

‘Music is now threaded through what we do
and no longer just a basket of instruments
in the corner of the room.’

Sound Explorers:
Early Years Workforce Development Programme 2023

Interim Evaluation Report

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Introduction

Sound Explorers is Evolve Music's Early Years Workforce Development Programme 2023.

Sound Explorers comprises 12-week residencies in early years settings. The aim of each residency is to:

- Embed a culture of musicality into the day-to-day practices of early years settings over the long term
- Enable parents/carers to facilitate music making at home
- Enable young children to benefit from music activity in early years settings.

Sound Explorers is funded by The Vernon Ellis Foundation.

The University of Plymouth is partnering the project through four student placements with Plymouth City Council and Plymouth Music Education Hub providing in kind development advice and support.

This report is based on data from a residency at The Cabin Childcare Centre, YMCA (Plymouth) that happened in early 2023, and the longitudinal data from Greenshoots Pre-School and Woodfields Primary School Nursery settings that took part in the Sound Explorers project in 2021 and 2022.

Evaluation findings to date are reported under the Sound Explorers aims and detailed outcomes. These will be incorporated in the *Final Evaluation Report* to be written after a further Sound Explorers residency happening in 2023. The Final Evaluation will incorporate impacts and learning from across the whole project.

At The Cabin, two specialist early years Music Leaders ran:



- ten group music sessions and one feedback session (with one session cancelled due to public health contagious illness concerns);
- twelve 1:1 music sessions;
- two CPD sessions.

In total 39 children and 14 staff were involved.

Two students were also on placement. In addition, the Music Leader who had also worked on the 2021-22 project provided follow-on advice and support to those settings.

Evaluation process

The External Evaluator drew up an *Evaluation Plan* (see Appendix I) which set out the programme aims and desired outcomes as described in the funding application to The Vernon Ellis Foundation, along with the evaluation methodologies.

This Interim Evaluation Report covers the period January to July 2023, with findings from the first phase work in one nursery plus the follow up evaluation with the two early years settings which participated in the 2021-22 Sound Explorers project. It is drawn from the Evaluator's:

- Attendance at the first CPD session
- Zoom conversations with the two students on placement as part of their supervision with the lead Music Leader and review of their reflective logs
- Review of a Zoom recording of a sharing session in May 2023 with three staff from the first nursery setting, the two placement students, the Early Years Improvement Officer from Plymouth City Council, two colleagues from the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub, three Evolve Music trustees and the two Music Leaders.
- Visits to the two 2021-22 nursery settings to talk with main contacts (Deputy Manager in one setting; Manager and key staff member in the other setting)
- Review of the first phase nursery staff project starting points and end reflections questionnaires (eight responses for each questionnaire, including six 'paired' responses)
- Review of the first phase nursery project-related Facebook engagement.
- Review of the follow up project questionnaires completed by staff at the 2021-22 nurseries (4 and 2 responses respectively)

- Review of Music Leaders' reflective logs and other evaluation data gathered, and liaison with Music Leaders.

Embedding a culture of musicality into the day-to-day practices of early years settings over the long term

Outcome: 20 staff in two early year settings will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to facilitate music for children in a group or on a one-to-one basis.

This first phase of the programme involved 14 members of staff across the delivery sessions (with 16 in total attending the first CPD session), with a similar number expected to take part in the second phase.

As part of tracking any increase in staff confidence and practical knowledge, nursery staff were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire about their individual starting points before the project began and a complementary reflection questionnaire at project end.

At the first CPD event, staff picked a coloured lolly stick with a number on to create their anonymous ID, with the intention they used this number on both questionnaires to enable analysis of individual 'distance travelled'. Direct comparisons between questionnaires was possible in six cases, enabling the analysis of individual 'distance travelled' journeys.

Aggregated responses from the eight staff members who completed the starting points forms are summarised below, covering:

- level of confidence

- music background
- any uncertainties about music making
- what they would like to learn from the music leaders
- ideas about what would support more impactful music making in the nursery.

In terms of confidence about using music with their children, a 1 – 5 Likert scale¹ was used with the following results:

CONFIDENCE	1 Not at all confident	2 A bit confident	3 Quite confident	4 Confident	5 Very confident
No of responses	0	2	3	3	0
% of responses	0%	25%	37.5%	37.5%	0%

When asked what music experience and/or skills and/or likes staff brought to the project, one left the question blank and one wrote *‘none’*. Another explained: *‘Very little experience as during NVQ3 we didn’t really explore music.’* Two described themselves coming with *‘a love for music’* and four mentioned *‘singing’/ songs’*, with one also referencing *‘dancing’*.

When asked whether they had any particular uncertainties in using music with their children, only one replied *‘Yes’*, explaining this was *‘how to use music to communicate with children’*. This staff member had chosen *‘a bit confident’* from the ratings as above.

All the staff had something they wanted to learn from the Music Leaders, as below:

- ‘How to use music to help the children to feel safe and happy.
- ‘How to make children engage with music.’
- ‘How to deliver music better.’

