

“ I want to sing ”

Sing Up National Children's Bureau
Looked After Children Programme Evaluation

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SING UP NATIONAL CHILDREN'S BUREAU LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PROGRAMME EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

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Acknowledgments

Evaluating the Sing Up National Children's Bureau (NCB) programme for looked after children has been interesting and often inspiring work. It has been good to talk to musicians, project leaders, staff in children and young people services, foster carers and many others who have supported children's creativity and enjoyment throughout the programme. It was especially good to talk to some of the children and young singing leaders and find out how they felt about singing and music. We are very grateful to all of them for sharing their experience and giving us their time. We also want to say a big thank you to Sing Up and NCB for the opportunity to do this work.

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Introduction

Sing Up is the national singing programme which aims to ensure that all primary school-aged children are able to access high-quality singing activities, whether or not they attend mainstream school. The **Sing Up NCB** looked after children programme of work is part of Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream (BTM). Beyond the Mainstream is a thread which has woven throughout the entire programme since 2008 following a report by Rob Hunter and Phil Mullen (Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream Advisors), which explored singing provision for children who either don't access primary mainstream (children in SEN or PRU settings), and those who do access primary mainstream but may find attendance difficult (looked after children, children with SEN, gypsy traveller children etc). The report found that although there were pockets of excellent work, there was a need for more training and better resources for working with primary school-aged children in these groups.

In 2010 Sing Up BTM wanted to focus on **one** of the many target groups in its remit which is particularly socially disadvantaged (Morgan, 2011; McAuley and Davis, 2009; Cameron et al 2011; Forrester al, 2009), to maximise impact and make a real difference to policy and to our own measurable outcomes. It was early in 2010 that the partnership with the NCB began, and the focus of the Funded Programmes aspect of Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream became **looked after children**.

We felt our decision to focus on looked after children was timely in light of relevant policy, national developments in this area and, significantly, the need for a coherent and joined up approach nationally when looking at access to creativity through singing for this particularly disparate group of children.

Sing Up and the NCB have been working in partnership together for over 2 years now with one clear aim; **to promote the well being of looked after children through singing.**

A looked after child is one who is in the care of a local authority. In 2010, there were 64,000 looked after children in England. Most (40,400), especially those of primary school age, lived with foster carers (DFE, 2010).

Hallam, 2009 and Himonides et al, 2011 summarised the educational, emotional and other benefits derived from participating in music for children and young people in general. A Youth Music evidence review found that the same benefits applied to looked after children and that '... building looked after children's resilience can have a positive impact on their ability to cope with the challenges associated with being in care, and therefore on their life chances' (Dillon, 2010:40).



Sing Up NCB programme and social pedagogy

The principles of social pedagogy formed part of the framework for the evaluation. Social pedagogy is a term that is becoming more familiar in England, but a brief outline may be helpful. At the level of policy, social pedagogy can be seen as addressing social issues by educational means – it has been described as 'education in its broadest sense'. In much of mainland Europe, social pedagogues work across a variety of settings, including foster care support and residential care. The education of social pedagogues prepares them to share many aspects of children's daily lives. In Denmark 25% of the curriculum for social pedagogues consists of creative activities, seen as a medium for relating to children and promoting creativity. Social pedagogues see the child as a whole person, a thinking, feeling, physical, creative and social being and bring themselves, 'head, hands and heart', to their relationships with children, they are not distant professionals. Their aim is to support children's overall development by active encouragement and building trust, seeing the children as human beings of equal value to themselves and worthy of respect. They present children with new possibilities and offer activities that are challenging, but not too challenging. As professionals, social pedagogues are encouraged to reflect on practice individually and with colleagues as the basis for moving the work forward. In doing so, they resort to both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge. There is a strong emphasis on team work and cooperation with the other professionals and members of the community (Petrie et al 2006; Petrie, 2010; Petrie, forthcoming, 2011). It is important to note that the principles of social pedagogy sit well with the principles of vocal leadership, set out in the Young Leaders' 'How to Guide' (Sing Up, The Sage Gateshead, undated).

In 2008, the Arts Council England and Creative Partnerships funded Helen Chambers to examine how creativity could be embedded in the lives of looked after children and how this related to social pedagogy as described by Petrie et al, 2006 (Chambers, 2008). The project led to the development of the Artist Pedagogue Learning Framework, funded by Creativity, Culture and Education (Chambers and Petrie, 2009). The Framework also drew on a study for Arts Council England of the part played by the visual and performing arts in the education and practice of Danish social pedagogues (Petrie and Chambers, 2010).

Each of the projects funded was requested to develop the work on a social pedagogic basis. Pat Petrie gave presentations to project leaders on the principles of social pedagogy and they were provided with copies of the Artist Pedagogue Learning Framework (Chambers and Petrie, 2009). Guides to reflection were also prepared and shared with the project teams who were encouraged to use these after sessions and, in the case of the project leaders, at agreed points in the project's history.



Aims and methods

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- ◆ Provide evidence on the delivery of singing activities to looked after children and young people
- ◆ Capture the learning generated by the project with regard to:
 - Practice
 - Workforce development
 - Partnerships
 - Sustainability
- ◆ Conduct the work in such a way that it co-ordinated with other Sing Up evaluations
- ◆ Evaluate the projects with regard to the principles of social pedagogy.

The evaluation was based on data obtained from the following:

- ◆ Observation of at least one singing session at each project. Project leaders were requested to nominate a session which was most representative of their work for this purpose
- ◆ Attendance at 10 project meetings, including a steering group, a meeting for foster carers, staff reflective meetings and a staff training session
- ◆ Attendance at one performance and at a training day for all project leaders and their local authority partners
- ◆ 102 face-to-face and telephone interviews, plus other conversations with a wide range of people including project leaders, singing leaders, local authority partners, foster carers, children and young singing leaders. In the case of children, there were informal conversations and occasionally exercises to elicit their views such as the use of a 'graffiti wall'. In selecting children to consult much depended on local circumstances such as if children had transport waiting at the end of a session.
- ◆ Perusal of reflective writing from 130 singing leaders and young leaders.
- ◆ Informal discussions with leaders and partners at the Sing Up NCB Gatherings in Birmingham in April 2010 and February 2011, and the Sing Up National Gathering held in Gateshead in November 2010.

Visits and interviews were carried out in an informal manner and the researchers were sometimes able to participate in sessions. Interview schedules were devised but, because of the disparate nature of the projects, these were used mainly as topic guides for conversations with project leaders, singing leaders, foster carers and children. The topics covered were children and carers' involvement in the project, issues to do with young leaders, what had gone well, workforce development, legacy and sustainability, and any challenges. The musical intentions of the project and singing leaders were also discussed as were aspects relating to the principles of social pedagogy.

The data were analysed qualitatively with the intention of identifying the main learning points arising from each project, including those appertaining to working in a social pedagogic framework. On this basis, a case study of some 8-10 pages was prepared for each project. These were shared with the relevant project leader for comments. A summary describing each project was also shared and agreed with the leaders. The leaders made some factual amendments but had no major problems with the case studies or the summaries and agreed to these being used as the basis for this report. The findings of the case studies were then collated and analysed overall in terms of (i) what had been learned that could be useful for music agencies and local authorities wishing to provide singing opportunities for looked after children and (ii) an evaluation of practice in terms of the principles of social pedagogy.



It was amazing - the young people were enthralled.

Ethical considerations

The Institute of Education Ethics committee read and commented on the proposal before the work began. The Association of Directors of Children's Services indicated that the approval of their research group was not needed because for all the projects involved, children's services were a named partner and so had direct influence over the project. The researchers had enhanced CRB checks.

Information leaflets about the evaluation, introducing the two researchers were produced with consent forms. There was a version of each for adults and one for children. The information leaflets explained the purposes of the evaluation, issues of confidentiality and the option for individuals to refuse or withdraw consent to participation in the evaluation at any time.

Participants were assured that any information given to the research team would not be made available to anyone outside the research team, except with their consent. Similarly individuals would not be identified, except with their consent, in any publication arising from the evaluation.

Data about individuals were stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act. At the end of a project, non-essential data will be destroyed; information which is kept will not be kept for longer than necessary for completion of work related to the project (including dissemination and follow-up work). Anonymous printouts can be recycled, but anything with identifying details will be shredded.

The report

The report is based on case studies of the seven projects, with examples anonymised where appropriate – that is where it is thought that material is sensitive and that confidentiality should be maintained. Quotations have been chosen to illustrate the points made more generally in interviews and conversations, and to support what was observed during visits. All names of children and young people are pseudonyms.

Part One of the report gives an overview of the context for the projects, outlines each project, describes their partnerships and goes on to outline the involvement of children, young people and foster carers in the projects.

Part Two is about leadership and learning. First it describes workforce development opportunities, and accreditations. Next it examines the knowledge produced by the project and singing leaders themselves, about music and singing with looked after children, and about working within a social pedagogic framework.

This is followed by a discussion of the impact of the programme on participating agencies and on individuals and organisations external to the agencies. The section ends by describing the programme's legacy and the sustainability of the work.

The main learning points arising from the programme overall are then presented in summary form in Part Four (page 43).

PART ONE:

Sing Up NCB Looked After Children Project

The context

The local context for the Sing Up NCB projects were wide ranging as to geographical location, size of areas covered and population density. The projects were located in Bristol, Dudley, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, an area of the North-East of England covering Gateshead, Durham, South Tyneside and Newcastle and Surrey. Some of the participating organisations covered large areas: CoMusica in the North East, for example, covered a large area and the project included four local authority areas; in Lincolnshire, SoundLINC worked across the second largest county in England, with some very remote and inaccessible areas; the Myrtle Theatre Company work was based in Bristol, geographically speaking a much smaller area. Accordingly, some projects worked mainly with dense urban populations while others served children scattered across large rural areas. The local authorities' partners also all varied widely as to size, structures and the number of looked after children living within their boundaries.

The lead agencies

The projects were led by well-established music organisations and one theatre company. An exception was Surrey, where the project was led by the local authority in partnership with Rhythmix, a music organisation. Projects had mostly already worked with looked after children, but not always in a focused way or with primary school children.



COMUSICA WITH GATESHEAD, NEWCASTLE, DURHAM AND SOUTH TYNESIDE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES (CYPS)

CoMusica is the North East's Youth Music Action Zone directed and delivered by The Sage Gateshead through its Community Programme in partnership with local authorities, schools, and other regional community and youth organisations.

For Sing Up, CoMusica worked with looked after children in partnership with four local authorities. In each authority there were weekly after school singing sessions for two terms, involving 67 children overall. Additionally, in one authority, there was also a week of summer activities and some half term events.

The main aim was to introduce music and singing in all forms. First simple games and rounds are introduced, then part songs, then gradually encouraging the creation of new music, first by fitting new words to known songs, then by working on new music. The singing leaders said they worked with rhythm and songs from all over the world, including African circle games with a strong rhythmic pulse 'and the children love it'. They also introduced song writing, based on children finding rhyming words.

Some children from the project took part in a Sing Up celebration at The Sage Gateshead, with children from primary schools from across the region.

