

Evaluation Report

Evaluation commissioned by Evolve Music

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Sound Lab is supported by:

**YOUTH
MUSIC**



Introducing Evolve Music and Sound Lab

Sound Lab is a music making group for autistic and learning-disabled young people in the Bath, Somer Valley and Somerset area. Evolve Music developed Sound Lab from a small pilot project in 2018 and received news in November 2019 of a successful funding application to Youth Music (Fund A) for a 2-year project. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, original plans to run a regular music group in Radstock with partnership support from [SWALLOW](#) were revised to accommodate the lockdown restrictions and social distancing guidance. Weekly online sessions commenced in July 2020, led by two music leaders and a pastoral support worker (moving to fortnightly from spring 2021). The 90-minute sessions (4.30pm to 6pm) offered a mix of singing, playing instruments, music technology, improvisation, song writing and musical games. There was a focus on collaborative music making and creation, in addition to supporting young people to express themselves through music. A Summer Club of 5 face-to-face music making days (2 sessions each day) over the 2021 summer holidays took place at Critchill School, Frome. In addition to the support from Youth Music, funding was provided by Radstock Town Council, Bath and North East Somerset Music Hub (for the online sessions) and Frome Town Council (for the Summer Club). Critchill School supported the Summer Club by offering a venue free of charge. Evolve Music are also supported with core funding from the St John's Foundation.

A total of 49 online sessions (including one taster session) and 13 face-to-face music sessions (including 3 taster sessions) took place involving a total of 53 young people (14 online only, 39 face-to-face only and 3 young people doing both). A core group of 4 young people regularly took part in online sessions up to July 2021 and, following the Summer Club, the group grew to a regular 6 young people. The young people in the group had a range of learning disabilities and neurodiversity including autism, developmental delay and Down's Syndrome. 5 young people did some work towards Arts Award Discover with one completing the award and receiving their certificate by the end of the project.

Evolve Music created a Sound Lab [video to introduce the project](#) to young people and a [video of the Summer Club](#).

The original aims of the 2-year project stated by Evolve Music were:

To improve the provision of musical opportunities for young people aged 11 to 18 with additional needs who live across the Somer Valley area. Through this we aim to foster the development of a social community in which these young people can come together and make lasting friendships through music.

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/>.

There were 4 intended outcomes that were revised during the project planning phase to reflect the circumstances of the pandemic and the move to online music making sessions:

- An improvement in Young People's Musical Skills and/or development in their "horizontal" musical progression
- Increased social interaction and connections amongst YP thereby reducing any feelings of isolation
- Increase the confidence & skills of both established and emerging music leaders thereby increasing the quality of practice amongst the music leading workforce

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About the Evaluation Process

Evolve Music commissioned freelance Evaluation Consultant Nell Farrally to co-ordinate and support an evaluation process. The evaluation approach selected was a collaborative outcomes-focused 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. Evaluation commissioners and stakeholders are involved in some or all aspects of evaluation: design, data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination.

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.

An outcomes framework was initially created by Evolve Music staff and revised with Nell’s input. Each outcome had indicators (shown in the table following) with methods of data and evidence gathering identified for each indicator.

Intended Outcomes	Outcome Indicators
<p>Outcome 1 An improvement in Young People’s Musical Skills and/or development in their "horizontal" musical progression</p>	<p>1.1 Some young people achieve either Arts Awards Discover or Explore Certificate</p> <p>1.2 Young people report an improvement in their musical skills and/or musical progression</p> <p>1.3 Music leaders observe an improvement in musical skills and/or progression (eg. youth workers, teachers, music leaders)</p> <p>1.4 A portion of young people access music provision, and/or make music informally at home beyond their engagement with the project, in ways which are new to them.</p>
<p>Outcome 2 Increased social interaction and connections amongst YP thereby reducing any feelings of isolation</p>	<p>2.1 Project workers report positive connections made & sustained between participants</p> <p>2.2 Parents/carers report an improvement in participants' communication with young people or adults outside of the sessions</p> <p>2.3 YP report the project has developed their social interaction and connections</p>
<p>Outcome 3 Increase the confidence & skills of both established and emerging music leaders thereby increasing the quality of practice amongst the music leading workforce</p>	<p>3.1 Emerging music leaders report that placements & CPD opportunities are high-quality and enhance their professional development</p> <p>3.2 Project workers report that CPD opportunities are high-quality, enhance their existing practice and are relevant the current project</p>
<p>Outcome 4 Evolve Music is recognised as a high-quality provider of music activities for YP with additional needs</p>	<p>4.1 Evidence of Youth Music Quality Framework being used to review and plan project activities</p> <p>4.2 Evolve Music develop their own quality framework and QA procedures during the project</p> <p>4.3 People report satisfaction with the project (YP, parents/carers, project staff, emerging music leaders)</p>

Some methods of data gathering were planned provisionally, as the evaluation planning took place before young people were recruited for the project. Once there was an understanding of individuals' communication needs and preferences, the methods were revised. Data and evidence gathered and considered in the evaluation process are:

Young people's registration forms	Completed by parents/carers before joining 21 completed (for online and Summer Club sessions)
Attendance records	Attendance recorded for each session
Music Leader session notes (online)	Written notes created after each online session using question prompts (for 44 sessions)
Music Leader session notes (Summer Club)	Written notes created after each session using question prompts (for 8 sessions)
Parent/carer online/phone interviews	Transcripts of short audio-recorded interviews by the evaluator 3 parents/carers in March 2021 2 further parents/carers in December 2021
Parent/carer online questionnaire (Summer Club)	4 parent/carer responses
Parent/carer online questionnaire	The 3 parents/carers who took part in interviews in March were asked for further feedback through a questionnaire in December 2021 (1 response)
Music leader interview	Transcript of audio-recorded online interview by evaluator in December 2021
Trainee music leader video feedback	Short reflections on the Sound Lab sessions
Videos of online sessions (using Zoom)	Sections of the online sessions were recorded. One purpose of recording was so the evaluator could observe sessions without having too many adults on screen.
Song lyrics	The group collaboratively created song lyrics about Sound Lab in November and December 2021.

Evolve Music's project manager also facilitated reflective meetings with the music leading team at regular intervals where the evaluator was invited to observe.

Evaluation challenges and limitations

It is common for evaluations to face limitations regarding resources, time and the suitability of methods to capture useful evidence. The evaluation challenges encountered during Sound Lab included getting feedback from young people – some of whom did not respond to direct questioning or have the language skills to communicate their thoughts. Different ways to get direct feedback were discussed between the evaluator, project manager and music leaders but the methods yielded mostly 'thumbs up' kind of responses rather than anything more detailed. It may, therefore, appear that young people's voices are minimally represented in the evaluation with a dominance of adults' points of view.