¹ a bipolar scaling method, measuring either positive or negative response to a statement

‘How often to incorporate music throughout the day.’

‘How to get the most out of a music session. To become more confident.’

‘Different ways and opportunities to make different types of music.’

‘Simple new songs. New hand actions. Helpful tips.’

When asked what would support more impactful music making, several responses focused on better resources and support:

‘Resources. Practitioners with really good knowledge and skills.’

‘More music instruments.’

‘Having a music station.’

‘A range of different instruments.’

Other comments related to the nature of, and access to, music making opportunities:

‘I think having more free music making sessions would be impactful.’

‘The use of musical instruments during group times more often.’

‘Child led activities.’

‘Allowing children to access [a music station] whenever they want to make music.’

Two members of staff referred to specific help needed to support impactful music making:

‘How to implement it in the setting.’

‘All staff to have more knowledge of how to implement it in the setting.’

Overall, the responses showed a keen interest in learning from the project to increase and enhance music making in the nursery.



Where starting point and end reflection questionnaire ‘pairing’ was possible². The results, in the following chart, shows the differences in scoring in relation to confidence in using music with their children according to the 1 – 5 Likert scale, where 1 is ‘not at all confident’ and 5 ‘very confident’.

Not at all confident	A bit confident	Quite confident	Confident	Very confident
1	2	3	4	5

Staff member	Starting point	End reflection	Difference
A	4	4	0
B	2	5	3
C	3	4	1
D	2	5	3
E	3	5	2
F	4	4	0
Average difference			1.5

This average difference is comparable to that of the previous Sound Explorers project (1.67) and as before, it is noticeable that ‘end reflection’ points show that all staff were now ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’ in using music with their children. In addition, the two staff who completed end but not starting questionnaires both rated themselves as ‘confident’.

Responses across the eight staff to the question How would you rate your practical knowledge now in facilitating music with your children? were as follows:

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE	1 Very low	2 Low	3 Medium	4 High	5 Very high
No of responses	0	0	3	3	2
% of responses	0	0	37.5%	37.5%	25%

² a question type where the candidates can match values to their category

Seven of the eight respondents (87.5%) reported developing music making and facilitation knowledge and/or skills, with the following key areas noted:

- Increased knowledge and experience leading to greater confidence in facilitation.
- New appreciation of how children play through music.
- New knowledge that music can be set up in all learning areas.
- New knowledge that music helps children with their language and communication development.
- How to use music to communicate with children.
- How to use music and singing to help with transitions and daily routines.
- How to use different tones of voice.

When asked whether they felt they were supporting a wider range of music making, in a wider range of contexts, more often, than before the project, all staff responding said 'YES'. In reflecting on what difference the project made to when and how music making was happening in the nursery, staff commented:

'We are making more music and have access to a variety of different instruments.'

'Free access to musical instruments.'

'We know now how to include music in our daily routine and everyday activities.'

'We use music all the time even to greet the children.'

'We've increased music sessions.'

'Adults use their singing voice more.'

At the Zoom sharing meeting, one staff member described how music was now *'threaded through'* what they did at the nursery and no longer *'just a basket of instruments in the corner of the room'*. The nursery owner reflected that the project had been powerful evidence of *'the significance of being present in children's play...being there and*

interacting as the most important job’. For them, the CPD session had not just been a source of ideas and understanding, but also a fun experience that helped build the team.

Looking back at staff starting points in terms of their experience and desired learning from the project (see pages 6/7), all the developments above evidenced their growth in confidence and ability to apply new knowledge and skills to integrate music into their setting.

The Music Leaders reflected how important it had been to have *‘Overwhelming support from staff, all invested and proactive since day 1’* and identified a key development in them seeing themselves as creative, summing up the success of the project as below:

‘The adults and children are such creative and playful musicians. It has been wonderful to see an increase in confidence, musical communication and playful interactions.’

Staff connecting with their own playfulness and being active participants in the child-led play, rather than observers, was something Music Leaders saw change over the weeks. Through the Music Leaders modelling interacting with children without words, mirroring and matching, staff picked up these techniques *‘showing an innate ability to musically connect with children by observing and responding’*. Through weekly reflections with the staff music lead, *‘sharing the learning behind why musical play is important, the understanding and practical application of play partnering improved’*.

Reflection times also proved important for addressing any challenges that arose, for instance having so many children in one space which led to the decision to split the group into two to support better experiences. There was also some concern from the staff music lead about how the new instruments provided would be used – given in the past new toys had sometimes been broken or lost in the garden.

The Music Leaders explained:

‘We worked with T to make a plan so that she and the children felt confident with engaging with the instruments without restricting the musical play. T led a session to model how to play the instruments gently and respectfully. She put together an indoor music trolley that only comes out sometimes, as well as a music box that is out all of the time as part of the nursery continuous provision. She also separated out some instruments that were okay to use outside, so the children have a range of musical opportunities whilst also making sure things were looked after.’