FOREST OF DEAN MUSIC MAKERS AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE CYPS, MUSIC POOL AND HEREFORDSHIRE CYPS

Forest of Dean Music Makers was established in 2001 in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire to support children and young people in creating their own music. In Gloucestershire, the project was managed by Forest of Dean Music Makers and in Herefordshire by Music Pool, a community music charity working in Herefordshire and its borders since 1988, previously known as Hereford Arts in Action Ltd.

The main aim of the project was to increase high quality singing opportunities for looked after children in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. This was to include singing between children and their foster carers. It also aimed to make music a 'normal' part of the lives of looked after children and young people.

In Gloucestershire a range of activities were offered such as song writing sessions, after school and holiday singing sessions, and involvement in the Gloucestershire Summer School.

In Herefordshire, nine summer holiday sessions for family groups were offered. Sessions also took place in the October half term and in December 2010, with a singing celebration evening at the end of November 2010. A recording session took place in November 2010 at the Royal National College of the Blind. Twelve children attended and a CD was produced with seven tracks of the children singing and a drum solo from one of the children.

MYRTLE THEATRE COMPANY WITH BRISTOL CYPS

In Bristol, Myrtle Theatre Company and its associated practitioners are highly experienced in youth theatre with looked after children and other vulnerable groups. The company uses theatre to explore social concerns and the factors involved in health and well-being. Over the last three years, their practice has been increasingly informed by the principles of social pedagogy, which they also brought to the Sing Up NCB looked after children project. A valued partner in the project was Bristol ECLAS, (Education of Children Looked After Service). Two members of ECLAS staff were influential in recruiting children and supporting any procedures seen as necessary for their participation. They also joined in the singing.

The theatre company recruited a composer, a writer, singers, a designer and a choreographer to work with 25 children and young people, six foster carers and three young leaders. The children and adults were actively involved in composing the story, lyrics and music for a 22 minute opera, which they performed in Bristol's Colston Hall.

PIE FACTORY WITH KENT COUNTY COUNCIL CYPS

Pie Factory Music based in Ramsgate, East Kent is a well established music organisation working with young people in the area as a Youth Music Action Zone. The project aimed to:

- ◆ Introduce personalised singing opportunities for looked after children and young people in the delivery area
- ◆ Reduce the barriers to participating in singing workshops for looked after children and young people
- ◆ Help looked after children and young people to use singing as a way of expressing themselves and to support their overall development
- ◆ Pie Factory delivered one to one and small group sessions, song writing and recording sessions and more specialised sessions for disabled children, with key workers or carers present. Sessions included singing, song writing, recording, introducing children to musical instruments - such as the guitar, keyboard, percussion instruments - lyric writing, drumming and rapping. Rhythmic singing and chanting and familiar songs were found to be useful ways of introducing singing. Rapping activities were particularly popular with the boys.

SOUND IT OUT WITH DUDLEY CYPS - VOICE BOX

Sound It Out has been delivering music activities in the West Midlands since 1992. Voice Box was the name of the Sing Up NCB project for looked after children, undertaken in the Dudley area. The overall aim of Voice Box was to promote the wellbeing of looked after children through singing.

Twenty weekly sessions, held on Monday evenings (4.30-7 pm), took place in a primary school, from the end of July, throughout the summer and into the autumn of 2010, ending with a performance on November 30th. These sessions involved a core group of about 16 children aged 8-13, about 6 young people as mentors/young singing leaders, 6 musicians and 3 support workers from Dudley CYPS. The sessions included food and news sharing by children and adults for half an hour at the beginning of the session and musical games followed by 3 break-out sessions so that more focused work could take place with smaller groups of children and young people.

A celebration evening took place on November 30th 2010 at Netherton Arts Centre, in order for the children and young people to showcase their work to their carers, families, social workers and other local authority staff. Sixteen children performed on the evening of the performance.

The intention was to extend children's musical awareness



SOUNDLINGS AND LINCOLNSHIRE CYPS - PITCH IN

SoundLINGS is a music development agency working throughout Lincolnshire and the East Midlands. PITCH IN, the strand of SoundLINGS working with looked after children, aimed to engage children and young people in singing and develop specific partnerships with foster carers, placement support workers, social workers, residential workers, and Lincolnshire local authority children's services professionals.

Music and singing activities were offered to looked after children in a number of ways:

- ◆ Family singing sessions for foster carers and their children in stately homes and at summer barbecues throughout Lincolnshire
- ◆ With disabled children and young people in residential units
- ◆ As part of the JUMP project, a partnership between the local authority and two universities in Lincoln which worked with looked after children, aged 9-12 years.

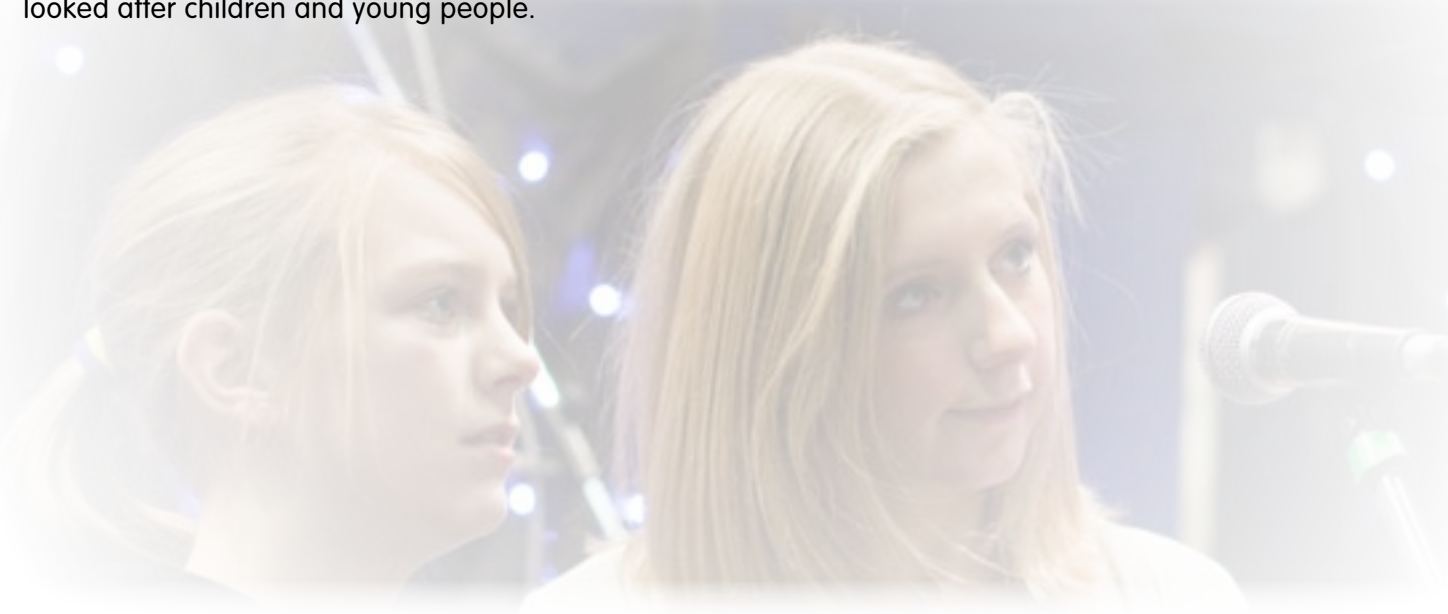
The aim was to offer creativity as a live component of each activity; to broaden horizons by using and including some unfamiliar material in the repertoire, such as songs from other parts of the world, as well as familiar material.

SURREY CYPS WITH RHYTHMIX - YOUNG VOICES

The Surrey CYPS project was run by Surrey County Council, specifically Surrey Arts, the children and young people service CYPS and the youth development service, in partnership with Rhythmix. Rhythmix is a Youth Music Action Zone, staging music workshops for young people across the South East region of England. It was founded in 2000 with the intention of reaching out to young people not currently engaging with opportunities offered by local authority music services.

The main aim of this project was to improve educational outcomes by raising self-esteem, emotional health and wellbeing and improving confidence through singing and vocal activities. The project offered one to one sessions and performances with opportunities to record voices, use instruments, microphones, MP3 and electronic equipment and make a CD. There were singing, rapping, beat-boxing and lyric workshops with performance opportunities for children aged 5-11, including Saturday sessions; small group sessions for disabled children in a foster home and a residential home; training in vocal leadership for young people aged between 12 and 19 at a weekday session and at residential weekends. There was also training and confidence building in singing and vocal work for social workers, foster carers and teachers.

The Oscarz Awards Ceremony was held in November 2010. This event was held for seven years previously but in 2010 was used to showcase the work of the project, and as an awards ceremony specifically for looked after children and young people.



Findings

Partnerships

It was a Sing Up NCB requirement that projects were developed with local authorities as partners. All the projects strove to establish close working partnerships so as to ensure both the success of the project and its legacy and sustainability. Partnerships were most commonly established with local authority children's and young people services (CYPS), including social work teams, residential units, foster care teams and fostering support groups. Other partnerships were made with looked after children's educational services, youth services, youth justice, early years services, children's centres schools and local authority music services. Less frequently links were made with health professionals such as specialist nurses and specialist social care staff, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) staff.

Much of the success of the projects was dependent on the strength of the partnerships formed between the music organisation and their main partners in the local authority. A weak partnership could have a negative impact on the project, while a strong partnership was mutually beneficial. As a project leader from Sound It Out said:

"We have a very good partnership with the local authority – they know the young people and the carers trust them. It wouldn't have been possible without their support."

Factors constraining partnerships

The establishment and consolidation of partnerships was sometimes hampered by a number of constraining factors, including some at national level. Project leaders and local authority staff suggested that there was a general demoralisation of social work staff nationally, arising from recent widely publicised scandals involving child abuse and neglect. One result was an increased emphasis on child protection at the expense of other activities. It was also said that financial problems currently faced by local authorities made for a diminished interest in creativity and the arts.

Some project leaders mentioned that it was more difficult to make links with some services than others. For example, in one area youth services were said to lack a focus on looked after children and young people, for others it was more difficult to link with the virtual school.

Importantly, there were several examples where the strength of the partnership was based more on the commitment of interested individuals than on strong organisational links. Partnerships which were dependent on one person faltered if that person left their post. The need to embed partners' commitment to the project beyond the enthusiasm of individual members of staff was recognised by project leaders. As this a partner commented:

"Partnerships have been a strength but it's based on a few people so it needs to be organisationally endorsed."

(Local authority partner)

A different project leader when commenting on problems in recruiting children remarked that although there had been some improvement in this over time, a key person in children's services, upon whom the project was relying, 'remained elusive'. Without the cooperation of this person it was frustrating and time consuming identifying children to take part and before necessary procedures, especially obtaining the consent of social services, could be undertaken. In another case, there were differences about procedures and practice between the local authority partner and the project following some staff changes in the local authority during the first few months of the project. Strong and trusting partnerships were necessary for the recruitment of children to singing activities, but convincing CYPS staff of its worth was not always easy. A singing leader from the Surrey CYPS project said:

"I have seen the benefits of singing but they (CYPS staff) need to have it explained to them. The take-up depends on the senior worker encouraging people."



