



**soundLINCS Fusion:
Looked After Children
and Music Making
Executive Summary**

Introduction

This executive summary offers an overview of the findings of an investigation focused on the efficacy of a training initiative which sought a greater understanding of music, and its value as a resource and intervention for Children's Services Practitioners (CSPs) in Lincolnshire, UK.

The project represented an innovative collaboration between voluntary, statutory and Higher Education partners and the research took place between 2016 - 2018.

Partners & Funders Involved

The following partners and funders were involved in the project:



The Headlines

The focus of the training was on exploring strategies for using music with young people, which can then be utilised to engage young people in the Looked After Care system.

The sessions were linked to the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS), around 'delivering excellent practice'. The KSS is the assessment and accreditation criteria for social workers supporting vulnerable families.

The Training

The stated aims of the one day training were:

- To demonstrate how music can be an effective method of communication with children and young people;
- To show how music can deliver better outcomes for children and young people;
- To explore how engaging children and young people in music can be positively related to through reflective practice;
- To increase participants confidence in music making and model activities that directly engage children and young people;
- To signpost to musical activities provided by soundLINCS, Lincolnshire Music Service and others;
- To engage participants in the research activities.

In total, five training sessions took place in two locations, attended by 37 Children's Services Practitioners from across Lincolnshire.

The Participants

Participants were employed by Lincolnshire County Council and the private residential care sector. They ranged from social work and youth justice teams, to early years and disability teams, to Young Inspectors and therapeutic activity coordinators.

Methodologies

The research team took part in a number of training days.

They engaged the participants in interviews and focus groups, exploring the interaction between the community music facilitator and the Children's Services Practitioners, the music skills being passed on, and their potential impact on the workforce. A number of case studies were developed.

The following methods were selected:

- Pre-course email interviews
- Participatory observations

- Eight sets of focus groups (with 4-5 participants per group) were conducted during the lunch break within each training session
- Case studies
- Telephone interviews

Limitations

Initially there was an ambitious plan to train large numbers of the children's workforce. Despite marketing activity the training received lower numbers than had been hoped for.

Focus groups however allowed for the collection of a substantial amount of data within a short space of time. Follow up phone calls after the training proved to be ineffective due to low response rates.

Research Questions

The Research Questions centred on:

- What are the distinctive approaches to music development CPD in the soundLINCS project?
- What are each stakeholder group's experiences of music development CPD?
- What is the perceived impact of music development CPD from the perspectives of each stakeholder group?
- What are the wider implications of the project?

Research Findings

Both responding and adding to the existing literature on Looked After Children and associated theoretical frameworks, workforce development, and projects that have previously engaged with music making, the research findings suggested that:

1. all participants on the training had a significant experience of music and were able to articulate its importance throughout their life journey;
2. A distinctive aspect of the soundLINCS training was to engage participants in a reflective dialogue of their music experience. Reflective practice was embedded in the training and resonated with the participants;
3. The training approach was effective and connected deeply with the Children's Services Practitioners, aligning the personal to the professional. This created a springboard through which the workforce could employ music in developing relationships with the client group in the future;
4. The workforce valued the training and saw it as something different to the usual CPD offer;
5. The workforce indicated that working with music, in the way they were shown had the potential for supporting issues around behaviour and communication. In order to achieve greater impact they indicated they would need further resources, particularly technology based ones and importantly senior management support.

Case study 1

So many of our children have missed out on the opportunity of being children, from the circumstances they have come from. They haven't played, they haven't been allowed- they haven't bounced saucepans with wooden spoons, you know the things that we take for granted, I suppose that we have done with our children or when we were children - that a lot of our young people we work with, just haven't done that - haven't had the parents.

Case study 2

I know when I worked in a residential [home] the young people would come for respite. A lot of them were non verbal, so we had to find something to interact with them, so we used maracas. So, all the attention was on them so one individual in a group would have an instrument and everyone else would move to the same speed and would move towards them.

Would you say that music gives them a sense of control?

Definitely, you can see it in their eyes because they are non-verbal, when people were getting close to them you can see in their body language they would start to get all giddy and excited.

Experience of attending the training

Many participants stated that the training was different or not what they had expected, but did, however, meet their needs by providing ideas of different activities they could use and then develop.

Several participants believed the training would be more focused on the development of playing instruments, rather than focusing on what music meant to them to build their knowledge of the power of music.

Summary

Engaging in musician training was thought to benefit both staff and Looked After Children. One of the most significant benefits was that the child's support network would be able to develop their relationship with a young person, helping the child to form a secure attachment.

Much of the literature indicates that Looked After Children usually lack secure attachments, which can impact on their opportunities to have their voice heard and develop emotional resilience. These are both critical issues that the reports examining Looked After Children in the UK have stated needed to be overcome.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to explore the impact of providing the children's workforce with music training to implement within their practice. The central enquiry revolved around several training sessions being delivered by the music charity soundLINCS in Lincolnshire, for various different children's workforce roles.

The following points summarise the findings, offer a conclusion in relation to the research and tentatively suggest recommendations for future music making CPD:

- Music is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. Consequently, all training participants have had a significant experience of music and were able to articulate its importance throughout their life journey.
- A distinctive aspect of the soundLINCS training was to engage participants in a reflective dialogue of their music experience (musicking). Reflective practice was embedded in the training and resonated with the participants.
- The training approach was effective and connected deeply with the Children's Services Practitioners, aligning the personal to the professional. This created a springboard through which the workforce could employ music in developing relationships with the client group.

Awakening music

- The workforce valued the training and saw it as something different to the usual CPD offer. The general feeling was that other CPD training can be formulaic

in comparison, powerpoint led and low on interactivity. The research supports that the soundLINCS training was engaging, interactive and provided ample opportunity for the individual voices to be expressed and heard. This was reflected in the overall conceptual framework in which the training took place. This could broadly be described as a facilitatory approach. This negotiated content led to a sense of co-authorship and ownership.

- Looked after children struggle to form secure attachments. The research and the literature highlight the value of forming secure attachments, a shared interest/common third, further advocating Social Pedagogy.
- The workforce indicated that working with music, in the way they were shown had the potential for supporting

issues around behaviour and communication. In order to achieve greater impact they would need further resources, particularly technology based ones and importantly senior management support.

- One of the objectives of the training programme was to establish an evidence base that might be replicable beyond the geographic location. Because of the limited sample size and range of stakeholders engaged, this research can only point to the desirability to upscale the project. It is however clear that the primary research and literature point towards the benefit of rolling out the training on a wider basis, in order to greater understand and assess the impact.



Next Steps

There is real value in exploring the link between music making and Looked After Children.

All partners are committed to continuing to seek funding to ensure that this research can evolve onto the next stage.

If you are interested in supporting this work please call: 01522 510073 or email: info@soundlincs.org

The full research report, including literature review, methodological approach and limitations plus recommendations can be found at: www.soundlincs.org