Summary of the data and evidence gathered

Registration forms

Registration forms were completed for each young person by their parent/carer and were primarily to get contact details for administrative purposes and to ensure that the music leaders were aware of young people's support needs and interests. The parent/carer responses also include some information relevant to evaluating the project. Parents/carers were asked if their young person had any learning difficulties, disabilities, medical conditions, allergies/medication or access needs. The information in the registration forms shows that Sound Lab was successful at engaging the young people for whom the project was intended: *'young people with a variety of additional learning needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger Syndrome and others as well as some young people with physical disabilities who live across the Somer Valley Area'* (from the Sound Lab funding application to Youth Music). Out of the 21 registration forms for the online and Summer Club sessions, information given about all-but-one young person was that they were either on the autistic spectrum, had other kinds of neurodiversity (ADHD, dyslexia) or had other learning disabilities. For the young person whose parent didn't share any kind of diagnosis, they were described as 'non-verbal' and would have a carer accompany them – indicating high support needs for this young person. Most of the young people had multiple conditions, for example information about one young person's needs was, 'Asperger's, ADHD, Dyslexia, Sensory Processing Disorder', whilst for another, 'autistic, ADHD, global developmental delay, communication issues and severe learning difficulties'. The majority of young people had conditions which effected their communication. Some young people also had conditions which effected their mobility, balance and manual dexterity.

The registration forms did not ask for young people's addresses, so the exact geographical location of where young people lived is not known. Where they attended school or college was asked, and this shows that the majority of young people attended school in the Bath and North East Somerset, Frome and north-east Mendip areas. Only one young person attended school outside of these areas. Schools young people attended included Three Ways School, Newbury Manor School, North Hill House and various schools in Frome. This geographical area is perhaps broader than originally intended – in part due to the online format, but also because Critchill School in Frome were supportive of the project by referring their students and offered a venue for the Summer Club, therefore the reach of the project extended beyond the Somer Valley to the Frome and north-east Mendip area.

Parents/carers were asked about young people's existing interests and experiences of making music. Many had a love of listening to music. Some young people had no prior experience of playing instruments whilst others had received 1-2-1 lessons on a range of instruments. Some young people had found learning instruments difficult due to poor memory and had not persevered. A couple taught themselves through learning by ear.

Attendance records

An attendance register shows that 14 young people attended at least one online session during the project. The Summer Club was designed so that young people could attend once or any number of the sessions to offer flexibility around families' commitments and summer holidays. 9 young people attended at least one in-person session for the Summer Club (6 of whom just attended Summer club and 3 also attended online). Records for the online sessions show that there was a core group of 4 young people from the fifth online session of the project right up to the final session in December 2021. A fifth young person joined in March 2021 and took part regularly for the rest of the project. A sixth member also joined at the same time but attended infrequently. A young person who joined Sound Lab for the first time for the Summer Club then took part in online sessions right to the end. The greatest number of young people to attend an online session was 7 at any one time. The majority of sessions had regular engagement from this core group with between 3 and 6 young people joining each session. Although a relatively small number in comparison to the pre-covid targets for the project, the size of the group worked well for online music making and there was a sustained participation in Sound Lab for 6 young people.

Music Leader session notes (online)

The music leaders showed a commitment to documenting online sessions using a structure of questions developed by Evolve Music staff. There was a mixture of questions to help with session planning and addressing problems as they arose, with sections to capture observation evidence of young people's progress towards the intended outcomes:

- Any crucial preparation, information to share or actions to take?
- Were the objectives of the session achieved?
- Did any issues or problems arise during the session?
- What feedback did you get from participants during/after the session (this might involve things they enjoyed/didn't enjoy, what they got out of it, how the work could be improved in the future, what else they'd like to do).
- Observations on participants' musical development.
- Observations on participants' social development/interactions .

There were 44 completed forms stretching from the first online session to the last that were analysed for information relevant to 2 project outcomes: *An improvement in Young People's Musical Skills and/or development in their "horizontal" musical progression and increased social interaction and connections amongst YP thereby reducing any feelings of isolation.*

Regarding musical skills and progression, the notes fall into two categories. Firstly, there are many notes that document what activities took place in each session that the group took part in, for example:

Observations on participants' musical development:

Song writing, understanding what makes a good lyric.

Retaining and recalling music from previous sessions.

Demonstrating musical ability through playing different musical instruments – group improv as well as playing along to song.

Participants were able to sing to a pulse over zoom (quite a skill!). Call and response used and participants were able to engage with this. Participants were introduced to guitar tuning and how to tune instruments.

Breakout rooms were utilised so that participants could record their parts.

This first type of notes focus on the activities and opportunities that were presented to the group. They show that there was a wide range of musical stimuli offered to the young people with the intention of broadening their musical experiences and skills.

The second kind of notes are about particular young people and observations of their individual skills and progression, for example, the extracts from the notes below capture how E. is confident in some areas of music making but not others:

Observations on participants' musical development:

9th July: He had a go at leading the group in a percussion exercise and played creatively (said afterwards that this was 'scary'). They also demonstrated how they play the drums and made some sounds on a bass guitar – plays with confidence.

16th July: Listens well and responds confidently. Declined to lead the group in follow the leader exercise.

Another example concerns H. who is 14 years old and speaks only a little during the online sessions. His younger sister, who does not have any additional needs, also joins in the online sessions. The music leaders comment on H. contributing to the recording of the song the group have written. Using GarageBand and Zoom breakout rooms, each young person was recorded singing lines of the song that were then edited into a group virtual performance towards the end of the summer 2020 online sessions.

...evidence of H.'s confidence singing a solo line without his sister. This to be encouraged more.

Another young person's musical skills are recognised and plans for supporting her progression are noted.

D. demonstrated that she can sing at a good pitch. She sounded confident and was singing at a moderate volume. This confidence could be pushed further to see if D. or any other participants would like to sing on their own in front of the group.

This kind of observation of what each young person is achieving and considering how they can be further supported is evident throughout the notes.

The music leaders' session notes also include information concerning social interaction. Similarly, to the notes about musical skills, the notes about social interaction also fall into the same two categories: comments on what the sessions offer to young people and observations of individuals.

The music leaders note how they supported the young people to express their thoughts concerning the changes they were experiencing due to the pandemic. Over the summer 2020, one activity initiated by the music leaders was writing and recording a song called *Living in Lockdown*. The intention of this activity is captured in the notes:

Writing a song about lockdown: Sharing what they had done during lockdown. Sharing what they had missed and what they had enjoyed.

The notes also record a discussion during the final session of the summer holidays before there was a short break in online sessions as young people were returning to school/college in September 2020. The music leaders asked the young people how they felt about returning to school after so long. Some young people were excited and the MLs note that there is *'No evidence of feeling isolated'*.

There are observations of social interaction between young people and how the online sessions support this. Two members of the group, D. and H. go to school together and the interactions between them outside of school in the online group are noted.

At the beginning of the session D. and H. said hello to each other. They continued to speak about their class and being in school together.

D. loves to encourage her school friend H. She congratulated H. saying 'well done H.' after he had played on his own in the hello song warm up.

