

# Music Champions

2019-2022



Evaluation Report

# Introduction

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**Two-year early years music project made possible through £95,000 funding from Youth Music with £10,500 cash matched funding from partners. Delivered by The Spark Arts for Children in partnership with Leicester City Council Libraries and Neighbourhood Services & Leicester City Council Early Help Services, Leicestershire Music, De Montfort University, Philharmonia Orchestra, The City Classroom (Leicestershire Cultural Education Partnership) and The Mighty Creatives.**

This report provides an assessment of the outcomes of the 2nd and final year of the Music Champions project. The primary audience for this report is Youth Music and partners.

In year 1 of the project COVID impacted on every aspect of delivery moving from in person to online. We worked in 4 contrasting settings with the musician and Early Years Practitioner (EYP) co-designing and co-delivering explorative music led sessions with children and parents/carers. Numbers were small but the impact on these children and families was huge. The on-line experience created an intimate and relaxed space for families to make music supporting families during this most difficult year. Our evaluation tools indicated an upward trend in child involvement, well-being, and expression in all participating children.

In year 1 the training for the music champions was delivered by the Centre for Research in Early Education (CREC) and each music champion (MC) had the opportunity to gain a level 4 certificate in early childhood music education. On reflection at the end of year 1, we felt that a bespoke training programme to meet the needs of the MCs and the project would be more suitable and place fewer demands on the MCs. We therefore devised a training programme more closely relevant to the needs of the project.

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# Executive Summary

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We have developed a strong partnership over the last two years. It was not a straightforward journey with Covid restrictions moving most of the programme online in year 1 and making it much harder to build relationships. However, at the end of two years we have created an effective model based on two key principles:

**Equal partnership between musician and early years practitioner.  
Child led musical play has the most impact on the child.**

We have recruited and trained high quality freelance musicians to be music champions. These musicians are now able to work effectively with early years children in the region. Three musicians from year 2 were employed by The Spark to deliver a Children In Need funded programme over Summer 2022. In the past we struggled to find suitable musicians to work with this age group.

**The project gave 'permission to play'**

Emily's (Philharmonia musician) experience taught us that we need to prepare musicians more fully for the early years age group if it is new to them. Including some shadowing opportunities beforehand in an early years setting/context

Networking – in hindsight there were too many networking events condensed into a short timeframe making them difficult for people to attend them all. Next time we will reduce the number and pair up settings to maximise attendance and impact.

The focus will be on the setting workforce with an 'Annual Gathering' for a wider audience.

There is an important legacy in each setting: early years practitioners are now confident to plan for and engage in music making with children and their families. Developing new skills and confidence to nurture child led music making.

# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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## Project aims:

### Championing Learning through Music

- We wanted to establish new methods of developing musical play in early years settings with musicians and early years practitioners: working together in partnership through an exchange of knowledge, skills and understanding to become Music Champions.
- We wanted to share our learning and information as part of a “community of practice” with Music Champions and other interested people/organisations through an Early Years Music Network for the city and county through network events and an annual symposium.

### CPD/Mentoring for The Music Champions

- Nicola Burke devised and led a bespoke programme for the Music Champions (MCs). This consisted of CPD sessions and mentoring visits. Year 2 began for the MCs with 2 days of CPD in November 2021.
- Introducing the vision:  
**Everyone is musical; children are at the centre of the music making.**
- Followed by two online sessions. The first just for musicians on developing an understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The 2nd online session for all MCs in February 2022 with expert guest speaker: Sophie Fox. Finally, a full day in March with experts: Katie Neilson, Rosie Adediran and Zoë Challenor. Feedback from MCs suggested next time to deliver Feb/March training sessions earlier in the timeline prior to starting sessions with children/families.
- Nicola mentored each MC through visiting each setting, giving feedback and offering a drop-in online session for support.
- Final sharing session/Gathering Event with all partners and music champions was held on 20 June 2022 at De Montfort University. Each pair of champions shared their learning with time to exchange knowledge and share learning. This was informal, supportive, aiming to reflect the reality of challenges and successes in the project with those already involved.

