to the child and their stage of development or current mood

Social interaction

Meeting different people
Having contact with others (during lockdown)
Child socialising and interacting with others (even though only online)

Speech and language

Helping child with speech and language

Fun and being together

Enjoyment by parent and child
Watching how the children enjoy the group
Being able to bond and do something together, spend time together

Structure during lockdown

Something to look forward to each week
Knowing there was something to do each week

Other

Online sessions: child didn't enjoy online or struggled to concentrate / engage or understand what was happening
Access to suitable digital devices was an issue for some
Face-to-face sessions would have been better
Returning to face-to-face groups: parents want face-to-face but acknowledge that getting out of the house is more difficult and a change of routine doesn't always fit with existing family schedules (nursery, parents' work etc)
Effects of the pandemic: detrimental to family bonding, speech and language delay exacerbated by curtailed social interaction