How young people show positivity towards the contributions of others in the group is regularly recorded in the notes, for example:

At the end of the session we asked the participants to make up a four beat body percussion exercise of their own. At the end of each performance everyone applauded. After B. and H.'s joint performance D. congratulated them saying that she thought what they had done was 'very good'.

Whilst the extracts quoted above offer very explicit examples of young peoples' social interaction and friendship, recognition of different young people's communication preferences and usual ways of interacting with others need consideration, so to not overstate the impact of Sound Lab online sessions on young people's social world. D. and H. have an existing friendship they bring to the group. For another young person who is the oldest in the group, he does not develop the personal connections with others to the same extent, although he does respond to his peers in the group.

E. is still mainly communicating with leaders as opposed to the participants, however he seems more than happy within the group and within himself. E. is also very supportive of the other participants praising them and saying 'wow' when something has impressed him.

The notes include descriptions of things that take place in the online sessions that demonstrate the young people having fun which could be seen as an important element of them socialising together.

The participants had some fun at the end. They all started to dance and act a little silly. They found it really funny in 'Shotgun' when we sang 'Back, back, back', as if it had an echo effect on it. They were inspired to use this idea somewhere in our own written song. They all started to make animal noises, inspired by our song writing ideas. They were all giggling at each other's animal noises. This helped to end the session on a high for all of the participants.

A further example how the online sessions contributed to the young people's social world was introducing Makaton signing to learning songs. None of the young people use Makaton in their own communication, but they all became more familiar with Makaton signs.

Participants picked up the Makaton signs to this song quickly despite the fact that most participants were fairly new to Makaton and some signs were a little more challenging.

When considered with other evidence described later in this report (videos of learning and performing songs with Makaton signing) the singing and signing activities contribute to developing young people's communication skills that could support them in social interactions with others in their school/college communities. The notes give a sense of how accommodating and supportive the young people are of each other's needs. When new people join the group in early 2021, existing members adjust to the new group dynamic.

4th Feb: *D. said hello to T. and was very welcoming. T. didn't respond and she seemed a little disappointed and confused by this. T. said 'rubberdubbers' and D. smiled back. By this point D. was starting to understand that T. has some communications barriers.*

11th Feb: *T. became upside down as he was looking down at his camera from a different angle. All participants joined in with this and Tommy smiled back at everyone.*

There are other things evident in the notes. There are many examples in the session notes of the music leaders reflecting on the structure and content of the sessions and how they adapt their practice to maximise each young person's experience. An example of this from early-on in the online sessions (July 2020), where the MLs notice that some young people's focus lessens when there is a period of not playing instruments, and they record their intention to include instruments regularly throughout the sessions to maintain everyone's engagement. A second example from later in the project concerns composing using GarageBand:

The participants love creating their own music in garageband and it has been a great tool for music writing. However, participants seem to struggle to concentrate for long periods of time on garageband. We usually share the screen and the participant boxes are sent to the side of the screen. This makes communication a little more tricky as the participants have to rely on listening than on visual communication. Some participants became fidgety at this time. One participant put her hood up to show that she was struggling. In the future we could try to minimise garageband screen time to maintain the focus of the group. We could also plan to have an improvisation break in the middle of the garageband project. Or we could also ask the participants to play part of the song that we are writing.

In addition to the GarageBand example, there are notes about individual young people that show the consideration of how each group member participates best and how the music leaders strive to involve everyone and meet differing needs.

It seems that when H. is told to do something specific, he is usually more confident in responding. He is less confident when you ask him his opinion e.g. do you prefer example 1 or example 2. To boost his confidence, ask him to do more direct things as opposed to opinion based questions or improvising.

The notes also document the wide range of music making stimuli the music leaders are using in the sessions and what they are learning about what works well online. Comments about the online/virtual experience are frequent, showing that they are expanding and adapting their facilitation techniques and resources to a new mode of working.

Music Leader session notes (Summer Club)

A form, similar in format to the online session form, was created by Evolve staff for the Summer Club sessions – 8 were completed (out of 15 sessions across 6 days). The MLs use the forms much the same as for the online sessions with a record of the session content, notes of individual young people’s needs and interests to plan for how to tailor future sessions, and examples of young people demonstrating musical skills and benefiting from the social aspects of the group. In addition, some young people’ parents were present for the sessions and parent responses and feedback was captured, for example:

J. sat for a long period of time. Mum commented that this is not normal behaviour apart from when he is in school... Mum also commented about J. smiling and said that it's rare to see him really happy, and she was pleased with how the music session went for him today. It seemed that Mum had envisaged having to leave the session if he became too overwhelmed.

As there were only 5 days of sessions, evidence of young people’s progression is less notable than for the online sessions. The notes mostly contain descriptions of the music activities provided and how the young people responded.

Parent/carer phone interviews

In March 2021, the parents/carers of the 3 families who were regular participants were invited to take part in an online interview with the evaluator (the 4 core participants were from 3 families as 2 were siblings). All were very happy to give feedback and to give up their time for the interviews – an indication of the goodwill they had towards the project and their appreciation of it. The interviews lasted around 10 mins, were audio-recorded and then transcribed. All parents gave verbal consent to the recording and for their words to be used for evaluation and quoted in public documents. The transcriptions of the interviews were thematically analysed to draw out themes relevant to Sound Lab’s intended outcomes. The purpose of thematic analysis is not to synthesise everything parents said in the interviews, but to highlight patterns and contrasts in parents’ views that are relevant to the evaluation. The text in bold font summarises the themes, followed by a description.

Sound Lab is something young people have for themselves: Parents were asked about how much involvement or knowledge they had of what took place in the Sound Lab online sessions. They all felt that they did not have much awareness of exactly what their children did – this was not because they were not interested, but for all of them, their children did not want their parents present. There was a strong sense that the young people wanted the experience of Sound Lab for themselves. It was important to them that they had something that was just for them. All 3 parents concurred, although one said that their child wanted to share what they'd done in sessions with family members afterwards. Parents, however, did listen from the next room and were able to give valuable feedback about several aspects of the project.

Yeah, we can hear from the next room. She's in the lounge and we're in the kitchen working usually. Occasionally if we open the door, she's like, go away, this is my session! So it's nice to sort of hear them.

The value of an online music group: All 3 parents valued the online Sound Lab sessions as a substitute for the usual music making their child did which had not been taking place due to the coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions. The usual groups, music lessons at school, out-of-school clubs and, for one young person, their private drumming lessons, were not taking place and this left a void in young people's music making opportunities which Sound Lab filled.

Parents also valued the social interaction with other young people their children had during the online sessions. Again, this was important to them as usual opportunities for socialising at school and clubs were halted.

In addition to the importance of a replacement activity for the usual music making and socialising, parents valued any activity for their children to do during lockdown when everything else had stopped.

I think it was really good, especially during lockdown when everything – because he had various activities – it was great to have something that he could do which was creative, about something he really enjoyed.

Young people's responses to Sound Lab: From what awareness parents did have of how their children responded to Sound Lab, they spoke about the enjoyment of music young people got from the sessions and of the laughter and fun they could hear during the sessions.