Venues

A number of contrasting venues were used regularly by the projects and these included schools (for example, CoMusica, Sound It Out and Pie Factory), foster homes (Surrey CYPS, Pie Factory) arts centres (Forest of Dean Music Makers), a theatre (Myrtle Theatre Company, CoMusica) youth centres, (Music Pool and Surrey CYPS), an outdoor residential education centre (Surrey CYPS), community centres (Pie Factory, Surrey CYPS), residential units (SoundLINGS, Surrey CYPS) and stately homes (SoundLINGS). While some of the projects held all their sessions in the same venue, (Sound It Out, Myrtle Theatre Company) other projects held sessions in a variety of venues across the area (Pie Factory, SoundLINGS and CoMusica).

In some places, the choice of venue was a deliberate strategy integral to the aims and overall ethos of the project. The SoundLINGS project succeeded in its aim of offering an 'integrated service' to looked after children and the adults involved in their care by offering days out to the whole foster family. Foster families were invited to attend a music session at stately homes, such as Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, during the summer months. The families picnicked in the grounds before the music session and could stay to enjoy the venue afterwards. The intention was that foster families could experience interesting and beautiful public spaces and that looked after children could experience a venue outside children's health services and schools, the public spaces with which they were most familiar:

"We are using venues like National Trust houses to bring added value – there are so many benefits. This is based on the belief that if we put children and young people into stimulating environments, they will be creative."

(Project leader)

Similarly, sessions held by Forest of Dean Music Makers were held at the Gloucester Guildhall, an arts venue in the centre of Gloucester. This was chosen for its convenient location but also because it offered looked after children the chance to experience an interesting building where creative activities took place. A CoMusica carer told how her foster child found The Sage Gateshead, which is a spectacular building, exciting in itself quite apart from the singing sessions and that she liked going there.

The above examples should not be taken as a recommendation that singing sessions should only take place in rather grand settings – most of the venues used were not at all grand, but were seen as satisfactory, or better than satisfactory. The examples give an indication of venue options for children whose experience of what is on offer, culturally, may be limited.

Some of the singing leaders reported that there were problems with choosing schools as venues. In one location, schools had been used initially, but reportedly it was hard for the school not to view the sessions as a 'piece of school provision'. A singing leader said that the school management were not proactive in recruiting children because they could not accept that the project was for looked after children only. It was especially difficult to recruit looked after children who were newly arrived at the school. Other leaders believed that it was better to use a 'neutral venue', described as a level playing field for the children, rather than a school. In schools it was thought that there could be a stigma attached to attending something especially for looked after children.

Accessing a venue by car, during rush hour, to drop off and pick up children was a problem, a deterrent to participation even, for some foster carers.

Children's engagement, enjoyment and satisfaction

Benefits for children and young people

As part of the Sing Up NCB national programme, the work with looked after children focused on working with children aged 5 to 11 or 12 years. Young singing leaders from 14-18 were also recruited to many of the projects. Establishing the projects would have been pointless if the children and young people did not benefit: if they did not find their voices and enjoy singing. There were very few examples of children who did not enjoy taking part in the projects, and where they occurred this was put down to their not wishing to attend in the first place:

There were a few issues with one or two children who didn't want to be there. They were there because their siblings were attending and the foster carer couldn't do anything else. But that was sorted out. (Project leader)

However, recruitment was usually based on identifying children who actively wanted to take part or were willing to give singing a try.

Growing confidence in music and singing

Leaders and others gave many examples of how the projects had benefited the children and young people who participated. They gained confidence in music and singing, enjoyed being introduced to new instruments and having opportunities to compose music, write lyrics, and perform in front of an audience. As these singing leaders from Sound It Out commented:

"I've mainly noticed the growth in confidence in the kids because to start with no one wanted to sing out – there was a lot of mumbling going on – so we started with getting them to sing songs they might already know and they might like. We had a few teething problems about the best choice of song. The artists were trying to choose something and there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing but now we're into them creating their own songs and performing to the rest of the group. And now we have some children every week desperate to sing a bit of song by themselves to the rest. So we have a lot of solo singers which is amazing and week by week, people singing out a bit more and performing rather than looking at the floor and pretending they're not there. Now they're more proud of what they're doing.

The whole project is ever so good because some of them are discovering they can write songs and children who don't normally sing are coming out and saying 'I want to sing'. Some of them maybe don't want to sing so it's making them think about playing an instrument and looking at music."

With very few exceptions, the children and young people who gave feedback about the sessions they had taken part in were full of praise for them. The comments, written by the Sound It Out children on a graffiti wall were typical, conveying a sense of achievement and enjoyment:

- ◆ I enjoyed recording and completing a song
- ◆ I like my song what we did today
- ◆ It was good fun
- ◆ Writing the song, playing the drum
- ◆ Happy today – I wrote my own line
- ◆ It was fab
- ◆ It was so cool
- ◆ It was fun because I love the songs
- ◆ It's fun, good to learn to sing. I love Voice Box!
- ◆ It was awesome
- ◆ It was really good and I enjoyed it
- ◆ Today is the best session we had. Glad I came on my birthday
- ◆ I really enjoyed it today and now I am really happy
- ◆ It was good songs. I did not know it but I know it now
- ◆ I really tried my best today.

(Taken from Sound It Out Children's Graffiti Wall)

A few children were either less positive about the sessions or suggested how the session had challenged them:

- ◆ I guess it was alright
- ◆ I never knew producing a song was so hard – phew!
- ◆ It's boring!

The children taking part in projects did not always express themselves at length. The young leaders, however, who worked alongside the adults, were more forthcoming:

"I am now more confident singing in front of people. I've learnt more things – about more types of music. I know more about what people are into." (Young leader, aged 14)

Some discovered previously unknown musical talents and it was hoped that this discovery would have long term effects. Some examples were reported to us:

"A 15 year old at Pie Factory was discovered to be an 'amazing producer' and has been working on producing songs and now an album."



“A girl, aged 8, had tried rapping and then identified that she really liked playing the guitar. Although she was not keen to perform to others as her concentration was sometimes poor, she really concentrated on composing. She really looked forward to the sessions and missed another out-of-school activity to come.”

“I feel confident – I love singing! Singing is my favourite hobby. I liked some songs – now I like all songs! I want to be a pop star”

(SoundLINCS, boy aged 8 years)

It was reported that many of the children continued to sing at home. Foster carers said that children were singing at home, 'you hear them singing the little songs' (CoMusica). A Herefordshire carer said that she and her family were now more involved in music. The children who had been given a guitar, a keyboard and a percussion instrument for Christmas were all singing the 'catchy' songs introduced to them by the project.

“I'm having singing lessons and I'm going to the theatre”

(Girl, age 11, Sound It Out)

A Sound It Out support worker similarly thought that the project was encouraging children to participate in other music activities.

One girl, as a result of participating in Forest of Dean Music Makers sessions during the summer had requested violin lessons.

The active participation of older children and young leaders was seen as encouraging for the younger ones, and when some of the younger children became confident it encouraged their peers:

“They blossomed because they liked the singing and wanted to do it – they showed us their routines and it was a really lovely focus for everyone else and showed the others it was non-threatening and gave peer encouragement”

(Singing leader, Music Pool)

The 'wow' factor, being surprised, delighted and impressed by the music and by the abilities of the musicians was a new experience for many children and young people, reported by singing leaders and others. A 12 year old said 'It's really good. Really good music, it's clever how they put it together.' In Newcastle, a foster carer said that a child's teachers reported he had come to school buzzing about what he had been doing and how good the musicians had been. Usually he had little to say to them about what he had done out of school. The children's musical experiences are further described in the section on The Singing Leaders: Music and Social Pedagogy.



Social and emotional benefits

As well as the musical experience, the children and adults identified other benefits from taking part, similar to those identified by Dillon (2010). These included making friends, an increase in confidence and self-esteem, being introduced to new experiences and learning to co-operate. A member of Pie Factory's partner organisation said that although it would be hard to measure, nevertheless, he thought that changes in the children's behaviour were a good indication of the impact of the project: 'We've seen an increase in confidence, self-esteem, social skills and personal skills'

Similarly, some of the foster carers reported significant changes in the children they looked after. Three foster carers with children attending Pie Factory sessions said:

“We have seen a huge difference in J [foster child] – he's a totally different boy ... he's fully involved”

“You should see the joy on her [foster child] face – she is very quiet and withdrawn – as soon as you put a song book in her hand, she's totally different”

“Their body language says it all! Before they wouldn't stay in the [singing] room, perhaps [they were] a little disruptive, now they are really involved”

Meeting new people and seeing them regularly was a welcome opportunity for many. To give just two examples: two girls, aged ten and twelve years, who hadn't met before joining the Myrtle Theatre Company project, said with great enthusiasm that they had really enjoyed making friends with each other and that they are going to meet outside the project. In a different project, another ten year old said:

“She's [another girl in the group] one of my bestest friends and I met her here – I am going on holiday soon with her in her caravan”

(Girl, aged 10, Sound It Out)

A number of children and adults spoke of children having pride in themselves and in their achievements as a result of the projects.

"The sessions have hugely increased the confidence in some – pride in themselves and higher self-esteem, for example, by making a CD and learning something new."

(Singing leader, Surrey CYPS)

"I feel happy I was able to do it. It made me feel really puffed out singing at the Colston Hall. If I was upset at home I could sing here. At home I couldn't do that."

(Girl, Myrtle Theatre Company)

"Before I didn't want to sing because my heart was hurting. I was really angry but I really wanted to sing. When you sing you can show how you feel. I didn't feel shy anymore about singing at the end."

(Girl, Myrtle Theatre Company)

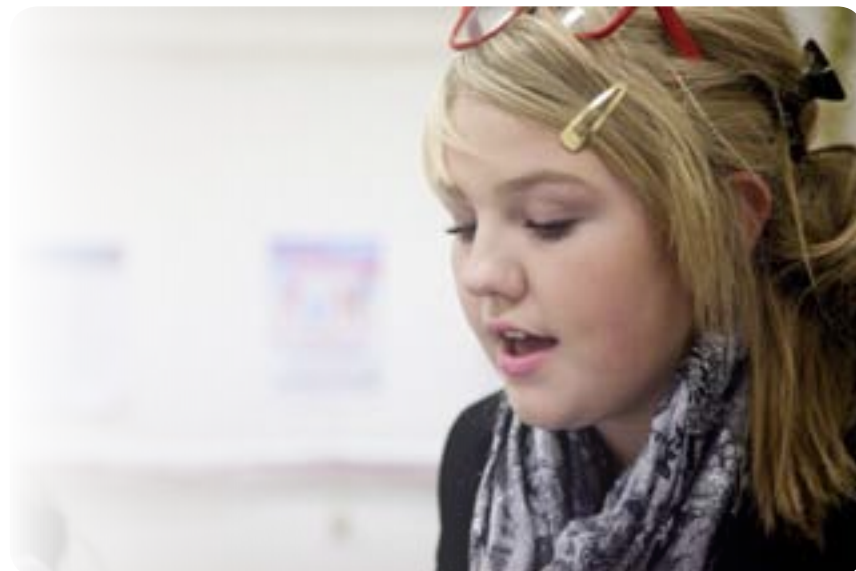
Young leaders

The overall Sing Up programme aimed to build and develop a committed and effective workforce, including young singing leaders, to lead singing in and out of the classroom and the school. The Young Leaders How To Guide states that:

"Through having opportunities for leadership children and young people can become more self aware, gain skills, exercise their power, initiate, and share influences with others. Youth Leadership can enable children and young people to have a positive effect on their own lives and the lives of others. Creativity is a fertile environment for youth leadership and as a result, empowerment flourishes"

(Sing Up, The Sage Gateshead, undated: 4)

All the projects planned to develop the role of young leaders who were themselves looked after young people of secondary school age. Often the young leaders had been involved in the projects' earlier work, so leaders were building on established relationships and known territory. For example, a 14 year old girl had developed multi-media skills by taking part in Pie Factory activities over some years. She could make films, take photos, write poetry, sing and write songs. It was clear from the girl and from her foster carer that these activities had greatly influenced her development, helping her to become very confident. Being a young leader on the Sing Up NCB project was thought to consolidate this experience and take it further.