This was a good example of the holistic, relationship-based and developmental approach Evolve brings to working with staff in the settings. This is key to achieving the aim to embed a culture of musicality while attending to practicalities.

From the nursery’s perspective, the quality of the Evolve Music staff, their supportive approach and the input of resources were key project success factors:

‘[Their] passion shines through in every session. We will always be grateful for your help and support you have given us.’

‘Thank you to Evolve Music for our new instruments! The children were so excited to try them all out.’

The staff music lead gave their own reflections on how they had developed the confidence to lead sessions – even on the day there was an Ofsted inspection. The resulting report included two positive references to the project:

‘Staff work with other educational providers to offer children additional learning activities. Children enjoy interactive music sessions. They sing and play musical instruments with peers and staff to encourage their confidence and communication.’

‘Children sing songs about how they feel using different voice tones.’

This confidence extended to teaching other staff members, including those in other settings. Another key area of learning for the staff music lead was that *‘Music doesn’t have to be an instrument.’* As a result of the project, all staff were using much more singing as part of everyday activity. The music lead was now running daily after lunch music sessions, when the children tended to be rather lively, working in a big circle with singing, parachute games and scarf play. The staff music lead was very pleased *‘To be doing what Evolve left us with’.*

‘Music is magic like no other which can do incredible unexplainable things. We love our music sessions.’
Nursery post on Facebook

Outcome: 10 staff in two early years settings will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to use music to support interactions with early years children with social, emotional, mental health needs and/or development delay or diagnosed special educational needs.

Out of a total roll of 71 children at the nursery, 18 (25%) were on IEPs (Individualised Education Plans). The range of special needs and disabilities included epilepsy, visual impairment, autism, communication and language delay, ADHD (suspected), stammer, and behaviour. There was also one child with EAL (English as an Additional Language). With approximately 10 of the 14 staff members at the nursery working on a Thursday when the group music sessions were held, and the high level of SEND children, many were both working with children with additional needs and able to learn from Music Leaders.

Music Leaders reported that SEND children took part in the first session and staff commented on how well they engaged, being surprised at the level of their focus. However, after that the children did not take part in the sessions, so Music Leaders asked if they could re-join and by week four or five, SEND children were involved again. The staff lead for music commented to the Music Leaders on how accessible the sessions were for all children with range of ages and needs, so any assumptions or apprehensions on behalf of the nursery more widely about SEND children taking part seem to have been addressed.

In the end of project questionnaires, staff commented:

‘[The project] has increased my confidence by allowing me to understand the different ways it can help a child’s development.’

‘I am confident in now singing more instead of using the Bluetooth speaker.’

‘Using music in everything.’

‘I have gained confidence by doing music together with the staff [i.e. Evolve] to create a happy and creative environment.’

‘[Working in] small groups.’

There was also some unexpected delivery in relation to this outcome outside the original project scope. Evolve was invited to participate in an Early Years Stronger Practice Hub launch event. They ran a workshop with a range of early year practitioners from across Devon and Cornwall to share some of the learning from Sound Explorers and give some CPD practical tips and ideas to work with children with SEND/SEMH. Fifty people attended the workshop. The event allowed Evolve to make some very useful networks and resulted in having staff from other settings coming to observe their work in the nursery: an immediate and tangible workforce development legacy.

Longitudinal Impacts

Outcome: Staff from the two 2021-22 project settings are supporting a wider range of music making, in a wider range of contexts, more often, than pre-project.

From the Evaluator's visits, conversations with staff, follow up staff follow up feedback form responses and Music Leader communications with the nurseries, it was evident there was an increase in music making in both settings in relation to type of activity, frequency and overall time spent – with one setting now ensuring *'the children have access to it [music making] at all times.'* Both settings were also very keen to maintain a relationship with Evolve and receive further support and CPD, demonstrating a commitment to continuous quality improvement in their music offering.

Staff follow up feedback forms were completed by four staff in one setting and two in the other, representing small samples. However, this is unsurprising given staff turnover, day to day working pressures and the context that follow up questionnaires often have a low response rate, even for projects where longitudinal evaluation can be planned and resourced from the very start, unlike in this case.

Given the length of time since the project was delivered for the 2021-22 settings, responses could not be tagged to any staff members' previous project questionnaires. While this meant it was not possible to extend the analysis of any individual's 'distance travelled' journey, the responses nevertheless give a helpful picture of significant developments overall.

For the first setting, the following chart shows the level of confidence staff had in using music with their children.

<i>CONFIDENCE</i>	1 Not at all confident	2 A bit confident	3 Quite confident	4 Confident	5 Very confident
No of responses	0	1	1	2	0
% of responses	0	25%	25%	50%	0

In the other setting, the results were as follows:

<i>CONFIDENCE</i>	1 Not at all confident	2 A bit confident	3 Quite confident	4 Confident	5 Very confident
No of responses	0	0	1	1	0
% of responses	0	0	50%	50%	0

Taken together, these ratings show that 50% of respondents were at the ‘confident’ level.