They are very enthusiastic about it, you know, they say they enjoy it and they laugh a lot.

Social interaction with other children was also enjoyed. Parents noted that their young people appeared very comfortable socialising in online environment.

She's not the most descriptive when she talks to us, but she just really enjoys it, she really looks forward to it. She likes having a session to go to or a class to go to. She's very engaged – when it gets to twenty past four, it's like, must get ready. She's very, really looks forward to it. And I think it just gives her, she likes to be part of something. So I think that's the main benefit for her is being part of a group and doing it with other children.

Musical experiences and access to instruments: All parents said that their children had an existing interest in music before Sound Lab and that they had access to instruments at home. Some families had a variety of instruments such as a keyboard and guitars. All families appreciated that Evolve had loaned them instruments to use in the online sessions, such as drums and chimes, which they felt broadened their children's musical experiences and gave them opportunities to try instruments which were new to them. In one family, a parent was themselves a musician. All parents demonstrated in the interviews that they valued their children being able to make music and they appreciated the opportunities Sound Lab gave.

I am very grateful that they have this opportunity to do musical expression, because I think that it helps them in other aspects of their learning. Learning's learning, and it's all growing of the cerebral.

Quality of music leadership: Whilst parents were not in the room during the sessions, they did have enough experience of Sound Lab to have formed impressions. They all commented on the skills of the music leaders and how they supported the young people. They were impressed by the music leaders' enthusiasm and creativity. They felt that the music leaders accommodated and adapted well to individual young people's communication and sensory needs. The relaxed and friendly environment which the music leaders created was noted.

They're bang on... those tutors, they're obviously well-adept... And I listen to the children ask questions and I do hear how enthusiastic the tutors are. And it is very well done, you know, they really, they're so... the enthusiasm... the creativity is really good. I think if more had realised how good it was, they'd be all over it.

Learning, skills and personal development: Parents spoke about several aspects of their children learning new things. The online music sessions had helped young people to learn about technical aspects of using Zoom and they were all now self-reliant and independent with joining the sessions without parental assistance. One parent felt that their child had become much better at waiting and taking turns to speak on Zoom.

One parent spoke about how Sound Lab is the first time their child had created their own music, even though he had lots of experience of listening and playing music.

I remember that they had to make up their own music, which I think he quite enjoyed being part of that. I think that was something he really enjoyed, actually. So, yeah, I'm sure there are new things that he has experienced, definitely.

For most parents, their children were already confident communicators, but one parent reflected that the positive feedback from music leaders also built confidence.

Satisfaction from parents and suggestions for improvement/development: Overall, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with Sound Lab and they were very complimentary of the music leaders. They felt that the activities were tailored to the young people's musical interests, and they were well supported to take part. Parents said the group was appropriate for their children's additional needs. Parents were aware that in a group such as this, the young people would have a variety of support needs, but one parent suggested that their child did not require the level of repetition to keep activities familiar as perhaps other children may need.

Parents had two constructive suggestions as to how the project could incorporate their children's particular interests. One suggestion was to record music more during the sessions as on the one occasion when this had been

done, a young person had showed great pride and sense of achievement in hearing themselves recorded and sharing it with their family. A second suggestion was that the music leaders help the young people prepare something which they can perform or share with their family after each session.

In addition to the evaluative questions, parents/carers were also consulted on the future development of the project during the interviews. At the time of the interviews (March 2021), Evolve Music were considering changing from online meetings to face-to-face meetings in Radstock at some point as lockdown restrictions allowed. Families found the online format accessible. All the parents said they would not be able to attend a face-to-face group in Radstock due to existing family commitments such as full-time work, their other children's after-school activities and the distance to travel. Evolve Music responded to this feedback by keeping the regular term-time sessions online and adding Summer Club sessions to the project for those who could take part in face-to-face activities.

Towards the end of the project in December 2021, parents/carers of young people who joined Sound Lab since the March interviews were invited to also take part in an interview with the evaluator resulting in 2 further parent/carer interviews. The first parent spoke about how her son's first experience of Sound Lab was the Summer Club. They came to 4 Summer Club sessions and then joined the online sessions from September, attending regularly until the end of the project. This parent's view was that Sound Lab was a good experience for her son. He needed her support to attend and take part in the online sessions, therefore she was very aware of what the group involved and how he participated. She spoke about how her son doesn't verbally express what he thinks, therefore she couldn't say what he thought of group. She did say, however, that he was very keen to go to the Summer Club and join online – which she knew was an indication that he enjoyed the group. This parent also commented that the way the music leaders ran the group made space for everyone to be involved, which she felt was important, and there was a social aspect of the group for her son.

It's good... it's a little group that he's part of. They all get turn to speak, there's no, like – some children just take over don't they and others say nothing – but they have that opportunity to say what they want, not that he does say a lot. But yeah, he's quite happy when it's the session and he enjoys it – part of a little group, although he's not met any of the others apart from one, no two I think [from the Summer Club].

Similarly to other members of the group, some of this young person's usual music making had ceased because of coronavirus. Before the first lockdown he had keyboard lessons with a tutor who visited his house, but that stopped and has not re-started. This parent spoke about how her son's learning needs affected his music making – although he has a love of music, it is difficult for him to progress with technical skills.

He's not very good at being told what to do... We got a ukulele, we thought he could do that but that was too complicated whereas keyboard he could have the numbers and he could watch and look at a piece of paper that had been written out and follow it. He can do a few basic things on the keyboard.

When asked about how well the music leaders incorporated her son's musical interests into the sessions, she felt that they did not know him well enough to understand his individual interests, although he was very happy to join in with whatever the group activities were – particularly drumming which he enjoys. She did not feel that Sound Lab had offered new kinds of music making for her son as he had done lots of music making at school – although she offered that she didn't have any specific knowledge of what music making at school had involved and it

appeared that she had an assumption that lots of singing and dancing took place in the special school he'd attended.

Regarding personal development and skills, there had been an increase in confidence through the sessions.

Yeah, I would say definitely confidence in any sort of group that he does, you know, everything is confidence building. [To] start with he might be quiet and quite shy, but as the time goes on, confidence did build on the face-to-face session at Critchill, plus, it was familiar surroundings a well. So that was a good – for us that was a good setting to have it. Going anywhere new – he does, it takes him a while to get settled with new people and new places but his confidence did grow. It's more confidence there speaking face to face I think he is online sessions.

Asked how well the music leaders had supported him to take part and had adapted to meet his needs, this parent responded:

Yeah, yeah, very, very well. Because everything's done at his level, slower, giving him time to think about what's being said which he needs. Yeah, I would say they've done well.

There was one suggestion of how the group could be improved – to include popular well-known songs more. Otherwise, this parent was happy with what Sound Lab had provided.

The second parent interviewed gave a similar account. The social aspect of the group was really important. Her son was easily bored and there were not many activities to occupy him over the summer holidays. She appreciated that there 2 groups for different ages of young people and that the groups were small.