## Spark Festival/Music Performances:

- As part of our project plan, we wanted to introduce core participants to a high-quality professional music performance. The Spark Festival in February usually offers just this opportunity. In February 2022 we invited families to attend 'MMM Aaah Whoosh' at Attenborough Arts Centre. This was particularly appropriate being a music performance developed with families during Tiny Spark early years project (funded by Youth Music in 2019). Daisy Chain and Playdays Academy project participants brought children as did partner Talent 25 inviting families from their early years research project.
- To ensure all children participating in the project were offered this opportunity we commissioned a bespoke music performance: 'Sound Me A Story'. Performed at all 6 project settings attended by 430 children aged 0-4 years.

## Legacy:

- Each setting was allocated £500 for resources enabling musical play to continue after the musician residency ended. This budget enabled each setting to choose the resources that best suited the needs and enthusiasms of their children and families.

*"Families were delighted with their gifts to use at home"*

Kelly Hearn – library setting



## Settings in 2021/22



### **Willowbrook Mead Primary Academy in Thurnby Lodge:**

**Gemma Huxley (Music Hub Musician) working with  
Jessica Hurd and Verena Gordon (Early Years Practitioners)**

- The school is situated in an area of socio-economic challenge with significant numbers of children with English as an additional language (approximately 30% disadvantaged).
- The residency has had a positive impact on the school with a weekly 1-hour session working with two reception classes (60 children) developing a more child-led approach.
- Teachers reported this child-led approach created more space for observation. They were surprised by their children's capacity to learn songs and to engage for longer than expected, including children with additional needs.
- The teachers cascaded learning within the school – inviting the other reception class teacher to observe. This reception teacher went onto deliver similar sessions without the support of a musician.
- The MCs sharing session took place online on 7 March attended by 10 people: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.
- Both classes of children were provided with an individual bag of instruments to take home to continue musical play.



### **Daisy Chain Nursery in Blaby, Leicestershire:**

**Tim Baker (Spark musician)  
Jade Donkin (Early Years Practitioner).**

- A small nursery catering for up to 32 children in a large village 5 miles outside the city. Tim and Jade developed a way of working: planning in the moment. Together they explored ways of creating sound rich environments.
- They delivered weekly 1-hour sessions with 14 children working both indoors and outdoors.
- Sharing session on 29 April attended by 8 participants: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.
- The nursery evaluated impact through a pen-portrait of 2 children and an in-depth description as a case study.
- Tim was invited back to the nursery to contribute to the annual Sports Day event leading musical play sessions. This became a celebration of the project with parents/carers attending promoting the importance of musical play.

*“Children have experienced sincere fun and enjoyment and have made musical memories. These musical memories in the short term are providing for increased experimentation, exploration, and creativity”.*

Amanda (Daisy Chain nursery manager)



**All Saints Catholic Primary Wigston (Music Education Hub):**

**Jenni Goldsworthy (Music Hub Musician)**

**Jo Crane (Early Years Practitioner)**

- County based school situated in an area of socio-economic challenge with many children arriving from Eastern European countries. Weekly 1-hour sessions working with 26 children in reception. Approximately 50% disadvantaged, plus children with English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Teacher Jo found changing to child-led exploration had a positive impact on child engagement and enjoyment. Even very shy and withdrawn children joined in and interacted. Shared with parents/carers through film clips posted through an online portal.
- Sharing session May 26th at school attended by 8 participants: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.
- During the project the school created a permanent outdoor music play area as a legacy.
- By the end of the project musician Jenni reported increased confidence in her practice with early years. In Autumn 2022 she started leading sessions in another city reception class as part of her role with Leicestershire Music.

*“H spent a very long time engaging with, bells, chime bars and keyboard. He very comfortable doing his own thing but also engaged in the mimicking activity with Mrs G using chime bars. He went off a while but then returned and repeated a similar mimicking activity with myself using bells. He didn’t speak throughout but his high level of engagement spoke volumes”.*

