

Loud and Clear Foster Family Learning Early Years Evaluation





Katherine Zeserson (Director of Learning and Participation, Sage Gateshead)

The Loud and Clear programme described in this document has been transformational for everyone connected with it – children, foster carers, local authority staff and Sage Gateshead’s musicians. The powerful stories here about personal growth, relationship building, skills development and organisational change are moving and startling by turn.

Moving – because the emotional connectedness and care that were hallmarks of the work radiate so vividly from the narratives – and startling because perhaps we are surprised to learn that music can have such a profound impact in so short a time.

This programme shows us that it can – if the music making is grounded in deep, respectful partnership, with highly developed care and attention to individual needs, and a process of ongoing shared reflection. And it shows us that the experience of being part of a welcoming, mutual musical community in a particular situation can ripple out far beyond the boundaries of that specific moment into lifelong personal and social development.

Shared music making creates a community of equals, in which everyone’s contribution is equally vital to the achievement of shared purpose. Whatever that contribution may be – active vocalising, engaged listening, encouraging feedback, inventive percussion – the unique musical event we create together is only possible if we are all welcome, supported and engaged. In this warm and creative space we discover new aspects of ourselves and see courage and ability in others that we may never have seen or imagined before.

Everyone in the project has learned together as equals. Creative collaboration with foster carers and local authority colleagues in this project has inspired Sage Gateshead’s musicians and evoked a profound respect for the skills and insights of those partners. It has also encouraged the musician team to think about their own practice in fresh and challenging ways. But most importantly, the children at the heart of the work have entered the welcoming community of people who make and share music together – and they will always have a home there.





Myra Milne (Service Manager, Newcastle Council) and Elaine Devaney (Service Manager, Looked After Children Gateshead Council)

Impact on foster carers

We have seen foster carers grow in confidence when singing and making music with children, they have learned more about why singing and music making can support resilience and help children develop trust, and they have even made their own song bags! The regularity of the weekly Family Learning sessions at Sage Gateshead and the way this creates an environment for foster carers to meet, talk, network and support one another should not be underestimated.

Impact on Looked After Children

As Local Authorities we now know more than ever, the importance of supporting access to creative activities and cultural venues for Looked After Children. Through the Loud and Clear project more than 49 have accessed weekly Family Learning music making sessions, and over 58 have attended holiday activities with older foster siblings. Local Authority staff have noticed children develop in confidence, musicality, rhythm and notably building bonds with their foster carer. Foster carers have also been able to continue to use songs and rhythms within their homes and in the community, which has enabled children to have consistency in different settings, in turn this has supported their development and confidence.

Impact upon the local authority

This project has without doubt attracted the attention of different departments within each Local Authority. The Fostering Teams have a clearer awareness of the impact and availability of music making opportunities for Looked After Children and how they can support foster carers to be part of this experience. They promote this to all foster carers looking after children in the pre-school age range. The fostering service are trying to promote this as being part of the core training offer to foster carers as they see this having a positive impact on the children who have attended.

Sage Gateshead has spent time advocating this project and their wider Looked After Children offer and as a result other departments are making links; from safeguarding to adoption teams. We are seeing the beginnings of a cultural shift in the way we think about creative and cultural opportunities for our Looked After Children as we have seen the direct positive impact that this can have on them and their foster carers – we are looking forward to the continued partnership working with Sage Gateshead and our neighbouring local authority (Newcastle/Gateshead).



Thank You!

Countless people deserve to be thanked for their contribution to this project. With a social pedagogical approach at its heart, this project began with a conversation between organisations committed to working with Looked After Children, young people and foster carers. The design, structure and implementation of the project has been held by the partners throughout and was brought to life by the project musicians and foster families.

We would like to give our sincere thanks to Gateshead and Newcastle Local Authorities, particularly Jill Little (Fostering Team Manager), Rick Telford (Individual Therapist), James Anderson (Corporate Parent Specialist), Su Brown (Fostering Resource Worker) and Heather Parkin (Fostering Resource Worker) for their unwavering support throughout and for their time and energy.

Our Steering Group have also given considerable guidance and provided expertise and time in abundance. Dawn Williams (Senior Manager, Bridge North East) and Sue Wressell (Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Aspire CAMHS).

Julia Partington (Early Years & Family Learning Strand Leader, Sage Gateshead) has been a constant presence throughout, supporting us to think about ways in which we can evidence outcomes and provide space for reflection and learning.

Our Project Musicians, Carol, Joe, Sofia and Klaire – team Loud and Clear – who brought the most invaluable mix of musicianship, commitment, enthusiasm, care and understanding to the project. Their approach provided a golden thread throughout.

Finally and most importantly we would like to extend our gratitude to the foster carers of Newcastle and Gateshead. We have learnt an incredible amount from you and continue to be amazed at who you are and what you do. We are very much looking forward to seeing you every week in the forthcoming year; shoes off and time for a cuppa!

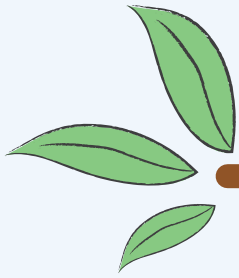
Jenny and Eleanor



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Introduction



Sage Gateshead

Sage Gateshead is a live music venue and a centre for music education in the North East of England. Our local, national and international concert programme runs all year round and incorporates all kinds of music. It is home to Royal Northern Sinfonia, Orchestra of The Sage Gateshead, and our Folkworks programme. Our extensive Learning and Participation programme enables everyone of any age or ability to become involved in music with 70% of Sage Gateshead's work taking place in the communities across the North East and Cumbria.

Newcastle Foster a Future

Newcastle Fostering is part of the Corporate Parenting Service, Children's Social Care within the Wellbeing, Care and Learning Directorate of Newcastle City Council.

Newcastle Fostering Service, also known as "Foster a Future", aims to provide a good quality, highly regarded service that inspires confidence in children/young people, carers, staff, managers and partner agencies. They provide and maintain foster care placements that enable looked after children to most fully achieve their personal, social, developmental, education and employment potential.

Gateshead Council Fostering Team

The Fostering Service is part of Gateshead Council's Looked after Children's Service based within the Learning and Children Department. The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to safeguard and promote the welfare, safety and individual needs of looked after children, through the provision of a high quality fostering placements, where the child's health needs are met, educational achievement is promoted and by the council fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities each looked after child is enabled to achieve his/her full potential.

The overall aim of Gateshead Council Fostering Service is to provide, develop and deliver a comprehensive and high quality service to meet the lifelong needs of children and their families/ usual carers.

Newcastle Aspire Team

Aspire CAMHS is the NHS part of a multiagency team of specialist services for Looked After Children in Newcastle. As a small team of mental health practitioners, they provide assessment and treatment for children in foster care and residential care who are having difficulties and in addition, work to promote good mental health for all Looked After Children through the provision of consultation, advice and training to carers and other professionals involved with the LAC system.

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Background &
Context

Loud and Clear was first established in 2009, funded through national government funded programme, Sing Up. By ring fencing funding, Sing Up established projects across England for primary aged children in challenging circumstances, including Looked After Children. Further Sing Up funding specifically focused on promoting the well being of Looked After Children through singing and was supported by the National Children's Bureau. In both instances, CoMusica (part of Sage Gateshead's Learning and Participation department), successfully secured funding to work in partnership with Local Authorities in the North East to develop singing opportunities for primary aged Looked After Children.

The partnership with Newcastle Aspire and Foster a Future teams began at this point, initially starting as pilot activity focused on looked after children of primary age.

In 2011 Loud and Clear became a Project within Sage Gateshead and Eleanor Mooney was appointed as Project Leader. A three year Looked After Children strategy was also developed, with Loud and Clear at its heart, signed off by Sage Gateshead's Board of Directors.

Through dialogue with existing local authority partners (Newcastle), and a newer partner (Gateshead) it was agreed that an early years project, focusing upon sessions for foster carers and Looked After Children aged 0-5 should be developed.

Funding for the Loud and Clear Early Years Family Learning project that this report discusses was awarded in 2012 by Youth Music, the leading UK children's charity using music to transform the lives of disadvantaged young people.