So, the fact that there were other people who had disabilities and he could be just amongst other people. And also a lot of people tend to think teenagers with disabilities can be lumped together with primary school children. You know, that's not right. It's not respectful. Just because they've got a disability doesn't mean to say that they should be treated as babies... And this group really catered to teenagers and beyond. There was a young man who was, I think he was about 20 or something. So that was really great for my son because he hasn't had much opportunities to be with teenagers in a social setting.

This parent felt that a lack of social opportunities for disabled young people was a real problem in the area where they lived. She spoke about a local social club for disabled young people that had such a long waiting list that her son may never get to the top of the list before he is too old to join.

In-person sessions were better than online for her son as he finds it difficult to sit for long periods of time and prefers to move around. However, she felt that her son does enjoy the online sessions. Although he doesn't communicate verbally:

And so he can't move around [in the online sessions], gets up and moves around the room and then sits back down again. But the fact that he comes and sits back down, he might go to the kitchen for five minutes and then come and sit back down again, shows me, even though he can't discuss it with me, that he's enjoying it.

There was some constructive feedback about online sessions related to her son's communication needs.

There's quite a lot of talk. Less music making than talk in the Zoom sessions, which is my one criticism.

However, this parent felt that on the whole, the music leaders accommodated her son's needs well.

It was lovely that the people who were leading it, the team, were so understanding. So patient because he has a lot of, uh... really tolerant and they went out of their way to help him. I haven't met a group of people so helpful and patient and thoughtful.

These later interviews reiterate some of the themes from the earlier parent/carer interviews: enjoyment of music making and being part of a group, social opportunities, increasing confidence, individual needs were well-supported by the music leaders, satisfaction with the group from parents/carers, and that Sound Lab offered a replacement for other music making which stopped due to the pandemic.

Parent/carer online questionnaire (Summer Club)

All young people's parents/carers were asked to give feedback about the Summer Club sessions – 4 responses were received which were all positive about their child's experience. The 4 responses to a question *from a parent/carer's perspective, what did you think of the Summer Club sessions your child attended?* were:

It's was very good.

Honestly, the sessions were possibly the best thing that has happened for my son for a couple of years. It has been so difficult to find any activity that he can take part in and yet you achieved this and made him so welcome. He loves all sorts of music and song and to combine this with the chance to spend time with other young adults was fantastic!

Excellent.

Very well organised and my son enjoyed the sessions.

Asking parents to give a proxy for what their child thought of the Summer Club sessions yielded similar positive responses:

He loved them.

Although he can't verbally express himself it is clear that he thoroughly enjoyed his times there – he rushed to get into the car to drive to the session every time.

Fun!

He had fun and enjoyed the sessions.

Parents were asked *'What was most important to you and your child about the music sessions?'*

Fun.

That the leaders were so gentle and tolerant with him, that they did not patronise him and that he had already 'met' them via the zoom sessions before actually meeting in person.

He engaged! And stayed for most of the sessions without wanting to leave.

Very relaxed sessions and followed the children's lead quite a lot.

Parent were asked *How well did we support your child to take part and/or meet their additional needs?* All responses use the words 'very well' in their answers with some parents elaborating further:

Very well indeed, you all went out of your way to keep the phones and iPads out of sight, to enable him to be free to explore the musical instruments! And you even made up a song based on a tune he loves! Thankyou everyone!

Very well – no pressure to join in when he didn't want to, patient & very catered for each specific special needs requirements.

Parents appreciated how well the music leaders had accommodated their child's needs and kept them engaged.

Parent/carer online questionnaire (end of project)

Rather than ask parents/carers who took part in an interview in March 2021 for more verbal feedback, we invited these families to give further feedback through an online questionnaire if they wished to – one parent/carer responded. Their comments reiterated what they said in the interviews – that their child had enjoyed the sessions and found them fun (particularly singing and signing) and that the music leaders created a group which supported each young person. Their response to the question *in what ways do you think your child has benefited most from taking part in Sound Lab?* also included commenting on musical experiences.

Being able to be themselves, the instructors are really patient with everybody and let the children discuss their ideas. She has also learnt about different instruments and has enjoyed the guest musicians when they have attended.

The Evolve Music team wanted to understand how the Summer Club may have complemented the online sessions, so parents were asked *please tell us what you (and/or your child) thought about the face-to-face sessions.*

I think it was good for her to see the instructors in person, but on the day she attended I don't think anyone from her regular group was there so maybe wasn't as much fun. She did like it though.

Music leader interview

One of the Sound Lab music leaders, Naomi, was invited to take part in an interview with the evaluator to reflect on the professional development she'd experienced through the project. She had joined the project as the Pastoral Support Worker but when a new music leader needed to be recruited 3 months into the Sound Lab online sessions, Naomi was invited to move to a music leader role. This provided a progression in her music leading work (she also leads a weekly music group for Mencap).

Naomi spoke about the different kinds of professional development she had received through the project. The peer-learning and feedback from working collaboratively with another music leader to plan and lead the sessions had been a source of professional development. The two leaders would plan together so they each led half of each session, playing to their own strengths such as singing or instrumental skills. This structure provided an opportunity for them to observe each other's practice, notice things that were taking place in the group and give and receive feedback from each other. As the other music leader is a qualified music therapist, Naomi also learnt more about music therapy approaches in music facilitation from working with her.

A second kind of professional development Naomi took part in were training events organised by Evolve Music. What was particularly valuable to her was the opportunity to make connections with music leaders who were working on other Evolve Music projects. A feeling of being networked to others and sharing practice was important to her. The opportunity to talk about her work was welcome whilst also hearing about others' work – particularly how they were adapting to working online using Zoom.

Mentoring was a third kind of professional development Naomi took part in through the project, which she felt had been most valuable. Evolve Music arranged for her to have 1-2-1 fortnightly online mentoring sessions with Alex Lupo for 6 months. The mentoring was an opportunity to talk about practice and to get input from a more experienced music facilitator. Naomi would talk about things that had recently taken place in the Sound Lab group with Alex, and they would discuss ways she could respond and develop her facilitation skills.

Meeting with Alex once a fortnight – I found that really insightful. We did talk about musical techniques and... we went into a lot of the psychology and the group dynamics of how one participant could change the feel of a group dynamic. We talked a lot about how that can have an impact, but then still making sure that everybody's needs met in the group. I found it really interesting to talk to him about that. He mentioned psychologists to look into and things, and I've really taken on board.

Getting a bespoke input into things that were taking place in the Sound Lab group meant that Naomi could immediately use what she was learning from the mentoring sessions in her work. One example of this she spoke about was finding a way to welcome new members into an established group.

One thing I ended up suggesting and we put into practice was we had this poster that we'd share and we kind of add little comments that the members had come up with and of what Sound Lab means to them – things about what they felt, like music is fun and it just showed what it meant to them. And then it meant the new participants could add in what they felt about Sound Lab too.