At Pie Factory, training sessions for young leaders included discussions about reflective practice, the drawing up of expectations and awareness of boundaries. These were written down for them to refer to. Young leaders also learned about 'brain gym' (exercises to enhance memory creativity and concentration) and about team building. They did a presentation of what they had learned. A young leader gave the following feedback about her involvement:

"I am really enjoying Young Leaders so far and I think I have learnt a lot already. I learnt how to do a simple 5 note scale and I've learnt a load of circle songs. We're working on 'Wade in the Water' and we have improved a lot in that already and my confidence has shot up and I'm feeling more involved in everything. I'm really glad we got funding thanks for everything. I'm glad you chose me"

(Young leader)

The Surrey CYPS project provided two weekend residential training sessions for looked after young people. These weekends included opportunities for team work, developing social skills and making friends as well as music activities. The young people there were very positive about the experience:

"I like working as a group. It's so fun – I have learnt how to work as a team, about talking and listening to each other and singing with each other. It's like a big family"

(Young leader, age 15)

One young person valued being away from home for a time and establishing positive new relationships with the leaders:

"... especially like being away from my home for a couple of nights. Being around nice people is important. The music is good as well but it doesn't matter about the music much. It's the people who run it who make it the best"

(Young leader, age 14)

In Sound It Out, a twilight session was held for 6 young people to be trained as 'peer assistants'. They met the musicians and support workers, took part in ice-breaker activities to build their confidence and contributed their own ideas to the development of the project.

Myrtle Theatre Company included young leaders in all their activities and made sure that the young people had a chance to lead different activities with the children. Planning and reflections sessions which addressed problems and potential problems were seen as especially valuable. An adult leader believed that the sessions maintained the commitment of two of the young leaders.

As with the young woman from the Surrey CYPS project, above, the importance of their relationship with the adult leaders was commented on by others. A 17 year old young man at Myrtle Theatre Company said that what he really liked was the way the project leaders communicated with people:

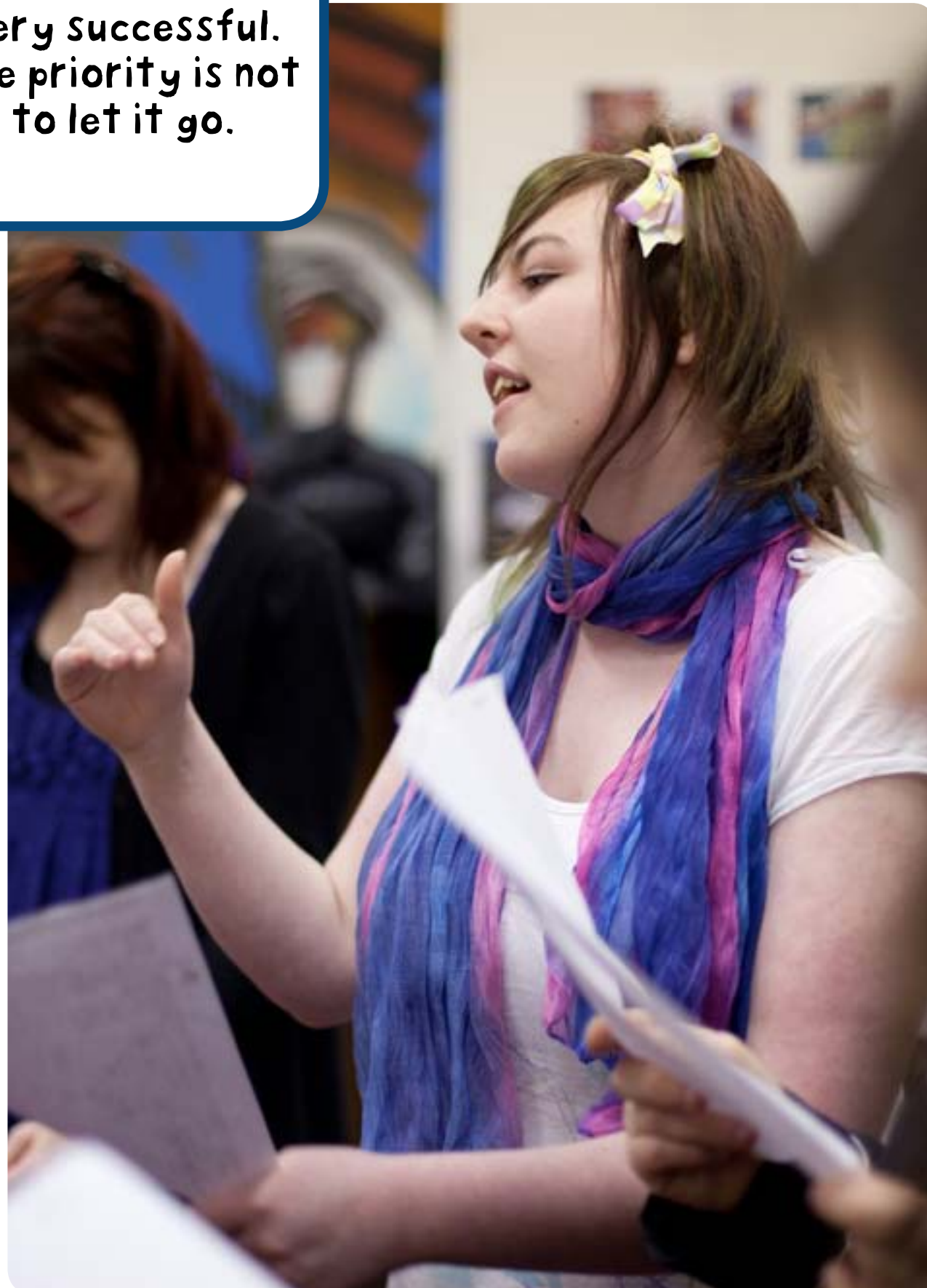
"It's warming how they are with people. Whatever you look like they're on your side... It's a good thing to take with you, I've never been in this position, it's shifting the boundaries"

He liked it because he was not the main leader but part of the leadership team and always felt safe and comfortable. He said he would certainly use the leadership skills he had been learning with his own band.

The second young leader didn't see himself as a singer although he didn't mind singing with other people. He had just started to take part in evening activities with the Bristol Old Vic youth theatre.

(Also see 'Workforce development and accreditation' on p26).

It has all been very successful. The priority is not to let it go.



Projects especially for looked after children

The looked after children who participated in the projects were almost all living with foster carers, rather than in residential children's homes. This is typical for looked after children of primary school age. It was very unlikely, therefore, that they had ever been brought together with other looked after children before taking part in the project. The question of whether it was ideal to deliver separate services for looked after children was raised by one of the singing leaders:

"It seems an artificial thing bringing together looked after children who are scattered, but it's something special for them to do as long as they're not stigmatised"

(Singing leader)

One of the young leaders in the Surrey CYPS project, who had been involved in music activities for five years, commented on how it felt as someone who was looked after:

"The reason why I like it as a young person coming through the system it means that you can express your anger in a good way rather than kicking off – it's better to express your negativity pro-actively."

(Young leader, age 18)

Another benefit, reported by a Herefordshire foster carer, was the importance of meeting and making friends with other looked after children and their carers - 'breaking the ice' as she put it. When the child had to go to another family for respite care, she had already met them, and made friends with the family through the music sessions. The same carer thought that referring to other looked after children when she spoke to the child about her forthcoming adoption made the discussion more meaningful and real.

Several of the looked after children and young people said that they particularly enjoyed attending a project that was specifically for children like themselves: they felt more comfortable where people understand some of their circumstances and shared some of their experiences.

"I have made some great friends – they're from the same background as me so they understand me."

(Girl, age 15)

Another girl, speaking about the older young leaders said:

"I like to meet new people in the care system – I know what they're about. I look up to them because they have their future – it's inspiration for me"

(Girl, age 15)

The advantages of attending sessions specifically for looked after children were highlighted also by some of the foster carers. In the High Tide project, for example, a foster carer commented that it was important to have somewhere to go with her foster daughter that was specifically for looked after children. She felt that it was sometimes difficult to attend mainstream activities as her foster child exhibited behaviour which made her 'stand out' from others, but attending a project for looked after children meant that the child and her sometimes challenging behaviour were accepted:

"You can't take them everywhere because of some of the behaviour problems. But here it didn't matter, no one took any notice and it was good for them to let off steam."

(Foster Carer)

"I'm a great believer in singing and the therapeutic impact – also it helps you breathe better, it puts your brain in a different place and it gives opportunities to kids who've had fragmented and difficult experiences in their lives, gives them a chance to be somewhere else for a time, all the head, heart and hands stuff... For looked after kids – like other vulnerable groups – music as an art form makes a real bloody difference – invest in it."

(Children's services officer)

Looked after disabled children

During the course of the evaluation, there were several examples of how looked after disabled children benefited from their involvement in some of the Sing Up NCB projects.

In one place, two profoundly disabled children, age 9 and 5, received hour long weekly sessions in their foster home with a singing leader over a period of several months. The singing leader introduced the children to music by using his laptop to make electronic sounds, a microphone, a keyboard and shakers and bells. On one occasion a carer's friend also brought a harp for the children to touch and experience. The effects of the sessions on the children were said to be visible and profound. The residential staff reported that the sessions gave children the opportunity to make choices and decisions for themselves, apparently lacking in other areas of their lives. A carer described how one of the children had started to strum the harp, the first time she had seen him display eye-hand co-ordination skills. As she explained:

"You can see him [the child] relaxing, his hands come out of his mouth and he hums. He holds a mini-piano and is starting to make a sound. He's smiling."

(Foster carer)

The singing leader similarly described the difference he had observed in the children, how one started to spread his fingers over the keyboard, rather than clench his fist and how fascinated the girl was with the sounds, and the instruments which she held to her ears.

One of the foster carers described the sessions as 'an answer to a prayer' as other after school activities would not accept these children because of their profound impairments.

In another area, music sessions took place with disabled children and young people in residential settings. According to one residential manager, the sessions benefited the young people in many ways. One girl would not go into a particular room, and this was longstanding. When the music session started, the girl was inspired to enter the room for the first time and subsequently joined in the sessions. The manager thought that the young people enjoyed the sessions and staff learned what could be achieved, and how they could develop their own practice. This view was echoed by a manager in a different home:

"They all get something out of it – they appear happier, engaged, chatty about it. You see the young people clapping and smiling with the music. It adds to what they do – it builds their confidence and also the staff confidence in showing them what can be done."