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The Approach



Methods

Throughout its eleven month duration and in the interests of providing as in-depth an evaluation as possible, a concurrent research enquiry took place as part of the running of this project. This enquiry has made use of qualitative research methods in order to gather multiple data relating to the impact and outcomes of the project at every stage. These methods include: reflective diaries kept by project musicians and participating foster carers, questionnaires for foster carers, focus group conversations with foster carers and steering group colleagues from the participating partner organisations, unstructured interviews with foster carers and musicians and participant observations in music sessions conducted by the lead evaluator.

Guiding principles – Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues and Social Pedagogy

Chambers and Petrie's Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues¹ (2008) heavily influenced both the design and implementation of this project. Taking the combined principles of education and care of Social Pedagogy as its basis, this framework suggests guidelines for artistic and creative practitioners working with Looked After Children, aiming to ensure that the work is of the best quality and is enacted in the best interests of the potentially vulnerable children participating.

The framework was central to the design of the Loud and Clear Early Years Family Learning project, from the initial stage of applying for funding and the consequent project design was mapped to it through consideration of:

- The principles and values of Social Pedagogy and the practical approach to the project by the musicians. These include: aspiring to provide the best for children, build their confidence and open up opportunities for them, ensuring safe boundaries, working with head, hands and heart, providing the highest quality musical experiences possible whilst remaining accessible, partnership working with carers and partner organisation staff and engaging in reflective practice.
- Identifying what workforce knowledge and skills amongst musicians, foster carers and partner organization staff needed development and how we could meet and respond to those needs within this project through the provision of accredited training and opportunities for professional networks to develop.
- Planning and implementing the ongoing evaluation of the project to ensure that it consistently reflected the quality indicators for work with looked after children as presented in the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues.

¹ This learning framework for artists working with Looked After Children aged 0-19 was jointly developed by Helen Chambers, Principle Officer at the National Children's Bureau and Professor Pat Petrie of the Centre for Understanding Social Pedagogy at the Institute of Education, University of London in 2008. Its development was funded by the Arts Council England and Creative Partnerships for the purposes of exploring how creativity might be embedded in the lives of Looked After Children. For further information, the framework can be accessed via the following link: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/561457/abbreviated_learning_framework_for_artist_pedagogues.pdf

Sage Gateshead's Early Years pedagogical approach & the EYFS

In addition, the content of music sessions and the design of the foster carer training sessions were influenced and enacted in accordance with Sage Gateshead's early years pedagogy. This particular pedagogical approach utilises musical learning as a tool for developing a range of life skills and to support the development of the whole child. Our approach closely corresponds the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)² statutory framework to ensure and provide the following:

- Quality and consistency so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind.
- A secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly.
- Partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers.
- Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported. (www.foundationyears.org.uk, 2012)

We recognise, in accordance with the EYFS, that all areas of early learning and development are important and inter-connected and have an existing strong base of qualitative evidence within our own historical programme of work and from external research sources to suggest that music making, especially singing in the early years, supports the three prime areas of learning and development:

- **Communication and language** – particularly supported by singing, rhyme and vocal play.
- **Physical development** – particularly supported by dance and movement to music and developing pulse and rhythm skills.
- **Personal, social and emotional development** – particularly supported by making music with others, turn-taking, sharing, listening and simple song writing activities such as the incorporation of children's own creative ideas into familiar songs.

Within the Loud and Clear Early Years Family Learning project, the specially trained project musicians enabled children and carers to explore and investigate music making freely through hands-on play and group participation in order to:

- Encourage and value children's creative ideas and contributions.
- Enable continuous engagement in musical learning.
- Support areas of challenge.
- Celebrate achievements.
- Encourage and develop children's confidence, both musical and social.
- Support the ongoing development of positive and playful carer/child relationships.

The shared central tenet of Sage Gateshead's early years pedagogy and of this project is that young children and adults alike learn most successfully when they are enjoying themselves, having fun and are supported in a positive way that allows for learner agency and adventurousness.

² The Early Years foundation stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework that sets the standards that all Early Years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children are ready for school and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life.

The revised, simpler framework for the EYFS was published on 27 March 2012, for implementation from 1 September 2012.

(DfE website, 2012: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/a0068102/early-years-foundation-stage-eyfs>)



Ethical considerations

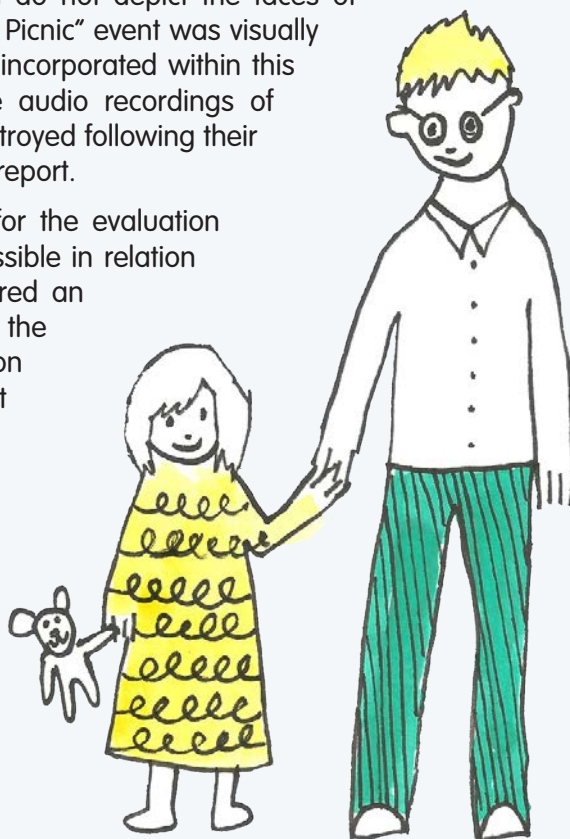
In a project of this nature, there were many ethical and practical issues to consider, particularly as the evaluation research involved children both not of an age to be able to give informed consent and identified as vulnerable. Permissions for participating in both the project and the related evaluation were secured via consent forms completed by the foster carers. Local authority partners advised that as Looked After Children would always attend the music sessions with their foster carers, this would be sufficient in terms of securing permission for the participation of the children, thus negating the need to seek permissions from relevant social workers.

The Approach

Above all, we were aware of the crucial importance of ensuring that participating children and adults were not negatively affected or harmed in any way by either the content of the project or the collection of data for the purposes of evaluation and the dissemination of this report. Safeguarding of the children was of the highest priority and as such, all individuals present at activity involving Looked After Children including musicians, partner staff and project evaluation team members were CRB checked in accordance with Sage Gateshead's child protection policy. Furthermore, retaining the anonymity of children and foster carers has been essential throughout the project for reasons of child protection and in accordance, all foster carers and children have been anonymised in this report through the attribution of pseudonyms and within all other related reference material.

There has been no use during the project of any video recording and the very few photographic records of project activity gathered do not depict the faces of children or adults. The final summer "Teddy Bears Picnic" event was visually recorded through the medium of the illustrations incorporated within this document as opposed to photographs and the audio recordings of focus group conversations will be immediately destroyed following their transcription and the publication of this evaluation report.

Other ethical considerations included the need for the evaluation team to remain as reflexive and unbiased as possible in relation to the research process and findings. This required an ongoing awareness of the potential effects that the presence of a participant observer may have had on the other participants' behaviour and the resultant findings. The use of multiple methods as described above to gather data from the perspectives of project musicians, foster carers and project partners has allowed for comparison of individual accounts to be compared and contrasted with the observations of the lead evaluator. This has provided a multi-faceted overview of the subjective experiences and overall impacts of the project, providing assurances of validity along with scope for generalizations about the effects of the project to be made for the purposes of this report.



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Project Aims & Objectives

The aims and objectives of the project were agreed by all partners at the point of application for funding. These were rooted not only in an aspiration to support the musical development of Looked After Children and carers, but also to support the personal, social and emotional development of the children and their relationships with others. The project aimed to:

Improve the quality and standards of music delivery for children and young people

Embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project

Improve the personal, social and emotional development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity

Improve the communication, language and literacy development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity

Build emotional bonds between Looked After Children and their foster parents and siblings, foster carers, and guardians through the medium of music making

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Project Structure

Steering Group meetings

Four meetings throughout the year brought together key partners from Gateshead Council and Foster a Future & Aspire teams at Newcastle City Council with Sage Gateshead staff & strategic partners from Bridge North East.