The circumstances of the pandemic and working online using Zoom were another aspect of professional development that came through the on-the-job development of adapting practice to a virtual environment. Naomi felt she had learnt about what kinds of music making worked in an online group. She felt that the online session format was successful – particularly as the young people were still engaging in online sessions even though many activities for young people returned to face-to-face delivery following the end of lockdowns and the easing of coronavirus restrictions. Retaining the online format was more accessible for the young people and their families as an after-school group with members from different geographical areas.

Trainee music leader feedback

Evolve Music offer a programme of music leader trainee placements called the Evolution Training Programme where emerging music leaders take part in the range of Evolve Music projects. Inês, one of the trainees, recorded a video of her reflections on the Sound Lab sessions she joined. Her observations of Sound Lab were how flexible the music leaders were in their planning, using the songs young people enjoyed listening to in the sessions as a way of connecting with them. Inês saw this as a confidence in leadership, and she appeared inspired by how encouraging the music leaders were towards the young people. She felt it was evident that the young people know the musicians are listening to them and incorporating their ideas into the sessions.

Young people's feedback

Ways to capture young people's thoughts about Sound Lab were designed with consideration of their communication preferences. Methods which were not reliant on direct questioning or verbal responses from the young people were regularly used by the music leaders in the sessions. Permission was given by parents/carers for the online sessions to be recorded. Not every session was recorded, but there are several recordings of a few minutes of feedback towards the end of the sessions. In one example of the feedback recording, a music leader asks the young people to hold up between one and five fingers to show how much they have enjoyed today's session. One young person holds up five fingers. Another makes a joke by holding up ten fingers.

There is some direct questioning from the music leaders asking for feedback. There are sections of video which show how the young people express what they think of the sessions, although the ways they express themselves are primarily 'thumbs up' non-verbal responses or very short verbal responses which are prompted by the music leaders. One example captured on video is where the music leaders are talking about what they feel they have learnt during the music sessions and consulting with young people about what they would like to do in future sessions.

ML1: *I feel like we've really got to know each other but we've really got to know each other through the music so I know what kind of music you enjoy listening to and singing along to.*

YP1: *Yeah.*

YP2: *[smiles and holds her thumb up but doesn't speak]*

ML1: *What would you love to do next term when we come back for our next block of sessions? We could do things like writing more songs...*

YP1: *Yeah.*

YP3: *Yeah.*

ML: *That's got a definite yes. We could do some more instrument learning.*

YP1: *Yes.*

ML1: *And some more drumming.*

YP1: *Yes*

YP2: *[smiles and holds her thumb up but doesn't speak]*

ML1: *We could do more singing as well.*

YP1: *Yes.*

YP2: *Can I say something?*

ML1: Yes.

YP2: *You know we put Shotgun into the thing?* [the group were singing and signing the George Ezra song earlier in the session] *Can I chose the song, can I chose the song next time?*

ML2: *What song – I can have a look at the signs for us?*

YP2: *I don't know yet.*

ML1: *Get thinking of your favourite songs you'd like to learn and sing for next time.*

[there is a fourth young person in the group who doesn't speak or respond at all]

The music leaders regularly asked young people for this kind of feedback for the purposes of ensuring that their views are considered. Several of the feedback sessions were also captured on video for evaluative purposes, for example, the feedback session transcribed below.

ML1: *So you've enjoyed it [YP's name]?*

YP1: *Yeah.*

ML1: *Brilliant. [YP's names – YP3 and YP4] have you enjoyed being part of our group so far?*

YP3: *Yeah.*

YP4: *Yes [smiles].*

ML1: *Can everyone tell me what's been the best thing that we've done so far?*

YP3: *The singing, just a minute ago.*

ML1: *Yeah. I thought that was really cool. What about you [YP1's name]? What's been your highlight?*

YP1: *Erm, aah, [pause] playing a bit of my instrument. Yeah.*

ML1: *So, you've done drumming and a little bit of ukulele as well and a few other instruments that I've seen.*