Across the two settings, staff described via the questionnaire the music making knowledge and skills developed through the project they were putting into practice, grouped as below:

Embedding a wider range of music opportunities

- Developing the environment to embrace music, ensuring the children have access to it at all times.
- Adding a piano and a keyboard to the music making resources.
- Knowing that music doesn’t have to come from using instruments.
- Using everyday objects to make a beat.
- Singing instead of speaking.

- Using a variety of different equipment to make music e.g. scarves and different materials, a variety of different musical instruments and sensory items such as rice/pasta.

Providing specific support for additional needs children

- Making more sensory time for children to explore the equipment in a smaller group.

Integrating music into other activities

- Incorporating instruments into story time, so children can use them to make quiet and loud sounds for different parts of the story.
- Using music in special events, such as leavers' events.

Understanding how valuable music is in supporting children's wider development

- Harnessing music to support the development of speech and language, helping the children learn words, their sounds and meaning, as well as many other areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Using music to help children develop their confidence and interact more with learning.

In addition, staff reported how much they enjoyed working with Evolve and enjoyed seeing the children's enjoyment with music: One commented how they had all, along with the children, *'really embraced the concept of music'*.

When the Evaluator visited the two settings, direct evidence of learning and development from the project being put into action was observed. In one setting, many new instruments and other resources had been bought and a music 'designated area' in

the nursery both enhanced and extended in terms of space. This development sat alongside a now integrated approach to music making, with a staff member reflecting:

‘We never realised before how important music is... we just do it now, we don’t think about it... it’s part of our culture’.

They also made the comment below in a follow up email:

‘[The project] really has made a very big difference for our children in our care. There have been improvements with their speech and language and most importantly their well-being. The work you have role modelled for our SEN children has also changed the way we support our non-verbal children, and how important music is for our children's young lives.’

In the other setting, the first group activity of the day was a ‘rehearsal’ music session based on the Evolve model with name introductions, participative songs and lyrical games, followed by open play – to get ready for sharing ‘snippets’ with parents at the end of term leaving event. The children were very engaged and enjoying all the activities with great enthusiasm. They confidently included the Evaluator in the session, despite them being an unknown adult, to the extent one child sat on their knee to take part in activities together.

From conversations with staff, many other significant developments were noted. In the first setting:

- A lobby area was now decorated and used for individual work, including creative use of materials with the drums such as putting rice on the skins and watching, as well as feeling, the vibrations.
- The drums in the main space were being used as a calming activity for children with excess energy: ‘*They can bash the drums rather than other children*’.

- Singing to children with dual language, especially when using their names, was helping develop communication skills.
- Singing, often accompanied by actions, and clapping rather than using speech to get attention, were being used more often by staff.
- Music was being incorporated more into storytelling activities.
- Using different types of music at different times of the day was working well, for instance in supporting children to be calmer – or to wake up!
- Music making was proving particularly beneficial for children with additional needs, including those with limited language who were able to use music to communicate in their own way, with staff responding and building on what was seen as children’s strengths.
- Staff were increasingly observing children, following their line of enquiry and sitting with them in their musical play.
- More resources were being bought from various sources (and bought in from home), with interest in sharing these with other settings in the multi-academy trust.
- There was an understanding and appreciation that *‘tuning children’s ears to sound helped them get ready for phonics’*.
- New staff were being supported through role modelling and learning how to use their voice well (for example, speaking lower rather than shouting).
- Reception staff had noted how musical the children were coming up from nursery, along with having a good level of confidence and a keenness to be involved in things.

In the second setting:

- A ‘Music champion’ was identified and who had significantly developed their confidence in supporting music making.
- The Music champion was running weekly sessions, expanding available music activities and also *‘bringing on’* new staff in their understanding and skills in supporting the children’s music making.
- *‘Doing Evolve’* was always on the staff meeting agenda along with the other types of activity, so was fully incorporated into nursery planning.
- There was an increased awareness and appreciation that *‘We’re all musical’*.
- Staff were singing more outside of planned singing sessions; using more sounds and fewer words; and changing their voice tone and level to increase their range of responsive communications with children.
- Staff were using techniques learned from Evolve such as mirroring, for instance in one Evaluator observed instance, following a child’s lead who was singing to a teddy, building up sustained, interactive play.
- The Music champion was trying out new ideas and learning that – and from – *‘things don’t always go as planned’* and was keen to maintain contact with the project to share experiences with other settings and learn about new ideas from them and Evolve.

This embracing of music making inspired by the project was confirmed by one of the questionnaire respondents who noted:

‘Everything we learnt from the project is implemented in the setting... The range of new ideas we have is great. It really benefits all children and the staff have really benefited from it too.’

