

SING UP ‘BEYOND THE MAINSTREAM’

Short Report of Consultancy

March – July 2008

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1. Background and Context

This report is a shortened version of the main report of the 'Beyond the Mainstream' consultancy. It is written by the consultants, Rob Hunter, an independent community and youth work consultant, and Phil Mullen, a community musician. In essence the brief of the consultancy was to

- Scope singing activity with the 4–11 age group beyond mainstream primary schools
- Make recommendations for its development within Sing Up, with particular attention to workforce development.

2. 'Beyond the Mainstream'

There are just under 500,000 of the 4.6million primary age children in England who are not attending mainstream maintained schools. The main sub-groupings of this 500,000 are:

- 50,000 primary age children in special schools (including 5,000 in non-maintained special schools)
- 1130 in pupil referral units or the equivalent
- 7,000 traveller children not registered at any primary school
- 53,000 who require education outside school because of illness or injury
- 100,000+ in independent schools
- 50–100,000 children who are home-schooled (no government figures on home-schooling)
- 'There are still 200,000 unaccounted for' (Cambridge Primary Review).

There are also many young people who are registered with primary schools but often experiencing disrupted attendance and so less likely to engage in school-related singing activity. This includes:

- 24,000 looked after children
- 205,000 young people who are regularly truanting (5.21% in Autumn 2005)

Some claim that, in addition, a percentage of young people who attend school are 'unengaged' and similarly unlikely to engage with singing in some schools.

'Beyond the mainstream' came to mean, in this consultancy, not only those in schools other than mainstream maintained primaries, but also those young people who might be better engaged in singing via informal and community-based routes.

3. Activity

The consultants contacted by visit or phone: Youth Music and The Sage Gateshead staff including all YMAZs; e-mailed and in several cases visited or spoke with Sing Up Area Leaders; contacted the gatekeepers of several national networks in either the community music, voluntary and community or special schools sector; and spoke with or visited staff in more than 50 other organisations.

The consultancy was not asked to scope singing in extended schools or supplementary schools, due to Sing Up's existing relationship with ContinYou. There is also substantially more work to be done in scoping SEN singing activity.

4. Main findings and issues arising

4.1 Policy

In recognising the importance of 'beyond the mainstream' within its first year of operation, Sing Up has taken an important step towards inclusion. Speaking more generally of music, the Music Manifesto Report No.2, however, highlights the challenges.

'We know that music has a particularly important role to play in the lives of vulnerable and at risk children, and those with special needs. However, organisations working with these children have raised concerns that they are particularly poorly served by existing music provision. There is little research on the state of that provision or on how children's needs might best be met. This inevitably limits the objective for universality in music education.'

The Youth Cultural Offer uses phrases such as 'in and out of school', 'a universal offer with careful targeting of those currently missing out', 'prevent cultural apartheid', 'youth organisations and other organisations from the voluntary and community sector' which clearly support the development of singing 'beyond the mainstream.'

The organisational infrastructure of non-school provision for 4-11 year olds is fragmented. It falls between the spotlights on Early Years provision and that on Integrated Youth Support for 13-19 year olds both of which have recently been prioritised in terms of policy and funding. The Children's Fund money which had funded much work with 4-11s is, while being maintained, being pooled into the funding of Local Area Agreements and at risk in terms of higher local priorities.

Skills Active estimates there is a workforce of 132,000 employed in the Playwork sector across the UK. This covers: adventure playgrounds; school and community play centres; holiday playschemes; afterschool clubs; mobile play projects; specialist play projects. This does not include the care workforce or the army of volunteers involved in community-based work. Most are in small, independent organisations.

4.2 Challenges of working 'beyond the mainstream'

Young people 'beyond the mainstream' often lead turbulent lives. Whether this is caused by the disrupted placements of many looked after children or the stresses on families in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage, this often results in unstable attendance in groups and frequent challenging behaviour.

4.3 Relationships at the centre of everything

All workers interviewed stressed the importance of building respectful and trusting relationships as the bedrock of successful practice. This sometimes took time. It always required a good level of emotional literacy in the worker as well as reliability and self-management.

Actively involving young people in the planning, co-leading, monitoring and evaluation of singing activity was also a pronounced feature of successful work.

