

INTRODUCTION

Songbirds Music UK is a community interest company (CIC) delivering high quality specialised music projects in health, disability and community settings for children, young people and families affected by medical conditions, hospitalisation and disability, and delivering training to musicians, music students and healthcare professionals across the Northwest of England. Formerly working under the banner of Lime Music for Health, the core team comprising of Dr Rosalind Hawley and Mark Fisher, Specialist Music for Health Practitioners, and Kate Catling, Programme Manager, have a track record of over 25 years leading projects in the arts and health sector and their work has received national and international recognition in publications, conferences and winning awards in the Building Better Healthcare Awards 2018 (Collaborative Arts Project – Performance Category) and NHS in the North Excellence in Supply Awards 2018 (Patient Experience Category).

In January 2021, Songbirds Music UK commissioned Sound Connections to complete an independent, external evaluation focusing on the development of Music Leaders involved in the Songbirds Music for Health programme. This is a short summary report that consolidates - and celebrates - Music Leaders' experiences as they developed skills in working with children and young people in hospital and related community settings. A full report is available separately.

The evaluation is centred around 'Medical Notes: Music at the Heart of Life 2', a programme funded by the National Foundation for Youth Music from 2018 to 2020, bringing live, interactive music onto the wards at Royal Manchester Children's Hospital. A team of specially trained Music Leaders worked sensitively at the bedside with children, young people, families, and staff, giving everyone a chance to be part of the music.

Sound Connections collected evaluation evidence through telephone interviews with eight Music Leaders and through one Music Leader providing written responses to the same questions.



LISTENING TO THE UNSAID

AN EVALUATION OF MUSICIANS' DEVELOPMENT: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE SONGBIRDS MUSIC FOR HEALTH PROGRAMME AT ROYAL MANCHESTER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL 2018-2020

WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY SOUND CONNECTIONS



THE FINDINGS MUSICIANS' DEVELOPMENT

We asked Music Leaders about how their skills, practice and careers have developed through being involved in the Songbirds Music for Health programme.

We looked first at **musical skills** and found that, overall, it is greater musical flexibility and freedom the Music Leaders developed most. Throughout the interviews there was a sense that the approach required for working in healthcare settings has stretched Music Leaders beyond their original training and has helped them feel freer and more liberated to explore their musicality in new ways. Improvisation, playing by ear, singing, vocalisation, musical sensitivity, and enhanced ensemble skills were all highlighted as important areas of development.

"The first-hand, very practical experience of performing and improvising music on children's wards directly to patients throws you into the deep end musically; developing your skills to improvise, sing and perform as an ensemble very quickly."

We asked also about **creative skills** and, as with musical skills, improvisation was a key creative capacity mentioned repeatedly. Music Leaders describe how improvisation enables them to think *"in the moment"*, respond to individual situations, be flexible, change plans mid-way and adapt. Developing a 'toolkit' of skills to use when making music is seen as an important way of ensuring Music Leaders have access to a variety of options and activities they can use flexibly. Composition and creative movement were also valued by the Music Leaders within their newly acquired toolkit.

"I developed creativity using other ways of playing, using more movement."

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Music Leaders described a range of **social and interpersonal skills** they developed and honed. The reflections in this area were particularly rich and nuanced, and demonstrated the great sensitivity and emotional intelligence required. Common themes were learning how to “*read the room*”, to communicate without talking, to interpret the mood and atmosphere in different spaces, and to be flexible and adaptable. Many Music Leaders talked about how they learnt to communicate non-verbally, in a nuanced, refined way, reading facial expressions and body language. They learnt how to build conversations through music, being mindful of how their presence affects what happens in the room, and how subtle changes affect the way in which patients interpret behaviour and interaction.

“Listening to the unsaid and being able to read situations, being able to walk into a space and read and listen through what is not being said and trying to respond to that through the music.”

Several Music Leaders said that their **ability to communicate** with other musicians and professionals in the field improved. They also found it useful to learn communication techniques like sign language and Makaton, and to develop online communication and public speaking skills.

A core principle of the Songbirds Music for Health programme is **reflective practice**, which was encouraged from the outset through training sessions and support. All Music Leaders were required to fill out evaluation logs after each session as part of a debrief, and they wrote up a case study and completed a final evaluation report at the end of each project. Some also kept reflective diaries. Music Leaders said how important it was to reflect, talk and write about music sessions; they expressed that this gave them the opportunity to process their experiences, to remember the detail of sessions and to compare approaches with others.

“Music for Health has helped me formalise my reflective practice through writing it down and verbally reflecting with colleagues.”

We investigated how being involved with the Songbirds Music for Health programme has helped Music Leaders in **other areas of their working lives**. The evidence clearly demonstrated the wide-reaching ripple effect the programme has had in this respect. As a direct result of Songbirds Music for Health training, mentoring, and the opportunity to develop skills first-hand, Music Leaders have found it easier to get other work, and become established in other healthcare, community and participatory settings. Some have forged new career pathways, for example academic research, setting up their own company and working internationally.

“The projects I’ve led, the performances I’ve been a part of, and the work I’ve created in Music for Health have been vital experiences I’ve used in job applications. I would be in a much weaker position to apply for jobs had I not been a part of Music for Health.”

THE BENEFITS OF MUSIC IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

We also asked Music Leaders to consider if **staff, and hospitalised children and their families** developed greater understanding of the benefits of music in healthcare through taking part in the Songbirds Music for Health programme.

They reflected that key to **staff** developing a greater understanding of the value of music was that the Songbirds Music for Health programme had worked to embed this over time. They said that initially some staff were apprehensive but once Music Leaders demonstrated their sensitivity and staff became more familiar with them, they were welcomed. The Music Leaders shared examples of staff who experienced music sessions first-hand becoming generally more supportive, invested and positive about the benefits of music in healthcare settings.

Equally when Music Leaders worked with **children and families** over a longer period of time, they noticed that they discovered the benefits of music, and would ask them to come back to work with them again. Their understanding was enhanced through directly experiencing how their child benefitted from a music session. Music Leaders reflected that parents and caregivers found it powerful when their children took musical control and ownership, and expressed themselves creatively.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE SONGBIRDS MUSIC FOR HEALTH PROGRAMME

Reflecting on the evaluation findings a number of themes became clear. The themes are summarised here as key principles and ingredients that reflect skills and capacities Music Leaders developed through being involved in the programme; becoming immersed in working in healthcare settings; and receiving mentoring, training and professional development.

1. Advanced **emotional intelligence**, particularly **empathy**.
2. An ability to **improvise freely, compose** and **react in the moment**.
3. Being **sensitive** to the environment, **intuitive** and **flexible**. This includes the ability to ‘read the room’ and adapt to changes in circumstances and situation.
4. Advanced **communication skills** (verbal and non-verbal) that enable connection with children, parents, caregivers, healthcare workers and fellow Music Leaders.
5. A **reflective approach**, and the ability to encourage and support others to be reflective in their practice.
6. A willingness to **think in different ways** and to be **curious**.
7. Being able to **listen deeply**.



Left to right SMUK core team
Dr Rosalind Hawley, Mark Fisher, Kate Catling

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