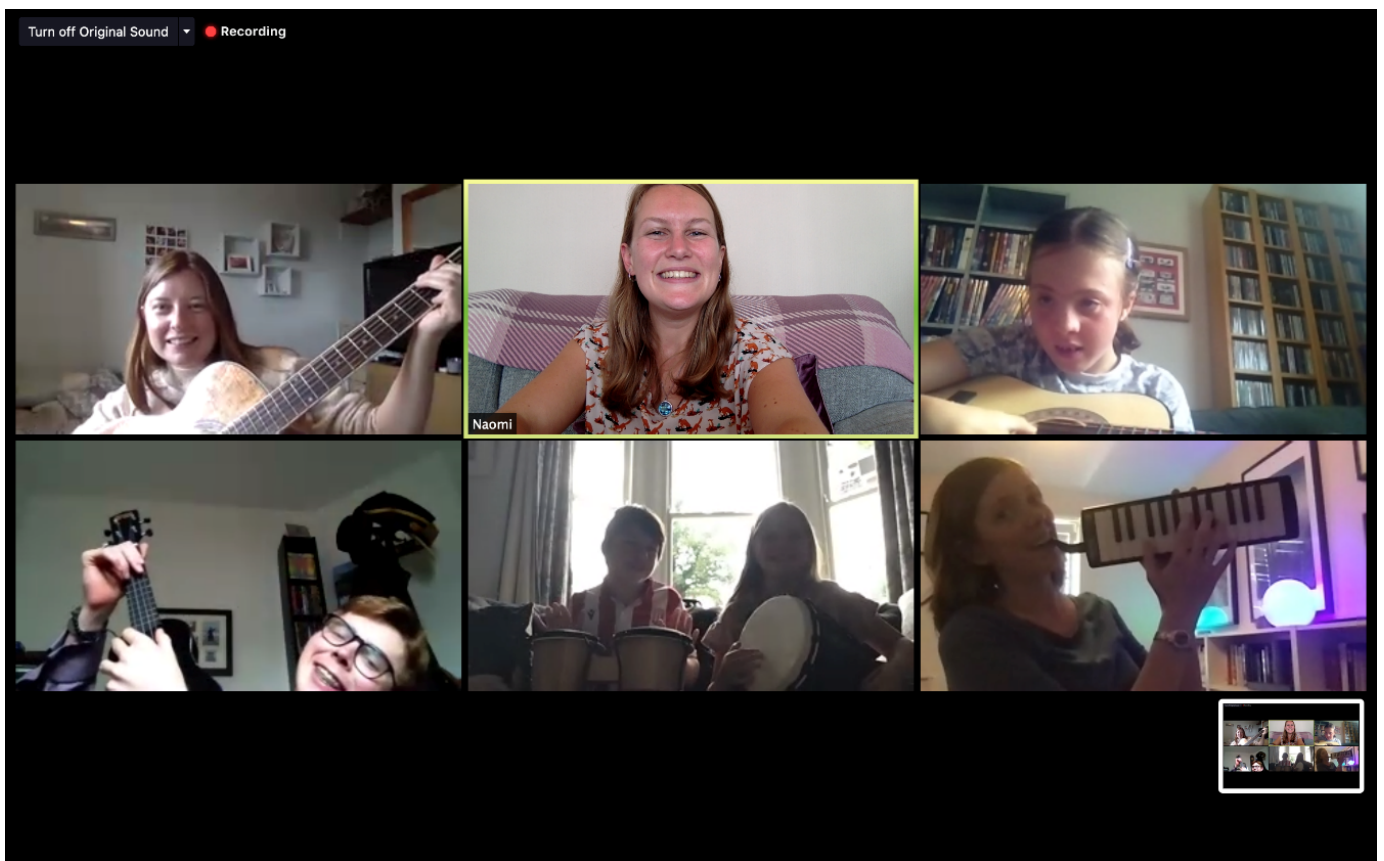
YP1: *Yeah.*

Whilst it is good that feedback is positive, these short affirmative answers are typical of these young people's verbal responses during the videoed feedback sessions and don't necessarily offer a great depth into young people's thoughts. Watching the sections of video where young people are making music perhaps offers more insight into what young people gain from the sessions. The text below is a commentary by the evaluator about what she observes in one section of video where the group are learning the Makaton signing to the song *A Million Dreams*.

ML2 is singing lines from the song whilst doing the Makaton signs for the words. She's singing unaccompanied one line at a time so everyone can learn the signs. As she counts people in, '1, 2, 3, 4...', YP1 joins in with the counting. The other music leaders are singing and signing, although they are muted. YP2 is doing the signs and singing some of the words (although she can't be heard in the Zoom recording). It seems as though she is really concentrating to keep up with the signing. YP4 isn't singing or vocalising but he is joining in with the signs and it seems as though he is confident at signing. YP1 can be heard singing along confidently and doing some of the signs. When they get to the end of singing the chorus unaccompanied, ML2 explains that she's going to

start the recorded accompaniment from the beginning, and she encourages people to be really confident when they get to the chorus. YP3 joins the group and sits down next to YP4 (she is YP4's younger sibling). The musical introduction starts. YP3 and YP4 are signing – they are keeping up with ML2 and are in time with the music. YP1 is signing, swaying to the music and singing along. His singing is expressive and uninhibited. YP2 is signing during the first verse and when the chorus arrives, she also starts singing. She is focusing really hard to keep up with ML2. She is smiling during the chorus and seems to be really enjoying herself. The song continues with everyone joining in. It becomes tricky when they reach the middle eight with most young people finding following ML2's signing more difficult. YP1, however, is still singing confidently – he knows all the words to the middle eight. When they reach the end of the song all the young people are smiling and they join in applauding themselves, led by the music leaders. ML1 says something about the sign for 'close your eyes' and YP2 moves her eyeball really close up to her webcam in a jestful way.

This few minutes of video is typical of the recordings of young people making music – they are all fully engaged and focused on the group activities. The music leaders are always positive and there's lots of smiling. The young people respond to that – every activity appears to be fun and light-hearted with lots of smiling and laughter. Another recording has the group singing and signing the Ed Sheeran song *Perfect*. YP1 and YP2 particularly are very enthusiastic in their singing – joyful and expressive.



An activity the music leaders did with the group was to make a poster of young people's ideas around 'what Sound Lab means to us'. The purpose of this was to share with people who were new to the group, as a way of welcoming them and making them feel involved. It is also, however, an effective way of capturing what is important to the young people.



Another activity that captures young people's positive thoughts of Sound Lab is the song lyrics they created as group towards the final sessions.

This is us, this is our Sound Lab
Fun, fantastic, fabulous
Playing lots of instruments
And travelling around the world
All the things we have been doing
BBQ rap, and drumming too (sausages sausages)
This is us, this is our Sound Lab
Fun, fantastic, fabulous

Considering the intended aims and outcomes

Within an outcomes evaluation approach, the discussion in this section of the report focuses on to what extent the stated aims and intended outcomes were met, with a systematic appraisal of each outcome and how the evaluation evidence available enables insight. The interpretation offered in this section of the report has been led by the evaluator with input from the Evolve Music team (consistent with the 'collaborative' evaluation approach).

Project aims: To improve the provision of musical opportunities for young people aged 11 to 18 with additional needs who live across the Somer Valley area. Through this we aim to foster the development of a social community in which these young people can come together and make lasting friendships through music.

Sound Lab achieved most aspects of the project aims but the specific context of the coronavirus pandemic needs to be considered. On the whole, the evaluation evidence collected shows that Sound Lab was an additional music making opportunity for young people and it reached those for whom it was intended – young people with additional needs. The focus on the Somer Valley area was widened to include Bath and North East Somerset, Frome and the North East Mendip area due to changes in partnerships because of organisations' pandemic responses (the original key project partner closed their services and furloughed staff at the start of the pandemic and a new fruitful partnership with Critchill School developed). Sound Lab did foster an online community of young people with additional needs through supporting existing friendships and creating new social connections, although there is no evidence that 'lasting friendships through music' were created. It is difficult to make judgements about whether the concept of friendship in the project aims aligns with concepts of friendship held by the young people who took part in Sound Lab, many of whom are neurodivergent, non-verbal, or need support to access social situations. What is evident is that young people had fun and joyous experiences of making music in a group, but there is no indication of how these new social connections are to continue as friendships beyond the project.

Outcome 1: An improvement in Young People's Musical Skills and/or development in their "horizontal" musical progression

The music leaders' notes show the range of music making activities young people were offered and that consideration was given to developing their individual musical skills and supporting their progression *within* the project. The opportunities to create music Sound Lab provided were very important to the young people and their families, particularly in the context of the pandemic when much other music making for young people had ceased. The online sessions filled a void left by discontinued instrumental lessons for some and creative activities at school.

Although the evaluation methods sought to understand how Sound Lab complemented or aligned with other music making young people do, no information has been found about how the young people are continuing or extending their musical progression outside of the project or being signposted to other music making now the project has ended. The musical instruments purchased through the project funding were distributed amongst the young people so they could use them at home during the online sessions and these instruments remain with the young people to continue playing if they wish.

Supporting young people's musical progression through signposting to other opportunities is receiving attention in the Bath and North East Somerset area through *Routes Through Music* led by Bath Festivals, a Youth Music-funded project that includes aims to improve musical progression routes for young people experiencing challenging circumstances. Evolve Music is active in a network of music providers who are working together to improve progression routes, but currently the support for young people such as those who have taken part in Sound Lab to transition to other project-based or ongoing music making opportunities does not exist. The need for Sound Lab is due to a lack of other opportunities that meet disabled young people's needs, therefore there are limited opportunities to which young people can be signposted.

Outcome 2: Increased social interaction and connections amongst YP thereby reducing any feelings of isolation

Various sources of evidence show how Sound Lab provided an online social opportunity for young people that was particularly valued by parents/carers when many other educational and out-of-school groups had stopped due to the pandemic. New social connections between young people were created through the online and Summer Club groups. One parent/carer highlighted the lack of alternative social opportunities (online or in-person) in her area that met her son's needs, therefore Sound Lab was particularly appreciated.