4.4 Singing

Singing was widely interpreted to include all things 'voice', including rap, beatbox, chants, body percussion. In some projects singing was included in cross arts approaches. Children beyond the mainstream don't have a single cultural or style identity and like music from different styles or eras. Also those organisations who are successful work in a range of styles.

Much singing 'above the radar' was largely young people singing in choirs, often linked in part to schools. Singing 'below the radar' was by definition difficult to detect. Practitioners felt there was scope for developing informal voice work: games, exercises, rounds, kazoos, 'transition singing', song-writing, use of music tech to give quick feedback. This would be valuable in itself and might also lead to more structured sessions, choirs, intergroup sharing etc. There was some of this latter activity in YMAZs but no systematic targeting of singing with the 'beyond the mainstream' target and age group.

There was some evidence that singing's image was of choirs and that this was seen as elitist, particularly that kind of choir available to young people as a voluntary out-of-school activity. It was felt that adults blockages about singing were sometimes projected on to young people. Among the reactions we received were: 'It's not for our kids', 'Like with reading, group singing is simply not in the culture they grow up with so it's simply not on their agenda', 'Singing's nice but it doesn't have anything to offer to what I'm trying to do with my kids', 'I can't sing so I don't like it am not going to risk embarrassment with my young people'. 'I wouldn't mind trying it but I wouldn't know where to start' suggested more specific ways forward.

4.5 Values and purposes

Practitioners currently using singing in informal settings as well as advocates elsewhere in the system suggested that singing as individuals and in groups was underpinned by the following values and purposes:

- Bringing fun
- Enabling creative expression
- Contributing to personal development
- Facilitating emotional expression
- Contributing to social development
- Contributing to learning in formal terms
- Building group identity
- Empowering individuals
- Promoting equality, access and cohesion
- Facilitating community action
- Contributing to community development
- Contributing to economic wellbeing
- Contributing to excellence in artistic creation and performance

These are slightly more wide-ranging than those underpinning Sing Up's case for singing in schools. They are worth articulating as they can be used to make links with other practitioners' agendas and change the perception of singing as something which is simply 'nice', to something more significant.

4.6 Passion and system

We were impressed in particular by projects which had a blend of both 'passion' to inspire young people and also other practitioners for singing, and also 'system' i.e. a recognition that to be truly spontaneous, creative, and enable your project to develop, you needed to have an infrastructure of reliability, effective planning, systematic reflective practice and the ability to monitor and evaluate the work in partnership with others including young people.

4.7 Models of practice

The following models of practice were emerging:

Short-term intensive e.g. half-term or holiday projects with looked after children or singing in summer camps.

Medium-term projects of 8–10 weeks often culminating in a performance

Ongoing open-ended activity e.g. Pie Factory Vocal Expressions Saturday workshops, singing in playwork and Children's Fund projects

Interwoven into ongoing activity such as transition singing in junior youth clubs or singing to 'break state' emotionally.

Whole organisation approaches which embed singing into an organisational culture as 'the way we do things around here'. Aspirational at the moment!

4.8 Special Schools

There appear to be a number of individual projects of sometimes very good quality in SEN schools but there is an absence of a regional or national replication strategy for interesting practice.

With the demise of the National Music and Disability Service (NMDIS) it is unclear where up-to-date information nationally is held.

While some singing activity in special schools will be very similar to that in mainstream primary schools, sensitivity to the specifics of the context are likely to be crucial: for example, to the particular needs of children without voice (for physical or emotional reasons); to the particular behaviours of some children with conduct disorders.

So far we have not identified voice/singing work with young people of primary age with mental health problems.

Some Sing Up Area Leaders and Music Services (e.g. Hertfordshire) are proactive in their work in special schools, others seem not to be. Youth Music funds a project with all Bedfordshire special schools and some YMAZs have interesting work but the degree of focus on singing/voice is unclear.

5. Proposals for development

The consultancy has made recommendations to Sing Up about the use of the identified development fund. Plans are in hand to solicit bids in the autumn for implementation in January.

We have identified the need for Sing Up Development Workers to complement the work of the Area Leader/Vocalise teams where possible. (See Appendix B)

6. Strategic and organisational issues

The main report identifies the need for

- Developmental projects on method and repertoire within the different sub-contexts of 'beyond the mainstream' activity e.g. looked after children, special schools, community-based prevention programmes;
- Projects to be effectively evaluated and the learning from the experience of these projects to be celebrated and systematically disseminated;
- Attention to be paid to sustaining the work through partnership work with multiplier organisations such as local authorities and national voluntary organisations;
- Substantial attention to be given to workforce development issues.