All Saints Catholic Primary Class teacher Jo Crane





### **Playdays Academy nursery in Glen Parva:**

**Emily Harris (Philharmonia Orchestra musician)**

**Jade Jackson (Early Years Practitioner)**

- Nursery situated on the outskirts of the city with many children travelling from areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Consisted of weekly 1-hour sessions working with 21 children
- Children had opportunities to play miniature rainbow harps and compose their own music using coloured strings. 4 small 'rainbow harps' were hired for the project. Emily wanted to help make her instrument accessible. Children enjoyed playing with them and had access to them in sessions with Emily and between sessions when Emily wasn't there. No damage was caused to the hired harps – the children took care.
- At the start of the residency Emily found this age group to be challenging and did not know what to expect Her experience as a classically trained musician equipped her with the skills to lead prescriptive musical experiences. At beginning of the project, she struggled with the child-led approach and found it very challenging to be responsive to children and their musical behaviours.
- Reflective practice and continuous professional dialogue/supportive conversations between champions/Spark/Philharmonia led to a seismic shift in Emily's perspective, understanding and practice, a hugely successful outcome.
- Sharing session 5 May with 7 participants: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.



### **Thurnby Lodge Children's Centre:**

**Leicester City Council Early Help.**

**Ashley Phillipson (Spark musician)**

**Louise Burton (Early Years Practitioner)**

- Centre situated in Thurnby Lodge estate in an area of socio-economic challenge with a growing population of children with English as an additional language.
- Ashley and Louise worked with 25 families as part of 'Stay and Play' drop-in sessions with babies, toddlers, and intergenerational families. Exploring world instruments such as singing bowls, a gong, rain shakers, a didgeridoo, harmonicas, guitars, and mouth harps.
- Ashley was keen to develop new songs with the families including traditional, well-known tunes with a cultural twist – using world instruments and new melodies. Ashley also used aromatherapy to create a peaceful environment and focused on making everything playful.

- The environment was set up with music in mind. Free flow, musical corners and spaces with adults modelling use of the instruments and following the child's lead in exploratory play.
- Sharing Session Monday 9 May at Thurnby Lodge Children's Centre with 15 participants: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.

*"We see the benefits of this approach for our families"*

Children's Centre Team manager

*"Being part of the project has inspired me not just with work but also with my grandchildren too."*

Louise Burton Early Years Practitioner



### **Hamilton/Highfields Libraries.**

**Iryna Upham (Spark musician)**

**Kelly Hearn (Early Years Practitioner)**

- Both libraries are situated in the city and serve inner and outer city estates in areas of socio-economic challenge with significant numbers of 2-year-olds in receipt of free nursery education. The libraries offer 'Toddler Time' sessions for children 0-5 years which are well attended by local families. The residency consisted of 6 weeks of 2 hour sessions in Hamilton followed by 6 weeks in Highfields Library working with 20 children.
- Challenges including parents/carers not participating – seeing the time as time to talk and make friends. Also 6 weeks was not enough in each setting. It took time to engage families whose cultural background forbids participation in music making.
- Kelly developed confidence to lead musical play using her ukulele.
- Child led approach was a learning experience for Iryna.
- Sharing session 11th May attended by 6 participants: a mixture of early years practitioners and musicians.
- Toddler Time practitioner noted an interest in using everyday household items to make music *"just like I did with my children"*. So legacy resources in both libraries for Toddler Time sessions included metal pots and pans.