(Residential manager)



In another residential setting, the young people were observed enjoying songs and exploring musical instruments that they would not otherwise have contact with, thus extending their experience. The keyboard was seen as particularly useful for its versatility, it could be used with children on tables, on the floor or over the knees on a wheelchair.

A particularly successful piece of work was carried out with a boy aged 8, described as on the high end of the autistic spectrum. Project staff wanted to include him but were concerned that with severe communication and learning difficulties he would not be able to take part in group sessions. So singing leaders visited him at home over a number of sessions and made recordings of him at home, with the sounds that he appeared to enjoy the most. Regular communication with the foster carers was crucial. For example, the child appeared to enjoy humming but the foster carers said that he hummed either because he was happy or because he was trying to drown out a sound he found irritating. The leaders produced a DVD in which the child was central. There was the noise of a washing machine and rhythmic sounds such as a clock ticking, together with the boy's voice, singing and humming. Later, the carers said that they had used the DVD when the child was 'over stimulated and having behaviour issues' and it had a positive, calming effect.

Foster carers: supporting children's engagement

Foster carers played a vital role in supporting the children's engagement with the Sing Up NCB projects. Their involvement was seen as crucial by all project leaders in both recruiting children and encouraging and maintaining their participation. To this end, all the projects worked hard, early on in the programme, at establishing links with CYPs foster care teams and with foster carers themselves through fostering link workers and foster care support groups. For Pie Factory an independent fostering agency was partner to the project.

For some, communicating directly and honestly with foster carers was seen as underpinning success. In Pie Factory, for example, speaking to foster carers enabled singing leaders to learn more about the children they were working with. The foster carers were a source of feedback as to how the children had felt about singing. In addition, leaders discussed their aims with the carers and agreed with them that not allowing children to attend sessions as a punishment – something which had arisen in earlier projects – was undesirable.

Pie Factory singing leaders identified the positive effects when foster carers were present in the sessions:

"It was really effective having the foster carers in the workshop with the children. For some children it gave them enough confidence to take part and once they were engaged the foster carers stepped back and let the child work independently. For those young people with more severe needs, it was helpful to have another voice of encouragement and practically another pair of hands to help with the workshop. On the whole I observed that having the foster carers in the workshop gave a feeling of safety to the children."

(Reflective Journal – singing leader, Pie Factory)

The role that foster carers played in the delivery of the sessions varied considerably. With Myrtle Theatre Company and in some SoundLINC sessions, the attendance and direct participation of the foster carers was seen as integral to the session. These carers were especially appreciative of the project. A foster carer involved with the Myrtle Theatre Company project said that it gave himself and his foster child something to do together, so that they got to know each other better. Also, in his own words the main benefit was to widen horizons for both of them. He said that the boy was happy to be with other foster children for a change 'he doesn't often meet others in the same situation as himself'. And he was benefiting from 'the general music stuff'.

A kin carer (in this case a grandmother) had herself taken part in the production. 'It was wonderful, lovely and the way the children performed, it was fantastic. They've done well. About her own participation she said 'I enjoyed being in it myself, it brought me out of myself. It brings him [grandson] out of himself as well'. Another foster carer said that what she had appreciated was:

"The children seeing you outside of your comfort zone is helpful. Sharing your own vulnerability."

And a child made a rather similar comment:

"The adults learn as well as the children. Not like at school when they just teach us stuff. We do it together."

In other places, although some foster carers attended the sessions, they did not participate other than to intervene when a difficult behaviour became too much for a singing leader to manage. Sometimes, singing leaders felt frustrated that the foster carers did not do more to check children's behaviour:

"I think I was surprised that some of the foster carers, when the children are being a bit unruly, are doing nothing and you'd expect them to step in a bit more and help us out." (Singing leader)

An education support worker in a different project, who attended some sessions, remarked that she acted 'as the big bad wolf' with the children but also she had to 'stamp on foster carers who can let the children run riot'. Some foster carers, on the other hand, took the line that it was the support workers' and musicians' job to look after the children. Other ways of thinking about working with challenging behaviour are discussed on p36, but this support worker's comment is included here only to observe that foster carers who experience singing lessons as unpleasant (meeting a 'big bad wolf') may be less likely to facilitate children's regular attendance.

Some foster carers saw the sessions as an opportunity for 'respite' or time for themselves. In one case a carer found the time available a useful opportunity to sit in a nearby cafe 'it gives me another hour to do my paperwork'. In a different location, a singing leader remarked that it was important to have something for foster carers to do if they didn't want to join in the sessions. The venue they used was ideal, because 'there's a kitchen where they can make a cup of tea and chat, and we've been able to talk to them as well, learnt a lot of things about fostering that we hadn't thought about'.

Ferrying children backwards and forwards from sessions could be a problem for project leaders. If transport was not available, the children could not attend. The Surrey CYPS project addressed this by means of travel warrants via a budget issued by Surrey Arts. Other local authorities provided cabs but many of the projects had to rely on the good will of foster carers to transport the children. In rural areas the distances involved made this difficult. In towns rush hour problems arose particularly for foster carers transporting children to after school sessions. Both problems could be disincentives for supporting the children's participation.

"It's dire. It is such a bind for her getting through the traffic during the rush hour. Also, Wednesday is the only contact time that they have with their parents and their other siblings."

(Foster carer, CoMusica)

Another barrier to accessing activities was when children moved placement, either permanently or temporarily. One young person from the Surrey CYPS project, for example, had to stay with another foster family while her carers were away on holiday. The second carer was not able to take the girl to the Oscar Arts Award event, although she had been working towards participating in the event for months. This example is a reminder that looked after children and young people rely on adults to access educational and leisure opportunities. The success of projects such as Sing Up are dependent on looked after children's and foster carers' circumstances – such as other responsibilities and ease of transport – and the commitment of the foster carers involved. These issues need to be addressed by music agencies and their CYPS partners in organising the practical arrangements for sessions, and in their communications with foster carers.

PART TWO: Leadership and learning – knowledge

This section considers first the workforce development opportunities and awards/accreditation that the projects provided. It then examines the knowledge that was produced by the projects about music and singing with looked after children, and about working within a social pedagogic framework.



Workforce development

Workforce development was approached and understood somewhat differently by different projects. Some projects gave examples of incidental and less formal opportunities, rather than training sessions. For example, The Sing Up NCB Gathering in Birmingham in April 2010, which marked the beginning of the programme, was attended by all but one of the projects. The two main partners involved in one project commented that it was energising and motivating. It was a rare opportunity to meet colleagues from across the country and to receive helpful materials, including a presentation on social pedagogy.

A member of CoMusica saw learning conversations with partners as major vehicles for professional development.

"It's been a huge learning curve, learning about the disadvantage suffered by looked after children – this came out in our conversations with the Durham Access Team. For five or six of the musicians who had already worked with children and adults, they have learned a lot of skills about working with a new demographic."

At SoundLINCS, because all the singing leaders were freelance workers, it was felt that training and reflecting on practice needed to take place around events, rather than as separate occasions. This was because of the costs involved in bringing leaders from across a large county together for training. In addition, the project leader thought that professional and personal development was furthered by his offering 'an approachable managerial style' to the singing leaders. He considered that his attentive listening was a core principle when they discussed their work with him, individually.

Other projects reported more formal training opportunities and brought in outside specialists. At Myrtle Theatre Company, the Education for Children Looked After Service (the project partner), an Independent Reviewing Officer, a child psychologist, and a foster carer all contributed to the first training session attended by the Myrtle core delivery team. It covered information about the lives of looked after children and foster carers, and elements of social pedagogy. A second session included foster carers.

"The training had a big emotional impact on the participating artists /singing leaders and reminded us of our responsibility to their welfare and the emotional support we must give them throughout the project."

(Report to Sing Up)

The Sound it Out project began their work with a series of five training seminars for the musicians, support workers, children's services staff, carers and arts organisations. Six young leaders attended a twilight session where they took part in ice-breaker activities, met the musicians and support workers, and contributed ideas for the development of the project. Training sessions included singing activities and topics such as:

- ◆ Benefits of creativity
- ◆ Developing core musical and vocal confidence
- ◆ Working with looked after children
- ◆ Local authority context issues
- ◆ Social pedagogy
- ◆ Project reflections
- ◆ Recruitment and sustainability issues
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Developing good partnerships



With the Surrey CYPS project, training opportunities comprised delivering singing and vocal activities to children; vocal confidence, vocal health and song writing. These were offered to a wide range of partners including: social workers, CAMHS workers, foster carers, specialist nurses, music service staff, virtual school designated teachers and youth justice workers. Training was delivered to the Fostering Executive Panel, which proved a great success once fostering colleagues overcame their initial trepidation. This also led to other training opportunities through the fostering support teams. Total Respect training was delivered by the Youth Worker from Surrey County Council (project manager) and a looked after child on working with looked after children for the music leadership team. This gave the music leadership team many insights into the issues and challenges of daily life for children in care.

Although workforce development sessions were not always well attended, a session for CAMHS workers worked well with 50 participants as part of a team away day.

The Surrey CYPS project also made training available to young leaders and included a two weekend residential training course covering outdoor team building activities as well as music sessions. Weekend residential were seen as beneficial to young leaders as, in the words of a youth worker, they 'offer high impact and intense learning for young people'. They overcame transport difficulties – arrangements needed to be made for only one event, rather than for a series of evenings - and were more convenient than evening sessions for young people attending school.

Joint workforce development opportunities for the singing leaders from Forest of Dean Music Makers and Music Pool were offered and delivered. All the Forest of Dean Music Makers leaders took part in an eight day 'Gloucestershire Music Leader Training Programme'. A Gloucestershire singing leader also conducted six two-hour training sessions with foster carers, to increase their confidence in singing with children and to add to their repertoire of songs. In Music Pool, there were singing taster sessions for foster carers, which encouraged foster carers to refer children to the Sing Up NCB projects and to participate themselves.

Accreditation

Opportunities for children and young leaders to take part in accreditation such as Arts Awards were offered by most of the projects but none had yet attained these qualifications by the end of 2010. Although the experience of young leadership was clearly valued by those who took part, it was suggested by Sound It Out that there was not always sufficient time during sessions to fully support all those (often with high support needs) who expressed an interest in gaining accreditation. A further challenge was that for many of the children and young people there was little encouragement or practical help to sustain the requirements of the awards, outside the project sessions themselves.

In a different project (Myrtle Theatre Company), one adult leader was responsible for supporting the young leaders, keeping in touch with them between sessions and reminding them when the sessions were occurring. In the case of one young leader who had been ill and not attending the sessions, the adult leader visited her in her residential home. The leader remarked that young leaders could be just as vulnerable as younger children and, because of their age, might have less support with regard to participating. For example, foster carers might think that they did not need reminding about attending sessions, or they could be expected to find their own way to the venues.

Despite these difficulties, it was hoped that four children and three young people from Sound It Out would achieve their Bronze level Arts Award in 2011. The two young leaders working with Myrtle Theatre Company had been taken to see a live performance of Mamma Mia at the Millennium Centre in Cardiff, where they were able to go backstage and on to the stage afterwards, and to speak with some of the actors and technical staff, as part of work experience towards their Bronze Arts Awards.