The impact of all these developments in relation to staff supporting greater depth, breadth and frequency of music making than pre-project is shown in the outcomes for children. Drawing from conversations with staff and follow up questionnaire responses, it was evident that there was a *high level of engagement and enjoyment* by the children and that this led to *specific developmental progress*, as in the qualitative and quantitative feedback provided:

A high level of engagement and enjoyment by the children

‘We have found the children much more eager to use the instruments confidently throughout the nursery and really enjoying the sounds they can make.’

‘The children love having the instruments to make different sounds and have used them through play.’

‘We have found the children really engaged with the sound they make, if it’s loud and upbeat they are full of fun, if the music is quieter they respond well, they are calmer, happy to engage in the joy of the sound.’

‘New children get involved very quickly.’

‘Some often ask if/when we can do [the music session] again.’

‘Children really engage and enjoy the sessions.’

Developmental progress

‘SEN children are using music as a tool to communicate.’

‘They are developing a sense of rhythm.’

‘Children have become more confident.’

‘The children benefit from the sessions in terms of being expressive and confident.’

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework Learning Goals

Although it is not possible to make a direct attribution between the project and children’s developmental assessment statistics, the key staff member in one setting was very clear that Sound Explorers contributed significantly to improved assessments, providing the following data:

Blank Levels³: there was an increase of ‘expected and above’ from 35% to 43%. The average was Blank Level 2S which increased to Blank Level 3D. *(Results from Autumn term to Summer term)*

Communication and Language: children who reached their ‘expected’ level went up from 42% to 58%. *(Results from Spring term to Summer term)*

Personal, Social and Emotional Development: 38% were at ‘expected’; this increased to 42%. However, at the beginning of the Spring term, 62% were ‘below expected’ progress and this reduced to 15%. *(Results from Spring term to Summer term)*. ‘Which is amazing’ (staff member)

Physical Development: 46% were at ‘expected’ progress, this increased to 54%. *(Results from Summer term to Spring term)*.

³ blank levels is away of assessing and developing children's verbal reasoning and abstract language capabilities

Added Value

Outcome: Four students will have developed their practice and practice support awareness through participation in a ‘live’ project.

Two students were on placement during the first phase and over the summer, a brief was prepared ready for the two second phase students.

The Music Leaders reflected how well the students had *‘slotted into the team’*, understanding *‘our practice’* and making a significant contribution to all the activities and support for the children. In particular, they recognised and valued their active willingness to *‘go with the children’s play interests’*. With the experience being a ‘first’ for each of them – the music student working with early years and the education student working with music – one of the indicators of practice development was being seen by the children as a ‘safe person’.

From the students’ perspective, the placement was a very useful experience in being able to relate theoretical learning on their courses with practical application and specific upskilling. As one of them shared, *‘It doesn’t make sense till you’re there’* – showing an understanding of what needs to be in place for professional practice development. They appreciated being able to get involved in all aspects of delivery, from setting up tasks to, for instance, group singing at the beginning of a session. They kept detailed reflective logs after each session, tracking both their own development and the developments they observed in the children and how the staff were participating in, and learning from, the project. Music Leaders commented in particular on their well-developed observational and reflective skills.

The students also participated in regular supervision sessions with one of the Music Leaders. The Evaluator joined one of these to ‘listen in’ and help prompt reflections on practice. Key areas of learning were around *being ready and responsive; spotting*

opportunities for musical play; communication skills; and facilitating rather than leading or teaching.

Examples of this learning and practice development were:

- Using observational skills with a ‘musical lens’ to see how ‘ordinary’ activity such as kicking a ball or sweeping up could be an opportunity for musical play.
- Offering opportunities without any pressure to children engaged in solitary play and who find socialising difficult, balancing free play with an adult’s facilitation role.
- Following a child in their play and what they bring, going with the flow of their interest and extending it to develop learning.
- Being open and accepting of a child’s musical offerings, maximising it for their enjoyment.
- Using mirroring and matching to support structuring a child’s idea, including for others to join in, rather than making a direct intervention.
- Thinking about communication from the perspective of how things will be understood by a child, especially if they are non-verbal and need extra patience or specific approaches.
- Learning not to underestimate children, from having observed very shy children gaining confidence and those who didn’t talk starting to do so, as a result of music making.

Outcome: Colleagues from partner organisations (PCC Early Years Directorate, University of Plymouth, Plymouth Music Education Hub) will have increased their knowledge and understanding of impactful music making in early years settings and the support it requires.

Although University of Plymouth and Plymouth Music Education Hub staff colleagues had to send apologies for the Zoom sharing meeting held in May, for other attendees – including colleagues from Plymouth City Council and the Early Years South West Stronger Practice Hub Officer – this was an important opportunity to hear first-hand about the project delivery and impacts as well as consider ‘Next Steps’. Colleagues unable to attend are very keen to maintain engagement with the project and will be sent the Sound Explorer Evaluation Reports.