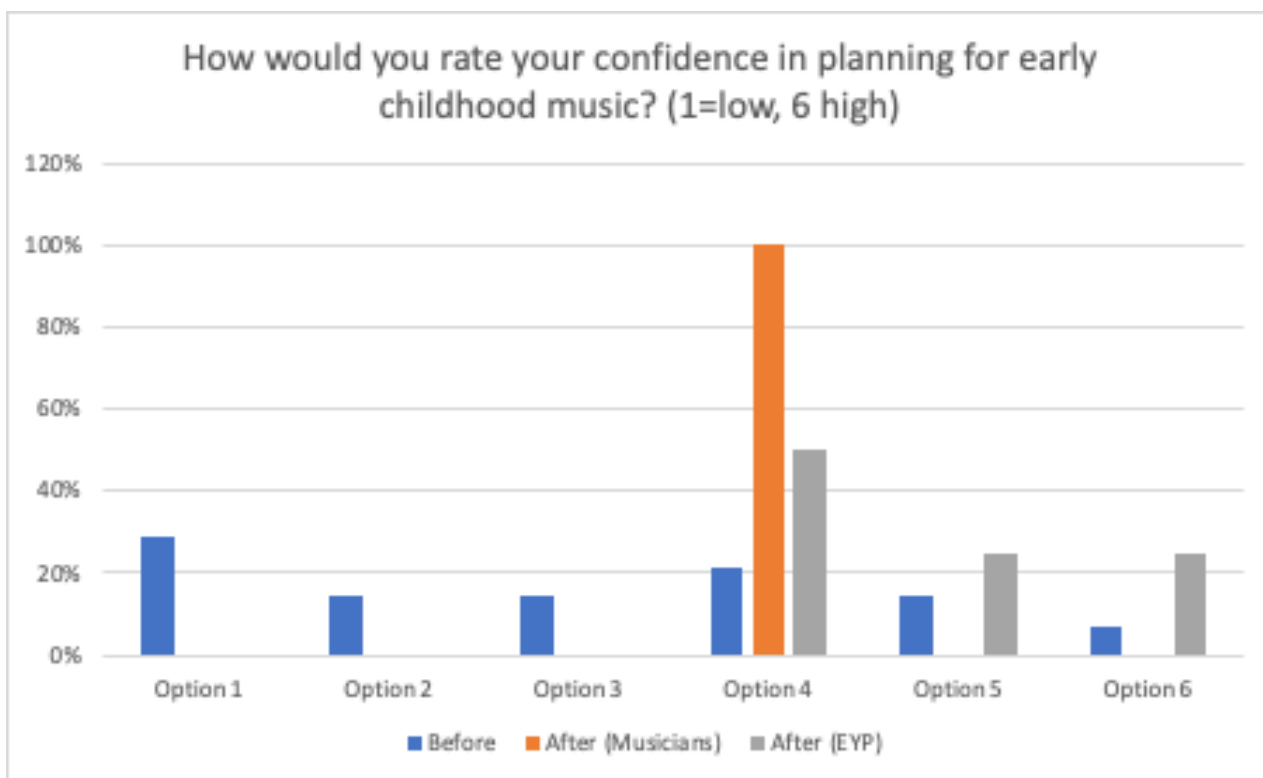
# Measuring Impact 2021-2022

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<b>Outcomes</b>
1. Young children's communication skills are increased.
2. Music Champions improve skill and confidence in using music with early years
3. Music making programmes are improved in settings
4. Learning and information sharing is enhanced

<b>Indicators</b>
1. Children's speech, pre-language skills & well-being
2. MCs complete bespoke training & report improved skills & confidence
3. Music making programmes in 6 settings
4. Attendance and participation in networking events

<b>Assessment</b>
1. 127 children show measurable benefit to speech, pre-language skills & well-being.
2. Practice improved as evidenced by feedback & observation
3. Provision improved evidenced by manager & parent/carer feedback.
4. 56 people attended 6 sharing events plus internal 'gathering' for MCs & partners.



**Positive feedback from setting staff.** All early year’s practitioner champions agreed their music provision has improved due to involvement in the project.

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*“In the longer term we anticipate that the impact of this opportunity will resonate with children, colleagues, and our curriculum. The organisation and consequently our colleagues have secured improved practices in terms of musical development. We have woven the need for a sound rich environment into our policy and practice.”*

Amanda (Daisy Chain nursery manager)

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*“Stay and Play environments now set up to facilitate music play/provision.”*

Louise Burton Early Years Practitioner Thurnby Lodge

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*“Parents were interacting and engaged more with each other than as they would at the ‘usual’ stay and plays, I believe because there was a mutual enjoyment of the sounds they were experiencing during the session. Colleagues appeared more relaxed during the sessions.”*  
Louise Burton Early Years Practitioner Thurnby Lodge



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*“A child that did not seem to be engaged in the project ended up going home to tell their parents all about the harps! Without parent feedback you would not realise the impact the project had onto some individuals”.*  
Musician Emily at Playdays nursery

## Questions for the future

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- How can we involve parents/carers and share more learning with parents/carers? Suggestion from Willowbrook Primary about parent/carer workshops taking place after school drop off.
- Would it be helpful to create a toolkit for musicians focused on key appropriate approaches to EY music making?
- How can we advocate for the importance of this work? We have already been asked to contribute to City Council events such as annual Summer Playdays.
- How can we advocate for local early years practitioner training to include music?
- How to reach more practitioners in the future: sharing learning more widely?





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