Leadership: learning and knowledge generated by project and singing leaders

The projects based their musical and leadership practice on existing knowledge but they also produced understandings about working with looked after children, both musically and in terms of social pedagogy. An important lesson to emerge was that the musical and creative capabilities of looked after children should not be underestimated. Given the right conditions, they were capable of enjoying and participating in a wide variety of singing, voice work and other, sometimes challenging, music making. Applying the principles of social pedagogy was seen as supporting this participation.

Putting children first

Sing Up NCB looked after children projects were best undertaken not as singing classes in miniature, but as pleasant places for adults and children to form warm relationships – places for a variety of musical and other creative and social activities with singing at the centre. Many of the children who participated in the seven projects were children with special needs and some were disabled. So, in keeping with the principles of social pedagogy, the first consideration was to undertake a musical journey from 'where the children were' rather than following preconceived plans or a rigid curriculum.



Singing and musical activities

As community musicians, the music and singing leaders were able to turn to a wide variety of musical experiences to maintain children's engagement. Attending to good vocal health and technique were reported (and observed during visits) in all the projects. At CoMusica, for example, sessions started with a warm up. Children were introduced to using their voices in different ways, head voice, mouth voice and chest voice, and involving the whole body in singing.

Overall, sessions included singing, song writing, recording, being introduced to musical instruments, such as the guitar, the ukulele, keyboard, percussion instruments (sometimes made by the children themselves) lyric writing, drumming and rapping. Some of these were identified as being particularly of interest for those boys for whom singing was not immediately attractive.

The musicians could be adept at finding what particular children liked. At a taster session which coincided with the World Cup, there were three boys who appeared to be angry that they had been made attend.

"They refused to get involved at first but rather than be discouraged by this the music leaders used their anger positively by asking them to be drummers. They also used a song about a Warrior to appeal to the boys' interests. This approach acknowledged the boys' feelings and encouraged the integration of their interests into the group. At the end, the boys wanted to do the drumming again, a good sign that the strategy had worked successfully and had encouraged their involvement."

(Singing leaders' Reflective Journal, SoundLINCS)

Familiarity and challenge

"It's about finding something that's within someone's capabilities and not too challenging and making small steps to progress."

(Singing leader, SoundLINCS)

The musicians often aimed to find a balance between meeting children 'in their comfort zone' and broadening their horizons by using unfamiliar repertoire and activities, with songs drawn from different countries. The intention was to extend children's musical awareness.

Sessions built from one session to the next, first using simple games and rounds, introducing part songs and gradually creating new music by fitting new words to known songs, then by working on new music. They introduced new repertoire such as African circle games, with a strong pulse, as an aid to recognising the beat. Projects also used rhythmical rapping and clapping to help children become more aware of beat and rhythm. The challenges introduced often went beyond those of conventional Western music forms and more complex art forms were not avoided:

"The session was conducted with the whole group of children, young people, mentors and staff. Singing together and copying lines was followed by more complicated rounds of the singing, using sticks to pass around the room at the same time. Although one boy found this really difficult – and said so! – most of the group were fully engaged with the activities and there was lots of laughter. A Zulu song and a Ghanian song were also introduced to the group, the latter in Ghanian, so a challenge for the young people."

(Field notes from visit to SoundLINCS)

Observation of a Sound it Out session and general feedback suggested that small group sessions worked particularly well and offered opportunities for singing solo and song writing, and recording these. A list of musical terms with their definitions was put on the wall during every session and referred to. Familiar songs were used to help the children sing and then some re-writing of them was introduced. Some of the songs included 'We Will Rock You', 'Don't Stop Believing', 'Don't Worry, Be Happy', 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight' and 'Mamma Mia'.

A description of the musical work undertaken by Myrtle Theatre Company, below, is provided in some detail, because it provides a vivid account of the potential of young looked after children.

An Opera Adventure

Myrtle Theatre Company produced a 22 minute opera, using material generated by the children and some of their foster carers. It culminated in a performance for carers, relatives, children's services and others in the Colston Hall, Bristol.

All the children came up with suggestions for a story. Things moved forward throughout every session. The musical director and composer said they were:

"not wanting to go into boredom during the sessions, just keeping them excited about developing the story, the songs and music."

Accordingly, there was no real rehearsal until the performance day.

Composing with the children

The composer wrote the musical score, on the basis of work done with the children, which was eventually performed by a six-piece ensemble. The leaders worked with the children in different ways.

'Painting the music' was one way. The children conveyed their musical ideas in terms of colour, shape, intensity and size by painting on large sheets of paper. At other times, when they had agreed a line for a song they would come round the keyboard and the composer would ask them how they thought it should go ... fast, slow, happy, sad, up, down ... ? He said:

"It dawned on me that it helped if the words they were coming up with had names [given to them], so the Maze became Lazy Maze. Then I asked what it should sound like and they said it should go slow, so I would improvise, in a very bluesy way, and it was easy after that – it seemed to open the door for them, and help them to understand [about the relationship between words and music]."

(Composer and musical director (MD))

For another song the composer played a melody in different ways: first legato, but the children said no, then more robotic, which they agreed on. The children themselves came up with an answering phrase, which had the same melodic structure. Some of the children were confident enough to suggest musical settings for different lines.

The children were encouraged to be expressive in their singing. For example, the MD asked them to stop singing, precisely on cue ('when you stop, the silence is just as exciting as the storm noise'), also to hold notes as required and to observe rests. They were encouraged to sing 'in a floaty voice' in quiet parts. They responded well to this.

"Musically, they were amazing, especially those who had played the CD during the holiday. There was one moment when Steve [aged 8] helped an adult singer who was having difficulty with her pitch, and Jimmy came in too. It was amazing."

(Singing leader)

Another singing leader, echoed this saying 'I wouldn't approach [this music] with secondary school students – but these are from primary school!'. She thought it was 'absolutely amazing ... The whole process children coming together to create this'. The music was described by a further singing leader as 'sophisticated', but the children did not find it difficult to sing. Commenting on how challenging the music was, he said he had thought the finished work would be 'just pantomime or music hall', but:

"Children are not so worried about musical conventions, so they tend to break the rules – eg. about key changes. So they're doing what 20th century composers have done anyway. You [an adult] looks at the music, and see that it's difficult, but when you're young you don't realise that. They just do it."

(Singing leader)



Performance and Awards Events

Performance was seen as a special opportunity for showcasing and valuing the children's work. Some of the projects had already put on a performance by the time this report was prepared and others planned to do so. Many produced CDs as part of their activities. Everywhere, the intention was that the children should enjoy creativity and have fun, rather than produce a polished performance and this approach was successful. For example, the CoMusica project leader described the Sing Up celebration day held in December 2010 at The Sage Gateshead:

"The quality of the singing was wonderful, some of the looked after children had written songs – both words and music. They were very prepared and committed and the singing was very confident. It was moving to see the relationships that they had with the musicians and with each other."

After practising, they went to the concourse and performed for the public, their carers and anyone else they had invited. The project leader remarked that the children were relaxed – 'There was no stress'. For SoundLINC, a planned celebration awards event at which looked after children and young people would be performing and DJ-ing was planned for February 2011. A celebration evening at the Freedom Centre, Hereford was held to showcase the work of the Music Pool project as the culmination of the programme. Myrtle Theatre Company put on a performance of their Opera Adventure, in the Colston Hall. A carer said:

"Rufus [child] was over the moon with it. There were so many people there and it was fun to see them doing it... they were enjoying themselves, you could see it in their faces. The children were all very well behaved and the singing was excellent. Rufus's brother and father came to see it and they were full of it."

For the Surrey CYPs project, one of the main avenues for demonstrating singing and creative activities was through the annual Oscar Awards Ceremony. In November 2010 this was used to showcase the work of the Surrey CYPs project and to present awards to looked after children and young people.

For Sound It Out, a celebration evening took place at the Netherton Arts Centre for the children and young people to show their work to carers, families, social workers and other local authority staff. Sixteen children performed on the evening of the performance and appeared thoroughly to enjoy it. One of the local authority partners was particularly impressed by the performance and what it meant to the children:

"It was amazing – the young people were enthralled. They all came together. The performance gave them a common call, a sense of belonging, to be part of something bigger (Local Authority partner)."

Social pedagogy and practice

The principles of social pedagogy (see p6) were intended to provide a framework for the projects against which the projects could, in part, be evaluated and this is the basis for this section.

Working with the whole child

Working with children holistically rather than seeing music activities as separate from the children's other experiences was seen by almost all of the leaders as essential for good practice:

"We are community musicians and we have to work with well-being in a holistic way, about feeling good, positive engagement and finding out what the children are like and are good at."

(Singing leader, Music Pool)

In Sound It Out, at the beginning of each session while eating together, the adults encouraged the children to talk about their day or share any news. For example, a singing leader reported that in one session, some of the boys were talking a lot about school and she felt that it was important for her to listen attentively to what they were saying, rather than move on immediately to singing as if this was not connected with the rest of their lives:

"I think it's remembering that everything you say has an impact on them and that training on social pedagogy really helped us understand that a lot more. It was definitely worth doing. The fact that you're playing a part in how they all develop – I know we should be aware of that anyway but sometimes it's difficult."

(Support worker, Sound It Out)

The singing leaders appeared to value the children's contributions in all but one of the sessions visited by the research team. This was song-writing where the children were invited to contribute rhyming words, for the end of lines. The rhymes they suggested were almost all dismissed. For example a child offered the word 'buttercup' as a rhyme. The singing leader asked 'How could you fit in buttercup? You throw all your ideas in but it's got to make sense. It can't be silly'. It is true that the word did not rhyme, but it presented some creative possibilities and the leader could have used it in another way, rather than reject it. Words which did rhyme but 'did not make sense' were similarly rejected. A foster carer also showed her disapproval for the suggestions, which, it appeared, were made in good faith by young children. Perhaps the carer had been led to believe that her role was to be a trouble shooter, backing up the musicians. It is, however, important for children's contributions to be received in a positive way, otherwise they are less likely to make further attempts and, more importantly, they may feel the rejection as personal.

A sociable and creative space

“Our approach is about being free, about play, about ‘space to be’, and that is part of our philosophy and ethos.”

(Project leader)

Social pedagogues often speak about people sharing the same living space when they are engaged in activities together. In the living space, everyone is seen as of equal worth - there may be people with different functions but there is no feeling that some are more valuable than others. The integration of social and creative activities into the sessions was observed in several projects. For example, alongside musical activities children danced, painted, took photographs, made scrapbooks, wrote journals, had snacks and went on picnics and outings. One project arranged a showing of Mamma Mia, outside the usual session time, and another brought children from different locations together to hear a well-known rapper.

In Sound It Out, sessions began with snacks and news sharing by children and adults for half an hour followed by musical games, then break-out groups for more focused music making, according to what the children wanted. At the beginning of the evening, a simple buffet was provided for all the children, young people, foster carers, musicians and support staff so that they could socialise with each other and start the session on friendly terms. Adults and children working in partnership together and in a democratic manner was particularly evident in the small group music sessions. The children and young people were observed to be very engaged and focused on song writing and/or performing.