Evaluating the success of an online group for young people's social interaction is a challenge given that it's a mode of interaction that is relatively new and was enforced by the pandemic rather than chosen as an ideal way of working. There does appear to be some advantages to this way of working for young people with additional needs. Zoom provides additional communication choices that young people took advantage of (typing in the chat box, using the emoji reactions, joining the group but with webcam turned off) – making the group situation more accessible for non-verbal and neurodiverse young people. The online mode also enabled young people from a wider geographical area than originally planned to come together to share their interest in making music.

Sound Lab certainly increased the opportunities for social interaction available to young people, but whether that *reduced* feelings of isolation is less clear. The project team inferred that providing the regular sessions, particularly during the lockdowns, brought young people together when no other social interaction with peers was taking place, therefore isolation was reduced. But from the evaluation evidence collected, there was no explicit feedback that young people's feelings of isolation were *reduced* – no young person or parent/carer explicitly said their isolation *reduced* because of Sound Lab. The music leaders' notes, however, do document the social interaction during the group online sessions which *could* have mitigated against feelings of isolation. The session activities made space for young people to express how they felt about lockdown and returning to school or starting a new college through different methods such as group discussion and song writing. The evaluation design of future projects could pay closer attention to the articulation of intended outcomes to acknowledge this subtly.

Outcome 3: Increase the confidence & skills of both established and emerging music leaders thereby increasing the quality of practice amongst the music leading workforce

Evolve Music provided training courses, networking, mentoring and enabled a delivery model of co-facilitation which all contributed to music leaders' professional development. The bespoke 1-2-1 mentoring was said by one music leader to be the most valuable kind of professional development to her, and she also valued the peer-learning from co-facilitation with another music leader. She felt that her confidence and skills increased, and she had been able to use what she learnt in the Sound Lab sessions, with direct benefits to the quality of practice.

A limitation of the evaluation is that not all music leaders involved in Sound Lab have been asked to contribute their views regarding this outcome.

Outcome 4: Evolve Music is recognised as a high-quality provider of music activities for YP with additional needs

The parent/carer responses in the interviews and questionnaires certainly show they recognise Sound Lab as meeting their child's needs, providing engaging music making for their child and that the music leaders' practice is high quality.

The perspective of one music leader was that her experience of working as a freelance practitioner for Evolve Music had been good and the project had been well-managed.

Intentions to understand partners' views of Evolve Music have not been successful. One reason for this is the intended partnership working did not take place as planned due to the pandemic. Requests for feedback from music teachers in a special school that one young person attended did not yield a response.

There were some outcome indicators in the evaluation framework regarding quality that were not addressed during the project. The Youth Music Quality Framework was not used as part of the project planning or review and the intention for Evolve Music to develop their own quality framework was not pursued. There have been discussions between evaluator and Evolve Music staff that developing an organisational quality framework may yet be something the Evolve Music leadership wishes to do. There were aspects of the project that the evaluator observed as paying attention to quality, such as regular reflective meetings with the music leading team facilitated by the project manager.

An end-of-project evaluation meeting facilitated by the evaluator with Evolve's Programme Manager and Artistic Director involved a reflective element and used the Failspace Project's [Wheel of Failure](#) to consider different aspects of the project on a success-failure continuum. The discussion generated by using this tool highlighted some aspects of Sound Lab in a consideration of quality. There was feeling that the project had been overly ambitious in terms of what could be achieved towards raising Evolve Music's profile. Whilst participation in Bath Festival's *Routes Through Music* network was a positive, there was recognition that more could have been done to raise the profile of the project through more regular sharing of information about the project. That more practice-sharing was not done was due to capacity of the team. Evolve's Artistic Director acknowledged that for the charity to have the 'pillar of community' profile it was seeking, more work to develop and strengthen partnerships was needed. There was also a recognition that young people's voices could have been included more in the design of the project from an earlier stage.

Recommendations and future development

What Evolve Music have achieved in the extremely difficult circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic should be acknowledged and celebrated. Considering how Sound Lab has addressed the intended project aims and outcomes prompts some recommendations that Evolve Music may wish to consider in developing how they continue to support the Sound Lab young people or other young people with additional needs.

The online format of group music making has an accessibility beyond lockdown and should be considered as a valuable element of future projects for young people with additional needs. That Sound Lab has continued until the end of 2021 with good attendance and participation, when most other groups have returned to face-to-face meetings, shows young people's needs and willingness to engage with online groups. Online sessions make music making groups accessible to families who are not able to travel to in-person groups due to geographical location or family commitments. An online group also increases the accessibility of music making for young people who find in-person groups difficult or overwhelming – Zoom gives them communication choices and alternative ways of participating. Evolve Music could consider continuing the format of regular online music making sessions with in-person holiday club activities as this increases the options for participation.

Original intentions to work closely with partner organisations were hampered by the pandemic although a new relationship with Critchill School was initiated. Evolve Music could continue working to develop partnerships with special schools so that Sound Lab can contribute and complement to the music making young people do at school.

Sound Lab was considered to be a valuable replacement for some young people's usual music making opportunities that ceased due to the pandemic. Some parents indicated that their child's attempts to learn instruments hadn't been successful because of their learning needs. For these families there would be value in having an ongoing social, accessible group that focuses on enjoying and creating music without the focus on developing technical skills that often comes with individual tuition. With the track-record Evolve Music is building of working with young people with additional needs in the Somer Valley area, the organisation is well-positioned to continue supporting the progression of young people in the geographical areas Sound Lab has served, should there be a strategic commitment to do so.

The importance of co-facilitation to the professional development and peer-learning of music leaders was evident. Evolve Music could strive to continue structuring music leading teams with joint facilitation roles for music leaders.

Professional development for music leaders was enhanced by the training, networking and particularly the 1-2-1 mentoring offered. Projects should endeavour to continue including professional development for the freelance workforce in the future.

The completion of a written evaluation report marks a single point in time in an evaluation process. Next steps for Evolve Music staff could be incorporating the learning from the reflective evaluation meeting and the evaluation report into planning future work.

Conclusion and next steps

Evolve Music have adapted the original Sound Lab plans to respond to the circumstances of the pandemic and enable young people with additional needs to make music in a supportive accessible online environment. The online group has provided opportunities for existing friendships to continue and for new social connections to be made. The pleasure young people found in the group music making was evident in the different sources of evaluation data collected. Parents/carers were appreciative of the project and noted how the music leading team accommodated young people's needs and supported them to take part.

As Evolve Music develop plans for more activities under the Sound Lab 'brand' (plans are underway for 6 sessions of a face-to-face afterschool club at Fosseway School in Radstock, and one-off 'taster sessions' are planned with SWALLOW and a group in Yeovil), creating a reflective space for the Evolve Music team to consider how the evaluation findings could inform activity plans would be worthwhile.

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