At the meeting, the Music Leaders gave a comprehensive, reflective presentation of the work in the first phase nursery, with contributions also made by the setting staff and placement students. The project outcomes described have been incorporated in this report under the relevant sections and in terms of the ‘Next Steps’ discussion that followed, the following context, success factors and opportunities were identified:

- The development of children’s communication skills is a significant challenge due to the continuing impact of Covid – and evidence shows music helps with this, as well as developing creativity, confidence, emotional regulation and social interaction skills.
- Ensuring there are regular Sound Explorer sessions over a period of time is key to making a positive difference to children, staff and the nursery setting.
- Having CPD and reflection time built into projects supports the most effective learning and its implementation.

- Having a Music Champion who has gained confidence in facilitating music making opportunities and is enthusiastic about sharing learning with other colleagues, is an important role in a setting.
- Essential music resources are not too expensive to buy; often good substitutes can be found in Scrapstores; staff are enterprising about where and how they source equipment; and there are specific funding schemes available.
- There is a need for Sound Explorers to be rolled out to more settings, supported with funding.
- There is an opportunity to link Sound Explorers settings and for them to cascade learning to other settings.
- There is an opportunity to create a wider network for Evolve, other music organisations and early years practitioners to get together to share ideas and *'keep themselves on the journey'*.

‘Every setting should have it [Sound Explorers]...see it, do it is how we learn.’

Plymouth City Council Early Years Improvement Officer

Enabling parents/carers to facilitate music making at home

Outcome: 30 parents/carers will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to facilitate music for young people at home.

More connection with and support for parents/carers in facilitating music making with their children at home was a particularly desired development from the previous 2021-22 project, assisted by a less restrictive Covid-19 context. Music Leaders invited parents/carers into sessions and also held a special Mothers' Day gathering, with 15-20 female caregivers attending. The Mother's Day event was received very positively, with these comments from family members posted on the nursery's active and well visited Facebook page (751 followers):

'When I visited The Cabin for the Mother's Day gathering, I really enjoyed watching all the children participating in singing and moving to the music. It's great to see personalities come through just from music. My son has started to really enjoy listening and singing to music on the way to nursery in the mornings and when he thinks I am not looking he dances which is new for him. Brilliant project and well done [staff lead for music]!!'

'Thoroughly enjoyed my time there. Nanny X.'
'M (& Nanny) had a great time!! They haven't stopped talking about it.'

'We had a lovely time today. Thank you.'

Music Leaders reflected that they *'felt redundant'* in the session as children were showing their parents their musical play, which demonstrated *'connection, joy and positive bonding'*. They reported how this event was not just enjoyable all round, but also demonstrated how nursery staff were integrating music into their practice within the context of supporting nursery-home relationships.

'Staff noticed how much the children and parents enjoyed it. They also observed how hard the children found it when parents then left as they are not used to parents being invited in. Staff were proactive in using music to help calm the children when upset – after parents left, they put on calming music, turned off the lights, got some blankets and had a relaxation session. This shows how staff really value music and are using it as part of their toolkit to support children's emotional needs.'

The original intention was to run a specific parent/carers event at the end of the project to support this music making at home outcome. However, as many parents worked and wouldn't be able to attend, Music Leaders adapted to connecting with families via the nursery Facebook page and Tapestry (the internal nursery-home communication platform). They created 'at home' music making ideas which they posted weekly, including:

- sound walks
- signposting to specific children's music television programmes
- putting on different types of music to draw to
- choosing a song to share and talking about what you enjoy about it and what it means to you
- making a 'show time'
- body percussion
- scarf dancing
- bath time songs and splashes
- singing chair – taking it on turns to lead



- kitchen dance party
- homemade shakers
- saucepans and spoons drum kit

Parents/carers responded well to other Facebook post requests, such as one for ‘special songs’ to be shared and talked about in sessions. This was another indicator of success in building relationships with parents/carers around music making ideas and their appreciation of the project. As one parent posted on Facebook: *‘G will be gutted it’s coming to an end!’*

Enabling young children to benefit from music activity in early years settings

Outcome: 60 young children will have improved their creativity, confidence, communication skills and social interactions

This phase involved 39 young children in the first phase nursery having direct contact with the Evolve Music Leaders, with a similar number of participants expected for the second phase, taking place from September to December 2023. In addition, children from the nurseries who took part in the 2021-22 Sound Explorers project continued to benefit from music activity led and supported by staff. While exact numbers are unknown for these settings, they were both still undertaking whole group music sessions, with one also holding 1:1 sessions.

Responses to the first phase nursery end of project staff questionnaire included the following representative observations on children's developments generally across the areas of creativity, confidence, communication skills and social interactions, where these are often interconnected:

'The children have grown more confidence in singing and communicating with others.'

'Children are using music through play to communicate with other children and the staff and finding it easier with transitions.'

At the Zoom sharing meeting, nursery staff also commented on a '*definite difference in behaviour*' in the children, noting how some were now using instruments when they needed to regulate their emotions, for instance banging on a drum. This was helped by staff modelling this, showing how you could slow down the banging. For many children, music was '*giving them a voice when they didn't have words*' and '*bringing them out of their shell*'.