The narrative of the project was shared at each meeting and was regarded by all as a key thread of reflection throughout the year. The sharing of the narrative enabled the steering group team to identify areas of celebration and challenge as well as the ongoing learning and this was underpinned by a positive, collaborative and supportive approach. Steering Group meetings also provided a platform for the team to look toward future plans & possibilities of furthering partnerships, ensuring that the legacy and sustainability of the work was considered from the outset.

Weekly Early Years Foster Family Learning sessions

Newcastle

- Friday mornings led by Alexandra & Anna (Project Musicians)
- Figures below show unique participants across the 30 session. Individuals may have attended one or more session:
- 30 sessions
- 28 participants (17 LAC and 11 foster carers)
- 3 staff members from local authority partners
- 2 Brazilian music educators who visited as part of the British Council funded exchange between Sage Gateshead and Guri Santa Marcelina, Sao Paulo
- North East Arts Council manager visit
- 1 Song Book published

Gateshead

- Monday afternoons led by Phil & Sian (Project Musicians) or Kirsten (Project Leader)³
- Figures below show unique participants across the 30 session. Individuals may have attended one or more session:
- 30 sessions
- 21 participants (11 LAC and 10 foster carers)
- 3 staff members from local authority partners
- 5 individuals on Sage Gateshead work placements

³ Musicians' names have been changed for reasons of anonymity.

These weekly music making groups for foster carers of under 5's were delivered in partnership with each local authority. Partner staff from each local authority were present at every session providing both key information for the musicians and pastoral support for the participants.

The pairing of musicians not only provided professional development & pedagogical support for staff, but in the unlikely event that a musician was absent at short notice, continuity was ensured and preserved for the participants. Two musicians also enabled a more personal approach for participants who required additional support without disrupting the overall session.

The 90 minute sessions were structured to include an hours' worth of music making alongside built in time for the foster carers to network, chat, support and get to know one another. This element was key to the success of the two groups, helping to develop and strengthen support networks for the foster carers and underpinned by the ethos of the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues.

Song bags containing finger puppets, a song book, CDs and percussion instruments (that can be shaken, scraped and tapped) were gifted to foster carers at the end of the project. Designed to be a stand-alone resource, and underpinned by the training (see below), Song Bags were given to enable foster carers to continue music making in the home with any LAC and their own children.

Training for foster carers and staff partners

Newcastle and Gateshead

Figures below show unique participants across the 3 sessions. Individuals may have attended one or more session:

22 foster carers & local authority staff

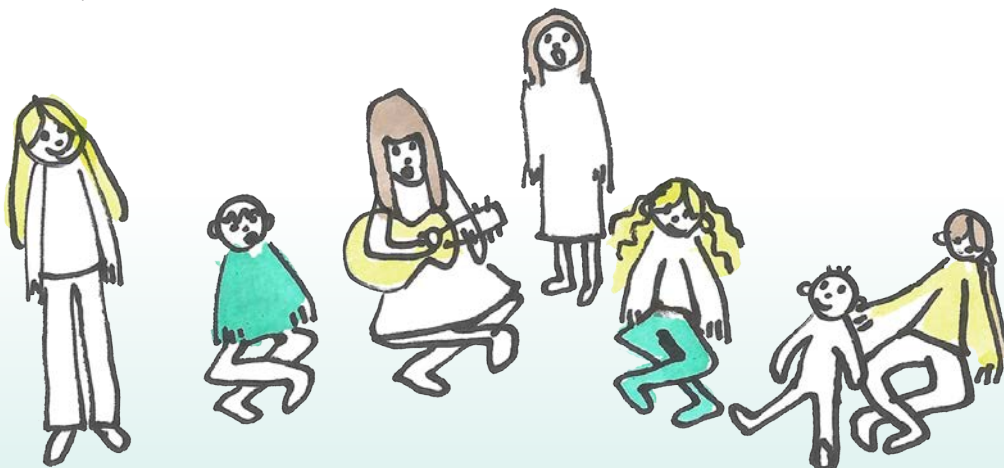
Three very successful training sessions were offered to foster carers and all adults involved in the lives of LAC from each local authority. These sessions were designed and led by Sage Gateshead Early Years Strand Leader, Julia Partington, supported by the project leader, Eleanor Mooney:

- [March '13 – The Benefits of Music Making with Under 5's](#)
- [April '13 – The Early Years Musical Tool Belt!](#)
- [June '13 – Find Your Rhythm](#)

The sessions were attended by foster carers, respite carers, social workers, local adoption services staff, adoptive parents, local authority staff & Sage Gateshead staff.

Participants gained knowledge of the theory and research that supported the practical elements of the weekly sessions, were given ideas of how to make & find their own musical props in the home and developed their own personal musical skill & confidence.

In addition, the content of each session was mapped to the Children Workforce Development Council Foster Carer Training Standards – enabling foster carers to easily align their new skills and knowledge with their ongoing training and professional development.



Holiday Activities

Newcastle and Gateshead

Figures show unique participants across the 3 holiday activities and Teddy Bear's Picnic. Individuals may have attended one or more activity:

58 participants (36 LAC and 22 foster carers)

Held at Sage Gateshead and Gateshead Old Town Hall, three half term family events were open to foster families with under 5s, older siblings and all family members. Activities included music activity for all the family, junk percussion making, introduction to the ukulele & face painting.

Participants included our regular weekly attendees, respite carers, kinship carers, friends and other family members & local authority staff. They proved an excellent networking opportunity, bringing together foster carers & staff from both Local Authorities on a regular basis.

Foster Carer fortnight activity event – turned into Teddy Bear's Picnic – August '13

Through dialogue with partners it was agreed that provision for Foster Carer Fortnight should be changed into a holiday activity. The Teddy Bear's Picnic was hosted at Sage Gateshead for foster families during the summer holidays. This proved a positive point of contact with our participants, both existing and new, between regular delivery.



Loud and Clear team meetings

Four Sage Gateshead musician team meetings were held during the project, bringing together project musicians, project management staff and the lead evaluator at regular points across the year.

Underpinned by the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues, each meeting was structured to ensure time for team reflection. Space was given to the management and logistics of the project as well as to the delivery of activity. Following the 'Head, Heart, Hand' model of the Artist Pedagogue Learning Framework, the team were encouraged to reflect upon what they had noticed in each session and how this informed their practice. The lead evaluator also supported them to draw from their reflective journals to inform these conversations.

Celebration event

This will be held at Sage Gateshead in October 2013 half term, to bring together participants & partner staff from both Local Authorities along with key strategic partners to mark our achievements throughout the year, reflect on our experiences and look towards the next phase of our joint project.

6

Findings

Impact

The impacts of the project have been identified via the following means:

- Project musician reflective diaries
- Foster carer reflective diaries
- Participant observations throughout course of project of lead evaluator
- Foster carer focus group conversation
- Steering group focus group conversations – including representatives from partner organisations
- Informal conversations amongst all project participants/partners
- Feedback forms following project activity (music sessions and training for foster carers and local authority staff)

They are presented in this section in succinct form and the key impacts are further elucidated through the use of case study examples.

Impact upon Looked After Children

There is much evidence to suggest that the project impacted positively upon the Looked After Children involved, particularly those whose placements were long enough to enable them to participate for the duration of the project. This was evidenced within all the sources listed above, with all of the adults involved keenly attuned to assessing and reflecting upon what effects the project might be having on the children.

In broad terms the key impacts of the project on Looked After Children noted within the evidence base include:

- Increased confidence to contribute to and engage with group music making
- Increased confidence and ability to verbalize and/or sing within sessions
- Increased ability to focus for extended lengths of time within music sessions
- The building of playful relationships with carers, musicians and other children through musical activity
- Recognition of established routines within the music sessions that could be transferred with positive effect into the home environment
- Increased response to sung instructions

It is possible that the examples of specific children's development commented on and recorded by the participating adults might have been a result of the passage of time, care given within the foster home, other influencing factors or, most likely, a combination of all of these, rather than directly resulting solely from participation in the project but there is qualitative anecdotal evidence contained within the sources to strongly suggest that the content of the project had positive benefits for the children involved.