One session that was observed for the evaluation, was characterised by a flexible structure that enabled children of a wide age range to make choices about musical activities and to combine these with other interests:

“The session is taking place throughout two rooms, one larger with floor cushions and rugs and a smaller room through an adjoining door. At times this door is closed. At others the children move freely between the two rooms. I am not always sure why children go from one room to another as no one has asked them to, but they seem to know what they are doing and the free nature of their movement adds to the informal and relaxing atmosphere. This part of the session is an unstructured session after lunch with approximately 12 children (ages c. 4-11) doing a variety of activities, such as their work books, drawing, singing songs, using the microphone and recording, alongside about 4 adults. Some of the children start singing ‘out of the blue’ while they are drawing and writing. I am struck by their freedom of expression. The staff are working alongside and with the children – there is no sense that the adults are there as people who necessarily know more than the children; this is a partnership and the adults and children are doing activities together.”



“... Children are now all in the large room where the rugs and cushions are. All are engaged and there are no apparent behaviour difficulties that distract anyone.”

(Field notes)

An 11 year old girl was asked what she liked about a session at Forest of Dean Music Makers:

“Girl: I make a tune. It’s good. I know lots of people like M [music leader] so I don’t feel shy. I like everything. I like the drawing

Interviewer: What’s your favourite activity?

Girl: When I sing.”

Preparation and reflection

A relative lack of structure in sessions and easy relationships, as in the example above, nevertheless needed preparation and adequate time for reflection and further plans when the sessions were over. This approach was much appreciated by a singing leader:

“In a school when I was brought in to work on the Gifted and Talented programme I was just left in the room with the children, with no preparation as to what might be done or expected. But with Sing Up, how the activities worked out was more carefully planned than in any other teaching activity I have done ... As little was left to chance as possible.”

At Myrtle Theatre Company, staff met for an hour before each delivery session, to talk it through and identify strategies and alternatives, should there be a need for them.

“After the first session, some leaders said that they needed support about children initiating physical contact with them, for example, feeling uncomfortable when a child came and sat on their knee or when another child had been digging another practitioner in his tummy. The team decided to do the ‘bubble exercise’, a movement game in which children pretend that they are in a bubble, which they move about. The bubble would be called a ‘safe space’ – a term that could be referred to as needed. This was later included as part of the children’s warm up.”

(Field notes)

Elsewhere a project leader and others commented on an activity which had not gone well. They thought that more face-to-face meetings for joint planning, would have improved the day and that a debriefing session would have helped in highlighting lessons to be learned from the experience and consolidating relationships between partners.



Reflective practice

Purposeful reflection, acknowledging the part played by feelings, building on successes and planning to avoid problems in future, is a principle of social pedagogy. At the beginning and throughout the Sing Up NCB programme, the project leaders, singing leaders and young leaders were encouraged to reflect on their practice using the 'head, hands and heart' framework. In one project, there was some difficulty in arranging time for joint reflection because of the costs involved in bringing leaders together. Nevertheless almost all of the project leaders kept reflective journals to chart their thoughts, feelings and plans about the work. In Sound It Out the 'head hands and heart' reflection framework, devised by the evaluators, was used in workforce development sessions to encourage musicians and support workers to think about their interactions with children. Twenty minutes were allocated at the end of each evening session for them to get together and discuss how the evening had gone, the positive aspects and any challenges. Elsewhere as much as an hour was allowed for reflection.

"This [working with looked after children] made us reflect on our practice. We realised that you need to look out for those children who don't ask for help by setting a creative task and it's also important to notice children who are sitting without doing anything."

(Singing leader, Music Pool)

Joint reflection could also be an opportunity to come to terms with areas which might otherwise not be aired. In one project a singing leader commented on problems that could arise when 'artist egos are brought together'. In another, a leader said supporting the children, not just showing what they could do as performers, had been difficult to start with and that other leaders may have had the same problem too. She said 'I think it was the reflections sections which helped with all of this.' Having time to bring these different aspects of the work into the open and discussing them with colleagues were seen as of great benefit. One of the Pie Factory staff commented how the training sessions and reflective practice had helped a young leader specifically regarding some aspects of her work, which the music leaders had discussed with her:

"The session went well due to everyone joining in with the discussion. I had a view on everything but managed to avoid talking over people but failed once or twice. Action – Try not to have a view on everything."

(Young leader)

Working with challenging behaviour

The instability and rejection experienced by many looked after children may lead to behaviour which is seen as unacceptable. Managing children's behavioural difficulties was one of the main challenges identified by singing leaders who were well aware of their responsibilities for the safety and well being of all their participants. However, singing leaders with previous experience of working with looked after children appeared to experience fewer difficulties in this area. A singing leader from Myrtle Theatre Company told us:

"These were children who were always being sent out or excluded from school. We decided we would find other ways, other strategies, to contain them."

Accepting the child as they are, rather than as adults would like them to be, was the only logical position to start from. An example, one of several, of a project working in this way, was given by a local authority partner:

"Some of the boys were a bit shouty, so rather than everyone saying 'shush' all the time, he [the music leader] got them to use that [loud voice] in the workshop, so we used it creatively."

(Local authority partner, Music Pool)



A foster carer commented:

“These children and young people are not particularly trusting of the adult world and to see them work together is great; the musicians’ genuineness has rubbed off on them so they’re now hooked into creative fun.”

The experience of the project leaders suggests that staff should think not of 'managing unacceptable behaviour' but of understanding the whole child and managing the social context so that the child feels secure and with less need to behave in ways that may be unacceptable to others. Having other activities on offer, for when children need a break from an activity is one example:

“[One of the adults] keeps her sketch book out and children can sit with her and sketch in her book – she’s very enthusiastic about some of their work. Children also have their own small sketch books and use them.”

(Myrtle Theatre Company, Fieldnotes)

In the same project, children were told that if they didn't want to join in something they didn't need to do so, but there was a named person that they could go and sit next to if they wanted some time out. Sometimes all the children needed was some encouragement and support to help them to persevere. For example, a foster carer saw that his child was on the brink of being disruptive and encouraged him, saying quietly 'you are doing well'. In an interview, a singing leader said that she had been very impressed by this and commented on the effect this sort of approach had on the children:

“The children were never rude to us, never confronted us or their carers in our presence, and they worked really hard.”

Yet many of the same children were being very disruptive in schools, with some of them excluded or under threat of exclusion: 'but you would never know it, to see them here'.

Involving foster carers in the sessions could be supportive for the children, because of their knowledge of the children and their relationship with them. At Pie Factory, there was a child who was described as having complex needs, struggling in his special school and finding it difficult to take part in group singing sessions. However, with the support of very committed foster carers, he began to join in the sessions. The adults involved in his care had observed a significant shift in his behaviour and in himself.

The ethos of a project was often communicated, through discussion and example, to all participants, as was evident from both reflective journals and in interviews. Leaders thought it was important to make clear to children and adults the standards expected in a positive way. For example, one project displayed coloured cards each of which had one message, such as 'we laugh with people, not at them. We have fun' and 'You don't have to do anything you don't want to' and there was a card about being safe. These were read out at the beginning of sessions and explained in an amusing way. They could also be referred to, as necessary.

The role of people brought in as support workers was in some cases given careful consideration. Observations and interviews suggested that they worked better where they had been fully included in discussing the ethos of the project and how children were to be valued and made welcome. There were however two examples where this had not been the case, one referred to on p32. And a second during a session that took place in a school, the music leaders were working in partnership with the children, writing lyrics and recording some rapping; based on their individual interests and characteristics, the children made contributions to the process of lyric writing.

“Teaching staff who were sitting in intervened frequently to control the children, interrupting the creative process and the relationship building between the children and the tutors, and between the children with each other.”

(Field notes)

Things worked better where all the people present were seen as part of the team, rather than some being leaders and others merely support workers or trouble shooters.

PART THREE: Leadership and learning: impacts for the organisations involved

The short summaries at the beginning of this report showed that projects were very varied in their organisation, and particularly in what they offered to children and young people. Aspirations to benefit the children were central to all the work and, as described earlier, there was much evidence that this was achieved. One aim of the evaluation was to understand the impact that singing projects for looked after children could have for the organisations themselves, and externally for their partners and others. Often the projects and their external partners had an impact on each other – there was two-way learning. There was also an impact for the people involved at an individual level.

Impact of the work on organisations and individuals involved

The evaluation revealed many challenges and learning opportunities for the organisations with central responsibility for delivering a Sing Up NCB looked after children project. These often came to affect the understandings and the practice of the participating agencies. Working with primary aged looked after children and in such a focused way was a new experience for some organisations and their staff. Also, cooperating with new partners with their own developed practices and requirements demanded a willingness to listen, to negotiate and to find new ways of working. The projects worked with a range of partners directly concerned with looked after children, from educational and access services, to fostering agencies, local authority looked after children's teams and educational services.

People from local authority music services as well as individual musicians employed for the project were often involved. Many singing leaders and music practitioners said that they would take back what they had learned to their own practice and to their organisations. Much of this learning was about providing music and singing for looked after children and how they could become a focus for the work. Some musicians also commented that the social pedagogic approach was something that would inform their own work with all children, not just those who were looked after.

In all the projects there was both workforce development and incidental learning about the lives and situations of looked after children. This was sometimes seen as 'a steep learning curve', which produced a greater awareness on the part of staff about the difficulties inherent in many looked after children's lives and of the value of singing and creative activities for them.

As one project leader said:

“Every time we’ve done something, a new piece of information emerges. So we are making links, joining things up. We’re beginning to link up with things.”

(Project leader, SoundLINC)

He saw the project acting as a catalyst to develop opportunities for looked after children in the county. A Pie Factory singing leader commented that drama groups in the area had a greater number of looked after children as a result of Pie Factory work and had an increased awareness about including looked after children and young people in creative activities.

Procedures

Working with looked after children necessitates dealing with complex procedures including risk assessment, obtaining consent for children to participate, sharing information about children, and requirements relating to photographing children. These processes and procedures could result in tensions between partners. To some project leaders it appeared that they were obstructive rather than helpful in the recruitment of children and the delivery of sessions. Whatever else, they often resulted in delays in projects starting up. Nevertheless there was evidence of both sides of a partnership having an impact on the other as regards procedures, with compromises being reached and some change in practice. For example, in one area the local authority partner developed just one consent form to cover all the activities involved in participation, with the result that obtaining consent became an easier and faster process.

For Pie Factory, forming a stronger partnership with the local authority was achieved through the project's involvement in understanding and working with consent and safeguarding procedures. As a result, Pie Factory tightened up its own procedures around safeguarding and became more aware of issues affecting looked after children and young people. This included recognising the importance of striking a careful balance between meeting the individual needs of children and young people, the need to avoid stigmatisation and to maintain confidentiality. As a Pie Factory singing leader explained:

"We have been tightening up on child protection procedures to make sure the young people are protected – but also not isolated or excluded."