Video interviews with staff were included in the Music Leaders' presentation, with the following being noted that music was helping children:

- settle better
- understand their emotions better
- develop their confidence.

Music Leaders and placement student also observed developments such as children:

- using their voice expressively, even if they were non-verbal
- getting better at sharing, turn-taking and playing with other children
- developing their focus and attention, getting involved in sustained play
- becoming more emotionally aware and able to regulate themselves
- speaking up in the group and suggesting activities.

Drawing from questionnaires, conversation with the staff music lead and the Evolve Music Leaders' observations, the following were examples of notable developments in specific individuals as a result of the project:

- A child with an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for their stammer being involved in 1:1 Evolve sessions which increased her interest in music and which '*slightly improved her stammer, as reported by a staff member. 'The 1:1 sessions helped build confidence, giving her leadership opportunities where she could give instructions through song'* and in the group music sessions '*she sang along loudly with no stammer'*' (Music Leader).
- A child with little speech becomes confident to use sounds, using and enjoying the full range of instruments, as observed by a staff member and also appreciated by their parents.

- A child new to the nursery who was very shy and quiet, now happy and talking – and *‘running in for their 1:1 sessions’* (staff music lead).
- A child put forward for 1:1 sessions as there were some concerns about communication and possible autism, as they were struggling with social interaction. In the first group session, staff commented on how unusual it was for him to join in for the whole session. They were surprised at how engaged he was, responding to instructions, taking turns and being an active participant in both the adult led and play sections. Both the group and 1:1 sessions have been significant for him and there has been an improvement in communication, social skills, working through big emotions and playing with others. He has enjoyed being the leader, taking ownership of his sessions. His confidence has grown over the weeks and he has shown clear preference and interests. He particularly enjoys putting egg shakers down the boomwhackers and singing songs around the gathering drum. He makes lots of eye contact, uses his voice expressively and engages with shared joy with the Music Leader (Music Leaders).

In addition, Appendix II comprises Music Leader accounts of two children’s development journeys which provide a more detailed story over time.

Appendix I: Evaluation Plan

This Evaluation Plan sets out the aims and desired outcomes for the programme, along with the evaluation methodologies to capture the differences the programme makes and learning gained to inform future work. The Plan is based on the value of dialogue and gathering multiple perspectives. The External Evaluator, Mary Schwarz, will write an Interim Evaluation Report after delivery in the first early years setting, including longitudinal evaluation of the 2021-22 Sound Explorers project, and a Final Evaluation Report after delivery in the second setting. Reports will be shared with everyone involved and more widely through appropriate dissemination channels.

AIMS	OUTCOMES	EVALUATION METHODOLOGY	WHEN
To embed a culture of musicality into the day-to-day practices of early years settings over the long term	20 staff in two early year settings will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to facilitate music for children in a group or on a one-to-one basis	Staff questionnaires devised by evaluator Evaluator guided conversations within CPD sessions Music leaders' observations via reflective logs	Setting start and end Setting start and end Ongoing
	10 staff in two early years settings will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to use music to support interactions with early years children with social, emotional, mental health needs and/or development delay or diagnosed special educational needs	Staff questionnaires devised by evaluator Evaluator guided conversations with staff within CPD sessions Music leaders' observations via reflective logs	Setting start and end Setting start and end Ongoing

	Staff from the two 2021-22 project settings are supporting a wider range of music making, in a wider range of contexts, more often, than pre-project	Staff questionnaire devised by evaluator Evaluator guided conversations with staff within follow-up sessions	Alongside and within follow up session
	Four students will have developed their practice and practice support awareness through participation in a 'live project' Colleagues from partner organisations (PCC Early Years Directorate, University of Plymouth, Plymouth Music Education Hub) will have increased their knowledge and understanding of impactful music making in early years settings and the support it requires	Student self-observations via reflective log/supervision sessions Music leaders' observations via reflective log Evaluator Zoom conversations with students Evaluator questionnaire with partner colleagues	Ongoing Ongoing Setting end Programme end
To enable parents/carers to facilitate music making at home	30 parents/carers will have increased their confidence and practical knowledge to facilitate music for young people at home	Evaluator informal conversations with parents/carers and observation at sharing sessions Staff conversations with parents/carers and reflections gathered via home/nursery communication channels with Evaluator designed prompts	Project end As appropriate
To enable young children to benefit from music activity in early years settings	60 young children will have improved their: Creativity Confidence Communication skills Social interactions	Music leaders' observations via reflective logs Staff conversations with parents/carers and reflections gathered via home/nursery communication channels with Evaluator designed prompts	After each session As appropriate

Appendix II: Music Leader accounts of two children's development journeys

Child 1: D

D was put forward for 1:1 sessions, as staff have concerns over her behaviour.

D finds emotional regulation hard and interacting with other children can be a struggle: D gets upset and hurts those around them.

D finds focus and attention hard and joining in group work can be a challenge.