The case study below illustrates these benefits in the case of one particular child with similar developmental patterns occurring amongst a number of participating children and evidenced within the data.

George was involved in the project from the very beginning and throughout, attending the music sessions regularly with his carer and foster siblings. George has been identified as having speech, language and communication needs although he is able to communicate his own needs effectively through gesture, his carer describing him as “a master of mime”. At the beginning of the project he was 16 months old and turned two during the course of the project. Jane, the foster carer with whom he attended the music sessions, has looked after him since birth and they have an established, loving relationship.

The musicians observed in the first session that George seemed happy to be there, but struggled to concentrate on the activities, preferring instead to explore the room. His carer noted in her reflective diary entry that “he wanted to get into mischief”.

The lead musician Kirsten noted that he appeared uncomfortable with direct attention from individual adults or the whole group and such attention and direct attempts to engage him would result in his becoming further detached from the group music making. She also observed that he would at times make a great deal of verbal sound but that this was not in the form of language and these sounds tended to be directed at his own reflection in the mirror affixed to the wall or used to indicate his desire to ‘get hold of’ the musicians’ instruments by grabbing them.



The musicians worked in partnership with Jane to allow George to participate in the sessions at his own pace, allowing him to explore the room and ‘dip in and out’ of activity as he wished. A turning point occurred within the first term of the project when George discovered that an entertaining game of ‘hide and seek’ could be played using the long drapes within the music room.

He initially engaged in this game with his own carer and then later with other carers, musicians and partner staff present within the group. This became a joyful and humorous aspect of the sessions and provided a bridge for George from his chosen position on the periphery of the group to joining in with them by increments each week. It was noted by the musicians as a result that he particularly enjoyed activities with game-like, playful qualities and so more of these, like musical games of ‘peek-a-boo’ using the drapes and later, scarves, were incorporated into the sessions as a result.

George’s response to the musical games, along with the building of a playful relationship with musician Phil was transformative in terms of his focus and engagement within sessions. Phil notes in his diary that by mid-December George displayed “a little less frenetic energy this week, smiled lots and enjoyed the ukulele”.

¹ This is a pseudonym as is the name ‘Jane’ for George’s foster carer.

Following the Christmas break, Jane and George missed a couple of weeks, resulting in them not attending a session for over a month. However, Jane had begun to use the songs and activities at home with George and his foster sibling. On returning to the weekly sessions she records:

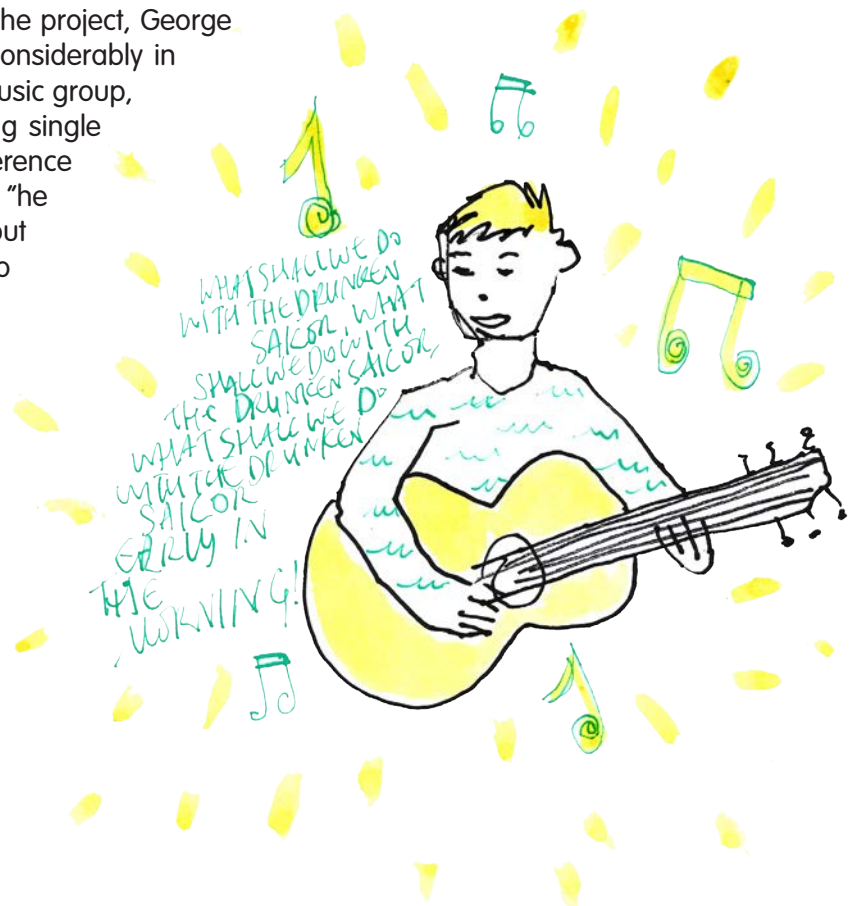
"George could do all the actions to the hello song and the kangaroo song. He loves the attention of everyone singing and watching him. He claps himself after he has finished."

She also verbally reported to the musicians that she had been using songs learned in sessions to calm George down when required and this had been most effective. She and her partner had also begun to use the 'walk and stop' song when they were walking along the street to encourage George to stop when required, something she had previously struggled to teach him and which was a safety concern given his penchant for running.

George continued to increase his participation and his ability to focus for periods of time in sessions early in the New Year and following the February half term. Clear evidence of his having built positive relationships with the project musicians and other children was noted in musician and carer diaries and by the lead evaluator during session observations. This was demonstrated on his arrival at the first music session after the half term holiday when he strode up to the musicians to give them warm hugs. Jane reported that he had done the same to staff on his return to nursery and she believed that he had missed those staff and the musicians during his week off. At this point in the project George's playful friendship with musician Phil was going strong. George began to spend long sections of the music sessions sat close to Phil rather than moving around the room, often putting his own face very close to Phil's in order to gently play with the guitar as opposed to grabbing at it (although a rogue bourbon biscuit was playfully 'posted' into Phil's guitar by a highly amused George during one session at this point).

Jane reported evidence of George's enjoyment of and sense of affinity with the music sessions, telling the musicians that he recognised the Sage Gateshead building and would tap his knees in the style of the hello song every time they drove past the building, regardless of whether or not that was their destination.

By March and for the remainder of the project, George was appearing to have increased considerably in confidence within and without the music group, beginning to speak and even to sing single words in order to indicate his preference of activities in sessions. Phil notes: "he isn't putting the words together but he is mimicking anything you do physically and verbally". George also demonstrated a comprehensive memory of the sequential format and routines of the sessions and the contents of the musicians' bags of kit, deciding on behalf of the group which bag they should look in next in order to ensure that his favourite activities were covered within sessions. He also confidently began to lead and direct the other children and adults when it came to tidying up at the end of activities and of each session.