A discussion is started in the main report about the evaluation of the programme as a whole with recognition that engaging with the relevant networks and building capacity among local singing animateurs and projects will take time in such a fragmented landscape.

Methods of project evaluation are discussed and links made to Creative Partnerships' proposal in the Youth Cultural Offer for 'intelligent, formative evaluation.'

7. Sing Up Workforce Development 'beyond the mainstream'

7.1 Three sectors in the workforce

The main report identifies three sectors of the workforce:

- The identification and training of singing animateurs able and willing to work 'beyond the mainstream'

- Support and development for those in the play work and care sectors who are enthusiastic for singing and wish to incorporate singing approaches into their day-to-day practice
- Support and development for teachers of singing in schools who wish to extend their practice 'beyond the mainstream'.

7.2 The importance of context

Training and development activity 'beyond the mainstream' is very context-bound. Practitioners will need to be helped to acknowledge differences as a result of:

- The nature of the engagement with the young people: unlike school, in most settings their engagement will be voluntary; even more than in school, an holistic perspective on their lives in community and different cultural backgrounds will be essential;
- The content: a greater emphasis on young people's choice and cultural interests may be more important than in some schools;
- Setting: activity will take place in different and multifaceted settings as opposed to homogeneous school classrooms;
- Workforce: the strengths, skills and development needs of the practitioners 'beyond the mainstream' will be diverse;
- Organisational setting: the work will need sensitivity to a variety of organisational contexts often very different from schools.

7.3 Review of elements of the Sing Up 'Beyond the Mainstream' Workforce Development Strategy

The report uses the McKinsey 7S Framework to review what considerations will be necessary in developing a Sing Up 'Beyond the Mainstream' workforce development strategy. Outcomes of this review are reflected in this report's recommendations (see Section 9).

7.4 Approaches to training

The report explores different approaches that will be needed. These include

- Raising Awareness: sessions to generate interest among groups who will not have considered using singing in their work before or to catalyse those already working developmentally with young people by adding to their repertoire of simple singing approaches.
- Getting started: one model being tested is that of a singing animateur, having raised awareness and got buy-in, then developing a mix of off-the-job training and co-working/coaching over a period of about 8 sessions. After this time the singing animateur, having also built a support group between staff of participating projects, withdraws and offers light-touch training, repertoire extension and support to keep the plates spinning.

At the 'top end' we recommend the development of a 20 day mix of off-the-job training and supervised practice for key singing animateurs who will be the experts leading Raising Awareness and Getting Started programmes. This

programme may be modular and would be complemented by specialist modules on e.g. singing with looked after children, or with young people with autism.

7.5 The management of workforce development beyond the mainstream

The report makes recommendations on the importance of effective supervision for singing amateurs.

The report discusses the importance of building on the emerging Area Leader / Vocal Force structure. However, we recognise that many Area Leaders will not have the capacity, because of the size of their areas or because of their professional experience to date, to play the strong part needed to deliver on a 'beyond the mainstream' strategy. We suggest that in the short term, the direction of this strategy is retained nationally. However, we consider it essential that the strategy is overseen by an organisational group consisting of the Sing Up Partners, co-opting organisations such as Music Leader where necessary. Representatives of employers of the 'beyond the mainstream' workforce might with benefit be invited to join the group on occasions. There should also be strong links with the Music manifesto Partnership and Advocacy Group.

8. Implications for the Sing Up web-site

8.1 Placing 'beyond the mainstream' resources on the website

We see the Sing Up website as central to workforce development. The main report has three Appendices in particular which might with appropriate modifications be placed on the website:

Appendix A 'Sing Up and the landscape of local organisations: a briefing' designed to help singing amateurs and Area Leaders understand the complex web of local structures on their patch.

Appendix C 'Case Studies' of interesting practice with different groupings 'beyond the mainstream', designed to raise awareness and enable those interested to make contact with others' experience.

Appendix D Methods and Repertoire. This resource is divided into the following sections:

Section 1 With the group

Section 2 Good practice between the partners

Section 3 Repertoire

We also recommend that the website include, as the project develops, DVDs of practice, examples of 'evidence of impact' etc.