D has engaged with group sessions and her focus has improved over the weeks. In the first few sessions, she would sit or stand in the middle of the circle and seek 1:1 attention from Beth or Georgia. With positive interaction, D has been able to engage with most parts of the sessions and now sits in the circle and follows the flow of the session. She makes suggestions such as 'sing angry voice' when we ask for funny voice suggestions.

D's 1st 1:1 session: D enjoyed exploring all of the instruments and resources. Her focus and attention was fast paced and she seemed to struggle to engage with one thing, moving quickly between things as her eyes moved around the room. D didn't want the session to end and became dysregulated when a staff member reinforced the session end. (D threw through wellies, collapsed on the floor screaming and crying.)

Beth said, 'I wonder if you are sad the session has ended because you've had fun and enjoyed the music?'. D stopped crying and said, 'Yes, sad'. Beth then played with D, pretending to make a cake asking D what ingredients went in. D calmed down and joined in the game. When Beth asked where we could bake the cake, D left the room and led Beth into the main play space to the kitchen. She then went off into the green to play.

This first session highlighted that some work around emotions and labelling feelings was important for D. Also, using music to help D feel grounded and more focussed, increasing ability for sustained play.

D's subsequent sessions were much more focussed. She particularly enjoyed playing with elephants, tapping them on the table and making up rhythms whilst singing. D enjoys Beth repeating back their musical phrases. D spent a long time playing with boxes, hiding things inside. Beth turned this into a musical game which D focussed on for a sustained period (10 minutes). Over the weeks, D has remembered her favourite activities and initiates the elephant and hiding games each week.

D is using her voice to sing and exploring vocal melodies.

We have seen a real improvement in D's focus and attention as well as her communication and language.

Naming when D is overwhelmed with emotion is helping her to regulate quicker. Beth has been modelling 'co-regulation' in the hope that D will in time be able to self-regulate.

Child 2: S

S was put forward for 1:1 sessions as she is very shy with most adults: in nursery, she only talks to one or two adults. She is starting school in September so the nursery wanted to support her in building confidence with new adults. Staff weren't sure if she would want to engage with sessions, however wanted to give it a go.

In the first group session, S really enjoyed the scarf songs and joined in with these, dancing with his friend.

The first 1:1 session, S stood by the door and wouldn't come into the room with Beth and Molly for the first five minutes. Beth soon realised that structured singing or adult led activities were too intense for S, so instead she offered a scarf to S and began to throw it around. S smiled and moved further into the room. Beth sang 'One bright scarf' and hid the scarf. S pointed to where it was hidden and then moved further in and sat down. S's confidence gradually grew in the session and she hid her scarf for Beth to find.

In the first session, S didn't say any words but pointed and nodded to answer questions. Session 2 was similar to the first, however S came straight into the room and said three words in the session: 'lion' 'pop' and 'turtle'

Session 3: Beth noticed that S had a lovely friendship with a child called N. Beth asked N and S to come in together. N was more confident in sessions and S picked up on this. She was more playful than before and spoke a little more.

N and S always come together and over the weeks S's confidence has grown and grown. She is now very playful, confident and cheeky: initiating games, choosing songs and being very clear about what she does and doesn't want to do!

'Play and Stop' has been a prominent song in S's sessions as it has encouraged her to be the leader, telling us all when to play and stop. S enjoys this and also adds in instructions like 'Play louder, quieter, fast, slow.'

Rubber ducks have also been a hit. S enjoys hiding them and making out quacking sounds. Using puppets and toys has given S a chance to explore her voice through another character, making loud sounds and funny noises.

In the nursery, S will now have a full conversation with Beth in 1:1 sessions, group sessions and general play.

S seems like she is a 'different child' - although we know that she is the same S she has always been, she's just feeling safe and secure enough to share all parts of herself.

It is a privilege for S to have shown her funny, confident, creative side in the music.

Music Leader Notes

- 71 children on nursery roll
- 39 attended on Thursdays
- 18/71 children on IEPs (25%)
- 7 official 1:1 children worked with on Tuesdays, but real number was approx 10-15 per week as we often ran small groups for anyone who wanted to join
- Range of needs: Epilepsy, visual impairment, autism, communication and language delay, ADHD (suspected), stammer, behaviour (staff think half of all children have behaviour challenges), 1 EAL child
- 14 staff members (approx 10 on Thursdays)
- 16 staff members attended CPD1
- 15-20 parents attended sessions over the weeks
- The Cabin facebook page has 751 followers who would have seen music making posts, pics and videos
- 2 students (each attended 10 sessions and 10 peer supervision sessions/CPD)
- Group sessions: 10 + 1 feedback session (1 session cancelled due to public health contagious illness concerns)
- Plus staff replicated sessions weekly
- 1x ofsted observation of music session
- 1:1 sessions: 12
- 2x CPDs (final one to be run on 23.05.23)
- Network event- EY stronger practice hub, 50+ attended workshops