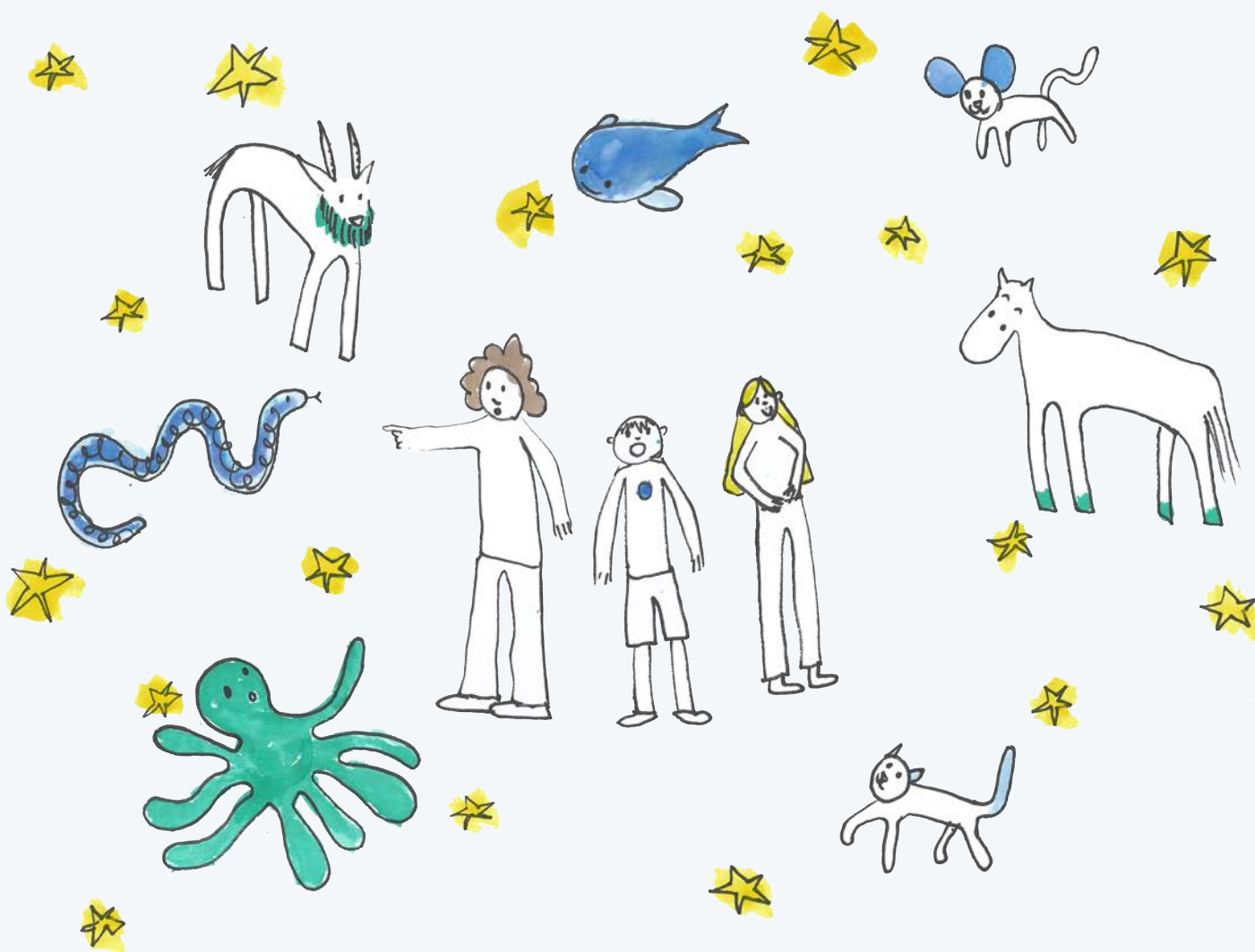


Impact upon foster carers

The project was open to all foster carers looking after children aged 0-5. Carers were invited and encouraged to attend the music making sessions between placements if they wished to.

By attending the weekly music making sessions foster carers were enabled to support the children in their care to develop musical skills such as:

- Listening skills including awareness of pitch, timbre/tone, dynamics/volume, beat/pulse and tempo/speed
- Pulse and rhythm awareness
- Vocal skills such as singing, playing with vocal sound and speech confidence
- Basic pre-instrumental skills
- Simple song writing skills



Within the foster carer and musicians' reflective diaries and the foster carer and steering group focus group conversations, there is strong evidence to suggest that the project has had several positive impacts upon foster carers. These impacts were both professional and personal and were felt to result from both participating in weekly music making sessions and attending the three training sessions.

In the foster carer focus group in the final month of the project, carers from both Newcastle and Gateshead were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences of being involved in the project and hopeful that funding would be secured to enable the project to continue.

In the focus group discussion and in reflective diaries, foster carers shared that participating in the project increased their professional skills in the following ways:

- They have been enabled to incorporate songs and musical activity regularly into their foster care role
- They have increased knowledge of the potential links between music and children's early development
- They found music making to be an effective way to interact, model positive behaviours and build attachment with the children in their care
- They have found music making an effective way to quickly establish important domestic routines for the children
- Meeting regularly with other foster carers in their local area, some new and some familiar, enabled the building and strengthening of supportive professional networks and personal friendships
- It was shared on multiple occasions during the project that foster carers and Looked After Children can sometimes experience stigma and feel isolated in mainstream under 5s groups. They greatly valued the opportunity to attend activity solely for Looked After Children with fellow carers who understood the situation and needs of the children in their care and the challenges they faced
- Foster carers valued the opportunity to reflect and discuss their own professional development in relation to the project through the focus group discussion. (It was observed from their reflective diaries and informal conversations that they are primarily accustomed to reflecting on children's development rather than appraising their own thoughts, feelings and professional learning)
- The music sessions were felt to have a calming and stress reducing effect not just on the children, but also for the foster carers themselves.



Whilst the primary focus from the perspective of the foster carers in terms of reflections on development tended to be on the children rather than themselves, the musicians were careful to note changes they observed in the responses, attitudes, skills and musical confidence of the foster carers throughout the project.

Kirsten noted that within one of the groups, the activity was regularly disrupted by "lots of talking" amongst the foster carers during the initial weeks but that as the first month passed and the children's engagement with the activities increased, carers too became more engaged with the music activity and confined their discussions to the breaks within sessions during which she began to notice them networking, building friendships and positively supporting newer foster carers with advice and by sharing common experiences.

Foster Carer Case Study

Liz⁵

A new foster carer, Liz joined the project at its inception, which coincided with her first placements. Although she was relatively new to foster caring herself, Liz has family members who are also foster carers so she had a wealth of knowledge and considerable experience of foster care as a result, even at this early stage of her professional development.

Liz came to the first music workshop with two looked after children, Bobby, aged 4 and Harriet, 2 weeks old. She was noted by musicians to be very keen on developing her professional skills as a foster carer, open to all information they shared with her and engaged in the music sessions with a keen interest in why and how they were leading particular activities. However, initially she shared some concern about her own singing voice and musical skills, both of which she perceived to be deficit.

Liz attended all three training sessions offered as part of the project. She had to make special arrangements within her own household routine in order to be able to do this, showing her recognition of the importance of attending all the training on offer and commitment to the project. She also rarely missed any of the weekly music sessions and quickly became an advocate for them, strongly encouraging other local foster carers to attend. As a result of attending the weekly sessions, Liz took the initiative to make her own song bag to use at home with the children in her care months before this was suggested in the first training session.

"A massive thank you for the wonderful sessions...Every session was AMAZING. We enjoyed every single one. I'm going to miss coming every week." – Excerpt from a thank you card given to musician Anna at the final session"

As the project progressed, so did Liz's belief in music as beneficial for children's early development and also her confidence in her own

"It's nice meeting the other carers and musicians who are very friendly and supportive' – Foster carer questionnaire response"

abilities to make music with the children she looked after. By the second term of the project her reflective diary shows that she was making music a daily part of domestic life, singing to Harriet to soothe her and to Bobby to help positively manage his sometimes challenging behaviour. She had also taught a wide range of songs and activities learned in the sessions to her husband to enable him to use them to support the children's routine and the development of his own positive relationships with them. Liz then began to share with the musicians, verses of the songs that she had written herself in response to the preferences of the children in her care and also told them how she was now leading music activity within a toddler group that she attends so that "other children and families can benefit".

By the time of the focus group discussion towards the end of the project, Liz's confidence in utilizing her newfound musical abilities clearly matched her enthusiasm, a marked contrast in balance when compared with her confidence at the beginning of the project. This was further evidenced in her comment during the focus group meeting (that was echoed by a number of other carers present) that she will now sing anywhere and does so regularly if it supports and engages the children and they even have an "Asda song" for making the weekly shopping routine more fun for them all.

⁵ Not her real name. The names 'Bobby' & 'Harriet' are also pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants

Training for foster carers and local authority partner staff

One area of the project that was felt by the musicians, partner organisations and the foster carers themselves to have had considerable impact was the series of training offered to all participating carers and local authority partner staff described in section 5 of this report.

These three practical training sessions were well attended with foster carers from both the Newcastle and Gateshead groups attending all three sessions. It was the mapping of the training for to the Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care Guidance that encouraged foster carers to attend in the first instance in the knowledge that there would be professional benefits and learning to be gained through attendance.