8.2 Making the website inclusive of ‘beyond the mainstream’ activity

Understandably the website’s language currently reflects the dominant users: school-based staff. The report recommends how this might be made more inclusive of the non-school workforce and also how Sing Up magazine might be similarly made more inclusive.

9. Recommendations

We sum up here our main recommendations, appreciating that many will already be under consideration. (Numbers in brackets refer to sections in the Main Report)

- 9.1 That the Beyond the Mainstream should fund projects as recommended in a separate document in May 2008
- 9.2 That Sing Up consider the post of BTM Development Worker within the context of Area Leader and Vocal Force Facilitator (see Appendix B)
- 9.3 That when soliciting bids from the proposed projects and in any further programmes, Sing Up should bear in mind the following criteria:
 - Commitment to suggested programme values as outlined in Section 5.5 of this report
 - Capacity and capability to put relationships and passion for singing at the heart of their planned programme
 - Commitment to an action research approach, to reflective practice, rigorous evaluation and reporting along lines to be agreed
 - A design which not only ‘does the work’ but contributes to the development of other staff in the organisation and to organisation development
 - Awareness of other sustainability implications
 - Commitment to sharing practice with other organisations locally, regionally and nationally.
 - Commitment to contributing to a DVD of interesting practice.
- 9.4 That the following workforce development recommendations be pursued
 - a. The Appendix D Methods and Repertoire be made available on the website
 - b. That Appendix C Case Studies should, after decisions about criteria for inclusion, be edited and placed on the website
 - c. a 20day course for singing animateurs working on singing with primary age children beyond the mainstream be piloted and taken forward thereafter as appropriate. Similarly a programme of specialist one day courses (7.3)
 - d. Area Leader targets to be amended to encourage the inclusion of BTM activity in their programmes (7.2)
 - e. Area Leaders be encouraged to develop local BTM strategies and undertake a Raising Awareness/Getting Started project with one part of the BTM workforce in the period up to July 31st 2009. (7.3)
 - f. A co-ordinated strategy nationally is developed in the light of 4c above to develop contact with national networks e.g. National Centre for Excellence in

Residential Child Care, regional Playwork Networks, National Association of Hospital Play Therapists, local and regional branches of the University of the First Age, to promote the role of singing in their prime activity(7.3). This should be accompanied by a co-ordinated strategy to influence the curriculum of initial training for BTM workforce job sets e.g. playwork, care work, junior youth work

- g. 'Appendix A: Sing Up and the landscape of local organisations: a briefing' be modified as appropriate and circulated to all Area Leaders to help in this activity.
- h. Area Leaders be encouraged and helped to identify local networks of the 'beyond the mainstream' workforce so that Sing Up training activity can be effectively publicised
- i. The management of the BTM workforce development strand be aligned with other strands of the Sing Up workforce development strategy while maintaining a separate identity in the short term in order for the specific work to gain impetus (7.2)
- j. That Sing Up consider convening an Advisory Group including employers in the BTM arena in order to ensure co-ordination of activity(7.2)
- k. That Sing Up liaise with other singing initiatives such as the Arts Council Looked After Children strategy, to offer a workforce development contribution.

9.5 That changes are made to the Sing Up website to enable it to play a full part in sustaining and developing BTM activity:

- a. Ensuring the BTM workforce has full access to the site (8.1)
- b. Broadening the base of Sing Up magazine and the site's resources as suggested in 8.2 and 8.4 above
- c. Addressing issues of inclusion through modifications to terminology (8.3)
- d. Facilitating each Area Leader having a page on the Sing Up site (8.5)

9.6 That the emerging BTM programme be allocated the necessary resource to achieve its ends. This would include:

- a. The programme of development projects already identified
- b. Workforce development initiatives
- c. Website modifications.

We also recommend that sufficient resource is allocated to the overall management of the programme to see that it is managed, not merely administered. This will include in particular

- Managing the process of setting up the development projects
- Monitoring progress, supporting reflective practice and formative evaluation
- Contributing to the management of the BTM workforce development strand
- Overseeing website modifications

- Promoting celebration, cross-fertilisation of interesting practice and the collective learning from the experience of the programme.
- The summative evaluation of the project.

We believe these tasks will be essential to the value potentially added by the 'beyond the mainstream' programme. The current Sing Up staff structure does not have the capacity to deliver these changes successfully, however, and so we propose the allocation of additional resource to this end.