Pie Factory staff saw the closer working relationships with social care staff as beneficial in that it facilitated effective information sharing about children and young people:

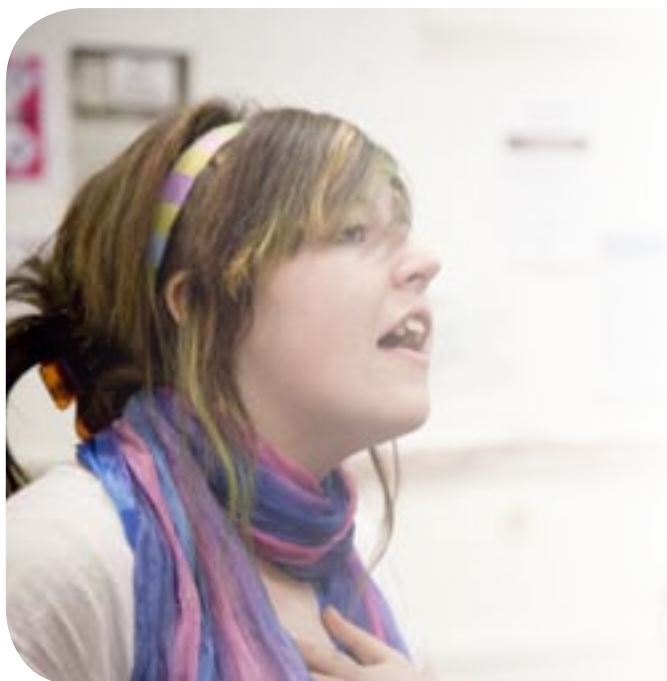
"It's been a good process because now we're going back to the social worker and saying what we're doing, especially with the Young Leaders, and asking whether there's any particular needs or behavioural issues."

A partner from a local authority organisation in Herefordshire saw the impact that the work of the Music Pool project had on the project leaders:

"We have all worked together really well. I think this is because the music leaders, rather than being musicians first have prioritised working with the children ... there's been no preciousness so it means we are all coming to it from the same place, there's been no conflict of interests."

(Local authority partner)

In a different authority, however, because the ethos and priorities of the two partner organisations were somewhat at odds it took much time and effort on both parts to achieve a spirit of cooperation. As with all the partnerships, the local authority partner was closely directed by a strict safeguarding and child protection framework. The music agency sat outside statutory structures and, as a result, was able to have a freer approach to working with children. Moreover, the rather unstructured style of the singing sessions did not sit easily with the more conventional educational approach of its local authority partner. Nevertheless, eventually compromises were reportedly made by both parties and the singing leader felt that relations between the partners had improved significantly.



For most of the projects and their partners there was the impact of working, perhaps for the first time, in a social pedagogic framework. As already described, this allowed practitioners to work with greater confidence in themselves and in the children. Many commented that they would take this way of working with them to future work – both with looked after children and with other children.

A project leader commented on the impact that the partnership had:

"It's wonderful, we want to learn from [the looked after children's educational service] and they're learning from us about what they can provide for the children [they see that it's] more than a spare time activity, it's about their development."

The educational partner at the same project, who had herself taken a full and active part in sessions, said:

"It's given us a vehicle for everybody - carers, artists and for me to take back what we've learned to the looked after children's education services... The project will definitely have an effect on me, I can't say about our service. And definitely it has had an effect on the carers themselves."

She thought that the social pedagogic approach used by the project showed that it was possible to be a bit more informal and take more risks:

"It's brought awareness about the level of complexity in children's lives, it's astonishing for me, I'm used to learning about them as cases."

Legacy and sustainability

The evaluation of the projects was carried out during a period of unprecedented public sector cuts and subsequent uncertainty for future funding and staffing, although at the time of writing, at least one agency had secured funds to continue the work.

Interviews and observations suggested many aspects of the legacy of the Sing Up NCB looked after children programme. The working partnerships that music agencies established in the course of the work was one part of the programme's legacy. The same is true of the programme's impact on individual musicians' practices and their understanding of what it is to be a child in care and the systems that surround the child in care. At the centre there are children who enjoyed themselves and enjoyed music making in the company of other children, with musicians and sometimes with their foster carers. Some were surprised and delighted by their own creativity. They experienced singing, producing, song writing, composing, were often able to develop skills in these areas and were introduced to new forms of music. Some wished to continue singing and others to take up an instrument.

"If there's something like this again, I would!"

(Young person, aged 15)

All the projects were taking steps to ensure that at least some of the singing and music activities could be continued or extended to include looked after children in, for example, preschool music sessions, or in rapping or steel panning. But a general concern was expressed by one of the singing leaders:

"I hate it that we raise expectations and then the funding stops – the young people have been let down so much."

It was recognised, however, that sustainability was not reliant on continued funding alone and that the signposting of children and young people to other singing and musical activities was also an important part of the programme's legacy. Opportunities identified by the projects included involving local authority



music tuition services in working with looked after children, the possibility of using looked after children's personal education allowance to fund group singing tuition, and signposting children towards mainstream opportunities such as community choirs. It was thought important that looked after children's right to free music tuition should be implemented and that there should be clarity about which departmental budget in the local authority was responsible for this.

One of the project leaders aimed to ensure that music was integral to a looked after children's Personal Education Plan:

"I don't want to walk away in a year's time without knowing there's a massive need for this to be part of the Personal Education Plan for young people. We want to make sure that music is integrated."

At a strategic and organisational level, projects indicated other ways of securing the project's legacy. These included information-sharing about participation in music for looked after children with potential partners and influential organisations. A CYPs partner said: 'We've got to pool what we can do and be creative'. For a different project, there was the possibility of including a looked after child representative in the broader organisation, as a way of opening the way for more looked after children to take part in existing opportunities.

A different option was to develop the role of young leaders so that they could eventually lead sessions. It was thought that this could be achieved through 'light touch' funding and in cooperation with the local authority team with responsibility for young people when they were leaving care. Elsewhere, a project was going to open the way for looked after young people to take part in the Foundation Learning scheme which his organisation delivered. (Foundation Learning is a qualification for 14- to 19-year-old learners, alongside GCSEs, Diplomas and apprenticeships. It combines subject or vocational learning with basic skills and personal and social development).

At the time of writing, it is not possible to say how many of these options and possibilities would be taken forward, or what the effect of local authority redundancies might be. However, there appeared to be a strong will to sustain the impetus produced by the programme. The success of the projects, in general, has reinforced belief in the benefits of singing and creative activities for looked after children and therefore strengthened efforts towards sustainability.

"We are very keen to build on it and use it as an exemplary model – it has all been very successful. The priority is not to let it go."

(Project leader)

PART FOUR: Learning points

The following learning points are all derived from the findings presented above.

Partnerships

There is a range of fruitful partnerships appropriate for arts agencies working with looked after children, such as other arts organisations and local authority music services. Of utmost importance and essential to the success of the project are local authority children and young people services. They can assist children in accessing projects and support the music agency in complying with local authority requirements regarding looked after children.

Partnerships which depend on the goodwill of one person within the local authority can be precarious.

Music organisations wishing to work with looked after children should involve and keep informed personnel as senior in the management structure as is feasible, from the outset. Otherwise the project is vulnerable if there are staff changes.

Where they work well, projects for looked after children can have a positive impact on the practice of external organisations as well as on the project and its partners.

Project leaders

Projects with looked after children often require time, perhaps more than is thought necessary, to set up, to engage with partners, to undertake any necessary workforce development with singing leaders, and to recruit participants. This time should be allowed for.

Local authorities require, to different extents, the consent of a number of parties before children are allowed to participate in organised activities. Sometimes local procedures go beyond what is required nationally and it may be that some discussion expedites permission. Nevertheless, projects should allow sufficient time to deal with consent issues, so that they can keep to schedule.

Looked after children are not a stable population. Projects may wish to consider 'over recruiting' participants to compensate for children who move on before the project commences or during the course of the project.

The venue

The venue chosen can enhance or undermine children's experience. Children enjoy an interesting venue, such as a theatre or a country house. While schools may be the only possibility in some cases, they may be less favourable as sites for free-time singing than other options if, among other reasons, they contribute to stigmatising looked-after children. This needs consideration by project leaders.



Foster carers

Foster carers manage a busy and complex workload. If they are to maintain children's engagement with the singing sessions, the foster carers own needs require consideration, for example regarding the timing of sessions, traffic and parking issues.

Personal contact with the carers on the part of the project leaders, in between sessions, can enhance their engagement and participation, as well as being a source of appropriate information about the children.

Foster carers can actively enjoy singing, in spite of any early reservations, if they are given sufficient encouragement. Taster sessions can help.

Foster carers' active participation in music making can be an opportunity for joint learning with the children, which can help build the relationship between them.

Foster carers role should not be confined to troubleshooting. If they participate they should be seen as part of the project team.

Children

There were many reports from foster carers, from other adults and from the children themselves about their enthusiasm for singing and music making. There were also benefits such as enjoying interesting venues, making friends, being excited about performance and becoming generally more confident.

It is helpful for project and singing leaders to understand that looked after children may be especially vulnerable because of their life experiences. They are, nevertheless children, first and foremost. Workforce development activities should stress this, and avoid stigmatising and labelling looked after children, for example by over emphasising behavioural problems.

There may be a danger of stigmatising looked after children where sessions are provided solely for them and this should be guarded against. At the same time, the advantages of attending sessions specifically for looked after children were highlighted by some foster carers and children.



Young leaders

The experience of being a young leader can be interesting and useful in itself, as well as opening up areas for interest, education and, for some, career development.

Young leaders should be seen as part of the project team.

They can be an inspiring role model for younger participants.

Young leaders, especially those who are themselves looked after, need the support of the rest of the project team if they are to make the most of their opportunities. For some this may extend to reminders about attendance and helping with transport arrangements.

It can be of benefit to young leaders to include them in reflecting on practice, their own feelings about it, the effects that practice has on participants, and the steps necessary for building on success and avoiding difficulties.

Singing leaders

Singing leaders can be surprised and inspired by what children achieve. They need to be supported by the project leaders to find a balance between being musically ambitious for the children and serving children's other needs.

Their practice can benefit from knowing about any difficult events arising in the child's life, which may affect the child's participation. At the same time, confidentiality must be observed.

In order to work well with looked after children, singing leaders need to be part of the project team, rather than merely session workers. They need to have adequate time for planning and reflection, in addition to the time spent in face to face contact with the children.

Project managers should be aware of what happens during sessions musically and in other ways, and provide singing leaders with supervision and support.

Singing leaders should regard support workers as part of their team – not just people at hand to control the children.

Music and social pedagogy

One of the biggest learning points of the Sing Up NCB looked after children projects was children's capacity for creativity and for singing and enjoying challenging music, both from the Western tradition and from world music. **This should not be underestimated.**

Leaders said that performance or the production of, for example, a CD or DVD gave children a sense of achievement – but the children's needs came first and leaders should not put them under undue pressure to achieve a polished performance.

The principles of social pedagogy were seen by project leaders to benefit singing and music making because they set a social context where children could enjoy themselves, feel safe and accepted, and risk making their own valuable contributions to activities.

Many looked after children have already experienced instability and rejection and this may lead to behaviour which is seen as unacceptable. Adhering to the principles of social pedagogy did not mean that project leaders ignored unacceptable behaviour: the ethos of a project was communicated through discussion and example. This was essential because singing leaders had a responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of all participants.

Leaders found it helpful to think not of 'managing unacceptable behaviour' but of understanding the whole child and managing the social context so that children felt secure and had less need to behave in ways unacceptable to others.

Project leaders found it helpful to regularly reflect on and discuss different approaches to children's behaviour with the staff team.

It was reported that social pedagogic reflection was a valuable means of project and workforce development. It supported team building, especially necessary where staff came from different professional backgrounds.

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sing up
Help kids find their voice