Feedback was gathered through evaluation forms at the end of each training session and this was 100% positive with no suggestions for how the training might be improved upon. As referenced above, there was evidence in the foster carer diaries that attendance at both the group music sessions and training enabled them to recognize the potential benefits of using music to support the children in daily life whilst also providing them with the practical and theoretical knowledge to do so.



CAN YOU HIDE YOUR NOSE?

Foster carer and local authority support staff training session written feedback:

What aspects of the training have made you think?

- "Training has brought the project alive for me!"
- "This has given me ideas to use as a resource worker for individual children"
- "Wow! All of it seriously, all information shared was very relevant"
- "Links to neuroscience helped me make sense of it"

What do you feel you have learned?

- "Belief in music helping communication and the brain"
- "Benefits of music for routines, soothing, especially for LAC"
- "It all felt very positive and it is evident how singing/music can help build relationships. Really good sessions – thank you."
- "Singing is very important and fun"

What will you do now as a result of this training?

- "I will make a song bag"
- "Explain and advocate for the work"
- "All of it. My role is supporting carers in managing behaviours – the song bag will work with some of these children"
- "Use singing to help with trust"
- "Use songs for routine, making a list of 'my' songs, I'm going to develop a song bag! Thank you very much, really worthwhile session & I'm looking forward to the next!"
- "I will bring this back to the Adoption Team and talk about how we can start making use of it."

Impact upon musicians:

Three of the four musicians working on this project had over five years experience of music leading with children aged under 5. The remaining musician, Phil had recently graduated from Sage Gateshead's Advanced Traineeship programme and though a skilled music leader and multi-instrumentalist, this was his first experience of working with an early years group. His reflective diary along with the observations of the lead evaluator show strong evidence of his increased skill and confidence of working with very young children.

The opportunity that the project gave the musicians to work in pairs was felt to have significant benefits for the quality, consistency and the smooth running of the sessions, and also for the musicians' professional development. Musician Alexandra commented:

"It has been an amazing project to work on so far. It is a real bonus as musicians that we can work as a pair. This allows us to develop our practice by giving us the opportunity to watch each other work and share repertoire. It also has the advantage of giving us the chance to support the children and look for opportunities for progression within the group." – From email communication with lead evaluator

All four musicians leading music sessions within the project cited specific areas in which their practice was positively developed:

- Increased understanding of the foster carer role and issues commonly faced by carers, Looked After Children and local authority partner staff
- Increased sensitivity to individual needs of children and carers within music sessions. The musicians reported feeling more attuned to the groups within this project as a direct result of this project's emphasis on attachment and the time factored in to allow for conversation and shared reflection. They felt that this enabled them to develop closer relationships with adult and child participants than would have been the case in other early years music projects they had worked on
- Further developing their capacity for reflective practice through the keeping of reflective diaries
- Increased knowledge of attachment theory and how music might support children's attachment to primary carers through training led by and professional relationships built with partner staff



"I cannot stress the importance of this session for each individual that comes along... As a musician I have found every experience of this project invaluable to my practice as well as to my own personal development. I have heard heartbreaking stories and seen children move on to more hopeful stages in their lives, being emotionally involved in each life I am allowed to be a part of. To see how music can build confidence, develop speech, new skills and strengthen relationships and to feel that I have been a part of that, is nothing short of humbling and a wonderful affirmation of the work we do."
– Alexandra

"I now find it easier to establish relationships with the carers/staff in any setting, and I feel I'm more flexible and louder in my practice, accepting "chaos" and going a lot more "with the flow". I'm also getting better at allowing one to one moments to happen in a group situation (it's easier when there are two musicians as you don't lose the rest of the group's attention, but I find I'm more attentive and sensitive to this in other settings too)." – Anna

The reflections of the musicians on their impact of the project on their own practice and professional development is supported by feedback given by the foster carers and local authority staff in the focus group discussions. Foster carers and partner staff wanted to highlight the following features of the musicians' work on the project:

- Professionally confident in all sessions – skilled at both music leading and at supporting both adult and child participants
- Inclusive and accepting of all children and confident in the context of challenges presented by the wide range of special educational, physical and emotional needs amongst the participating children
- Friendly, interested and encouraging towards carers whilst maintaining a professional relationship
- Quick to recognise and remember individual carers and children for the duration of the project and to value their individual contributions. Foster carers felt that this treatment was rare in their experience of other projects of regular group activity

"Working with the LAC under 5's foster carers has opened my eyes so much to the amazing task they have to manage both on a personal level for the carers but also a wider level for the local authority staff. More philosophically I suppose I've noticed how much foster carers are unsung local heroes. Listening to the way they speak about how music making has helped the children deal with transition and short term placement is really refreshing and I suppose the more experienced foster carers are really suitable people to comment with such objectivity. As a musician working in the community I think my sense of empathy and patience has improved massively as a result of working on the project." – Phil

Organisational Impacts

The partnerships between Sage Gateshead and the participating local authority departments and their staff within the planning, application for funding and the ongoing steering of the project have been agreed by all to have been strengthened and enhanced as a result of this project.

In the final steering group meeting focused conversations took place to examine in detail the project's organizational impact. Partner staff identified the following outcomes as a result of this project:

- Stronger networks emerging between foster carers – established foster carers supporting new foster carers
- Foster carer support workers have had the opportunity to see development of carer/child relationships and children's learning on a weekly basis and in the longer-term as a result of attending and participating in music sessions
- The link between the training element of the project and the CWDC development standards has been useful and provided coherence
- Increased profile of music within relevant local authority departments and a recognition of its potential benefits for the wellbeing and development of Looked After Children
- Shared learning between partners, including the two Local Authorities including an opportunity to compare and contrast the ways in which the two teams work
- Sage Gateshead now has increased and detailed experience of the needs of and transition points within the lives of looked after children and foster carers and how our work can support them with regard to adoption, return to birth families, kinship carers and long term placements

7

Meeting Challenges
& Lessons Learned**Meeting Challenges**

From the perspective of leading the project, the Sage Gateshead team and the steering group acknowledge that the most prominent challenge was to provide regular, consistently high quality project content within the allocated budget. However, the project leaders, lead evaluator and partner organisation staff are in agreement that the project has been extremely rich in terms of content and outcomes considering the parameters of the budget.

Clear and consistent communication across the project and between partner organisations occasionally presented a challenge due to the sheer volume of workloads and differing methods of communication and advertising between organisations and foster carers.

In the focus group conversations, foster carers were invited to suggest ways in which the project might be improved upon for the future. These have been taken into account in the planning of the second stage of the project and included:

**Lessons learned**

On reflection of the experience of delivering and tracking the project over the past 12 months, the musicians, project leadership team, lead evaluator and steering group team have identified the following areas as significant in terms of learning and for future consideration and exploration:



Communication – it was challenging for information regarding sessions and training events to always be successfully disseminated via local authority newsletters.

Recruitment – of ‘harder to reach’ foster carers – some carers we spoke to were adamant that attendance to at least one training session should have been made mandatory to familiarize them with the importance of music in the early years and to encourage foster carers who may have been initially reluctant to join a project focused on music making to join in the regular weekly sessions.

Access to weekly sessions – foster carers reported that contact time with birth families could often prohibit their regular attendance to sessions and felt the option of joint Newcastle/Gateshead foster carer sessions held both in the morning and afternoon would enable them to attend most weeks.

More time – within the focus group conversation carers shared that they valued the break times to chat with other carers and to build networks but that more time might have been allocated within sessions for this. They also suggested that a longer session would allow for the incorporation of more of the developmental and educational theory that was introduced in the training to be made explicit and discussed in the weekly sessions.

Attendance at music sessions by adoptive parents – foster carers felt that this would support adoptive parents to see for themselves the children’s responses to the music and to better understand why the foster carers advocate musical activity for individual children. It was felt that this would also enable adoptive parents to effectively use resources such as song bags and songbooks that foster families passed along to them to support the children’s transition.

Continuity for the looked after child – the importance of putting in place elements such as song bags and song books that can accompany the child when they leave foster care or move on from a placement so that the music making acts as a familiar bridge between stages of their journey

Networking time for foster carers – reinforced by the success of our session structure and the focus group

Impact of training – building confidence, knowledge and advocacy of the work, and attracting new departments within local authority partnerships to move our work forwards

The importance of informal conversations between adults and feeling relaxed within the setting

The importance of the Sage Gateshead Loud and Clear team being present, recognisable and familiar throughout the year in different situations which were both project and non project related across both Local Authorities. This helped bring not only the project to life but Sage Gateshead as a positive, constant presence and resource for Looked After Children and foster carers

8

The Legacy



A main priority of the project leadership and steering group teams was to ensure that this project would have a lasting legacy that ensured the impacts discussed in section 6 of this report would have potential benefits for Looked After Children in the care of participating foster carers long into the future.

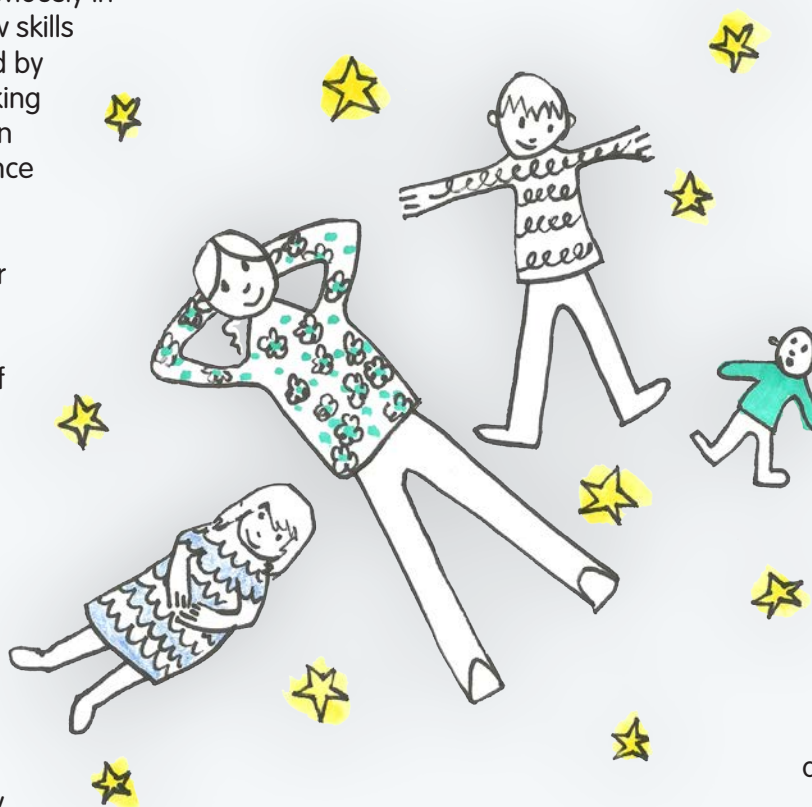
Here are some of the elements of the project that will ensure its legacy:

Song bags – To stay with the foster carer and partner staff: The contents of the bags can be added to as the foster carer's music practice develops and to reflect the interests of children in their care. Their main purpose is to equip foster carers to embed music making into their daily domestic lives, enriching the development of relationships through music between foster carer and looked after child and also between foster siblings within the foster family environment.

Song book – These stay with the Looked After Children and was written by the biological daughter of one of the foster carers involved in this project as a direct result of her family's participation in an earlier Sage Gateshead Loud and Clear project. Her original idea was to keep a written and illustrated record of the favourite songs of Looked After Children being cared for by her mother. It was her hope that through the book, the child's 'forever family' would be able to know and sing their favourite songs. This instinctive act on the part of this little girl would provide familiarity for young children as they adjusted to new circumstances and was recognised by the LAC project leader as a meaningful and powerful resource to roll out to all children involved in this project as a keepsake of their involvement.

New professional skills and knowledge

– As discussed previously in this report, the new skills and theory learned by professionals working with LAC resulted in increased confidence to be creative and make music with the children in their care for years to come. In addition, as a direct result of their involvement with this project, the project musicians also attended training on attachment theory led by external partners and received training on evaluation and reflective diary keeping.



Relationships – Through the project, relationships have been forged and strengthened between foster carers and children in their care, as peers and colleagues, with musicians, new foster carers and local authority support staff, musicians. Improved links and communication now exist for the future between both Newcastle and Gateshead fostering teams and new partnerships within both Local Authorities have been brokered (e.g. adoption teams and virtual schools resulting in more opportunities for LAC in those local authority areas).

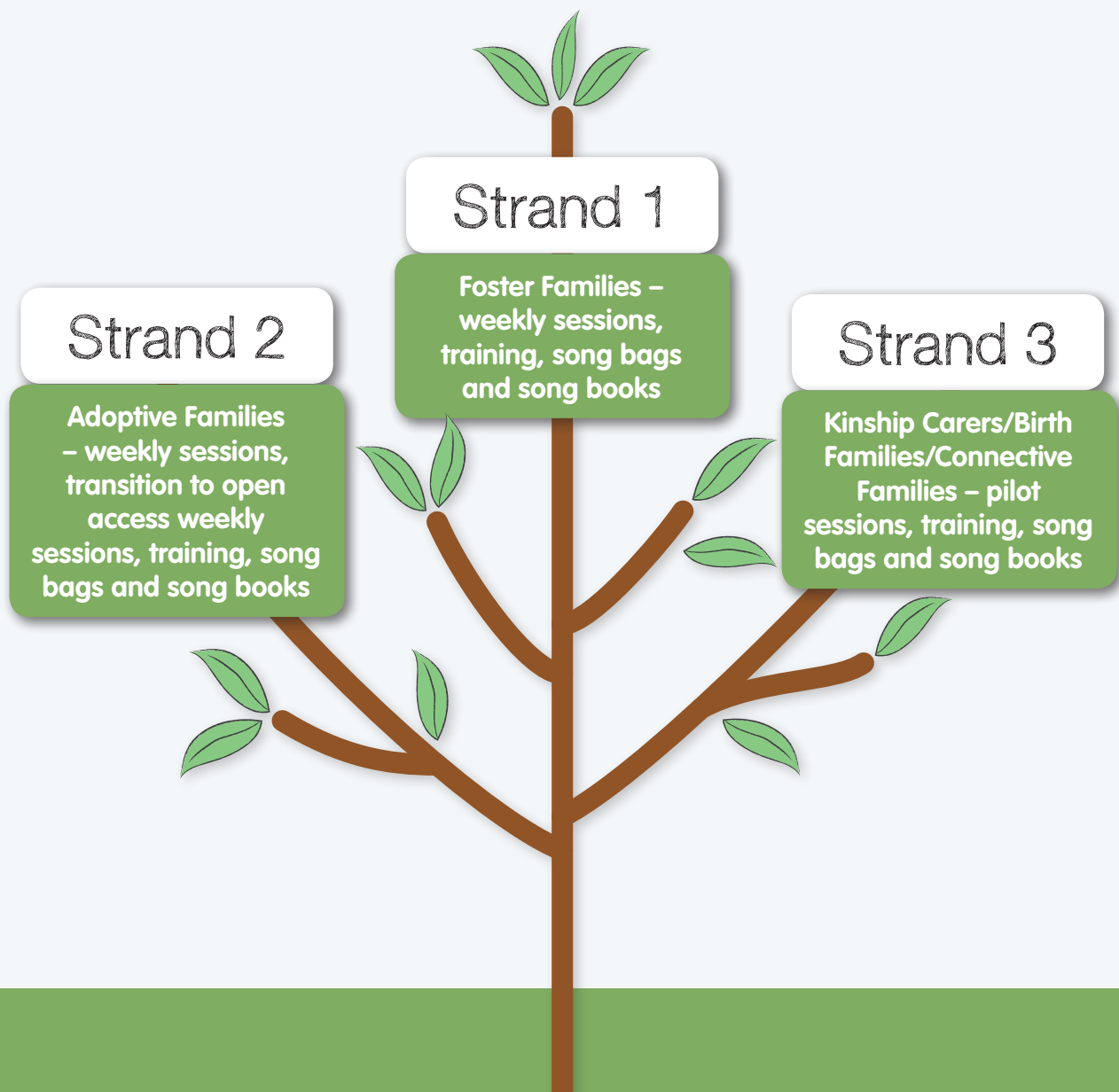
9

The Future What's Next?

Project

In May 2013 the project steering group identified the need to apply to Youth Music for further funding, which would enable us to build upon the learning from the project and further develop the project model. Through conversations with Newcastle and Gateshead Local Authorities and foster carers it became clear that the weekly sessions and the foster carer training were key parts of the project which should be maintained. The supporting resources (song books and song bags) were also identified as integral to developing confidence of foster carers and the transference of activity into the foster home. The foster carer focus group also informed how the structure could be developed and their thoughts matched those given by the Local Authorities.

In response to a question from the Newcastle Aspire team 'what are you doing to follow the child...?', the decision was made to develop an additional 2 strands to the project; adoptive families and kinship/birth families/connected families.



Organisational

Through the process of delivering the project, and through the realisation of the 3 year Looked After Children strategy, Sage Gateshead started to consider how it could develop the Loud and Clear team further. In August 2013 the decision was made to develop Loud and Clear from a project to a strand (a strand is an area of work defined by age and/or context of participants and encompasses a number of projects/activity). As a result of this decision, Eleanor Mooney (Loud and Clear Project Leader), became Strand Leader with a full time contract. This not only highlights the success of Loud and Clear within the organisation, but also shows the long term commitment that Sage Gateshead has to work with children, young people and adults in the looked after community.

North East Foster Carer Choir

A key learning from the project identified the value of networking and peer support opportunities for foster carers; interwoven during weekly sessions, holiday activities and training. Foster carers identified the significance of this space in the focus group, and local authority partners fully agreed. As a result, Sage Gateshead is piloting a North East Foster Carer Choir which will be delivered weekly at Gateshead Old Town Hall.

Connections

Sage Gateshead has also started conversations with other organisations that have shown interest in the Loud and Clear model of delivery. Children North East and Sage Gateshead applied for funding to Youth Music for a 2 year project for 'Families in Transition', including homeless families and estranged fathers. The model of delivery draws directly from the Youth Music Foster Family Learning project and will be managed by Eleanor Mooney.

Also Happening

Our growing presence and partnerships within both Local Authorities is bringing new opportunities for us to work together.

Through our partner James Anderson & Newcastle City Council, Sage Gateshead hosted two Teenagers to Work placements this summer, a scheme providing work experience for LAC aged 13-14. Sage Gateshead was the first cultural venue outside of the local authority to sign up to the scheme and we are already committed to hosting more placements next year.

Our new & growing partnership with Gateshead Council has resulted in our project musicians providing workshops and performances at the 2013 Gateshead Foster Carer Award Ceremony. We are also pleased to be providing 1:1 music sessions for individual looked after young people identified by the local authority.

Thanks to our ongoing partnership with Newcastle City Council, we are very happy to be hosting the Foster a Future Celebration of Achievement event for the second year running in February 2014, bringing a 300 strong party of LAC of all ages, carers & local authority staff to our venue for their very special event.

With Sage Gateshead Musical Inclusion colleagues, we are pleased to have been able to promote this work through our existing Gateshead Council partners and support the development of this new work.

When looking at our current provision and considering the importance of 'following the child', we are now in discussion with our established and new partners about reinstating our provision for primary aged LAC. For Sage Gateshead to continue in our mission to be a consistent, reliable presence in the lives of LAC, this is an obvious development that we are very keen to make.



10

Conclusions



The response from foster carers and partner organisation staff members who have supported and participated in the project over the past year has been overwhelmingly positive and this resonates strongly throughout this report. Taking these responses into account, along with the individual and personal stories of development concerning Looked After Children, foster carers, support staff and musicians contained within this report, it is evident that this project has been highly successful in meeting the desired outcomes and making optimum use of the funding provided.

Building in the evaluation as an ongoing element over the course of the project has enabled a full picture of the progression and impacts of the project to emerge and it is hoped that this report represents that picture as clearly as possible given the large volume of evaluation data collected.

As a result of this project a great many positive impacts and strengths of the project have been reported. These are agreed amongst the evaluation team to have been:

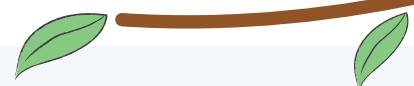
- Positive effects of regular music making on individual Looked After Children's confidence, social and emotional development and musical learning
- Legacy of the project for Looked After Children placed in the care of the participating foster carers in the future
- Positive effects of attendance at weekly sessions and training on foster carer's musical skill and confidence, relationships with children in their care, professional networks and relationships with other carers and musicians, increased knowledge of relevant early years music education and developmental theory
- Positive effects of working in accordance with the Learning Framework for Artist Pedagogues and within the principles of social pedagogy on the practice of project musicians
- Stronger relationships between Sage Gateshead and partner organisations
- Raised profile of early years music participation amongst partner organisations, local authority staff and foster carers

The main challenges identified from within the evidence base include:

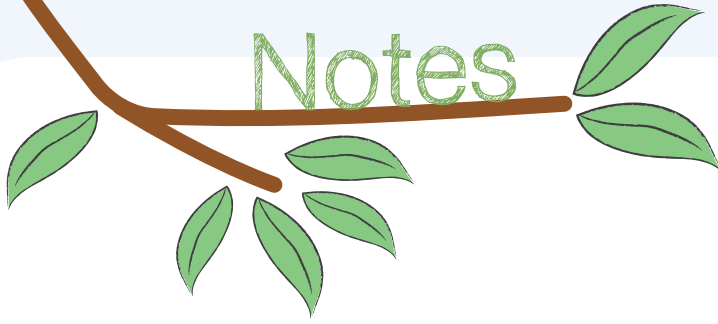
- Difficulty in recruiting foster carers who typically do not attend regular group activity or those who might be discouraged from participating due to project emphasis on musical content
- Consistency and efficacy of communication across partner organisations to ensure all relevant information reaches all foster carers looking after children aged 0-5

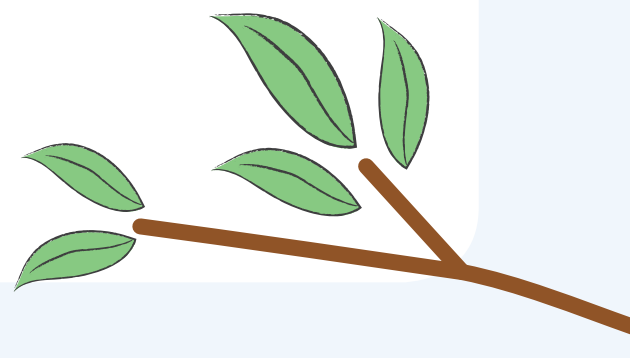


We are pleased that funding has now been secured for the project to continue into a second stage. This provides an exciting opportunity to deepen the positive work carried out thus far with foster carers and also to extend opportunities for involvement to a larger number of carers and looked after children. Project activity has now resumed for the second year with the project leadership team taking into account all that has been learned from this first phase, utilizing suggestions for improvement to further the success of the project and to ensure the continued legacy of the work.

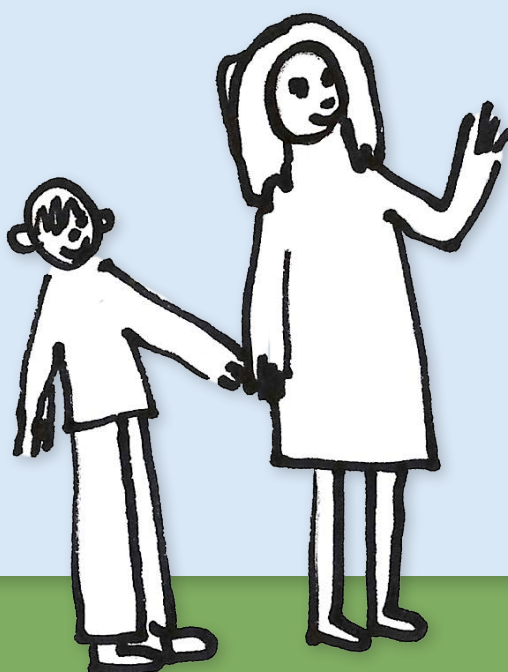


Notes





See you soon!



Jenny Young – Accessible Learning Strategy Leader – Jenny.Young@sagegateshead.com

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