

MUSICAL CONNECTIONS EVALUATION REPORT



NOVEMBER 2016 – DECEMBER 2017



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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Introduction..... | p3 |
| 1.1 Project Objectives and Target Outcomes..... | p3 |
| 1.2 Project Structure..... | p4 |
| 2. Tracking Data and Summary of Key Learning..... | p4 |
| 2.1 Results of tracking exercises..... | p4 |
| 2.2 Factors key to success..... | p5 |
| 2.3 Ongoing challenges..... | p8 |
| 3. Audience Development Activities..... | p9 |
| 3.1 Promotional Materials..... | p9 |
| 3.2 Signposting..... | p10 |
| 3.3 Transport..... | p10 |
| 4. Participant Perceptions of Musical Connections..... | p11 |
| 4.1 Self-reported benefits of participation..... | p11 |
| 4.2 Views on project content..... | p14 |
| 5. Intergenerational Work..... | p15 |
| 6. Feedback from Other Stakeholders..... | p16 |
| 6.1 Relatives..... | p16 |
| 6.2 Volunteers..... | p17 |
| 6.3 Care-home staff..... | p18 |
| 7. Showcasing the Impact of Our Work..... | p20 |
| 8. Organisational Structure..... | p21 |
| 8.1 Importance of project management..... | p21 |
| 8.2 Excellence of the musicians..... | P21 |
| 8.3 Board of trustees..... | p22 |
| 9. Training..... | p22 |
| 10. The Future..... | p23 |

1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2009, Musical Connections began delivering participatory music sessions in 5 of City of York Council's residential care homes for older people. The project had an immediate beneficial impact and in 2010, received an NHS award for work in the area of mental health and wellbeing. Between 2012 and 2016, the project was supported mainly by two 2-year grants from the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities grants programme. This funding enabled the project to develop and expand, bringing in new musicians and setting up additional groups in the council's sheltered housing schemes.

By early 2016, it was apparent that Musical Connections had significant potential to benefit many more vulnerable older people and, confident in its ability to sustain and develop the work, the project became a charity in March 2016. In November 2016, our new charity received a grant from Arts Council England, which gave us the resources to reach out to the wider community. This evaluation focuses on the delivery, impact and development of the work undertaken during the period of the Arts Council grant, from November 2016 to December 2017.

Given the length of the document, we have decided not to include photographs, but have focused on quotes from participants and stakeholders, to try to give a voice to the people within the project. However, a wealth of photos and videos may be viewed on our website www.musicalconnections.org.uk and the Musical Connections Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/muconnections>).

1.1 Project Objectives and Target Outcomes

The new funding was intended to help us achieve the following key objectives:

- to implement a new marketing strategy aimed at increasing the number of participants from sheltered housing schemes and bringing in new ones from the wider community
- to develop and showcase new community connections and the creative engagement of participants
- to pilot a new organisational structure intended to aid in achieving the above objectives and to increase the professionalism and sustainability of the project overall

Target outcomes for project beneficiaries were:

- reduced social isolation/feelings of loneliness
- increased physical/mental stimulation
- new opportunities for creative engagement/self-expression
- increased sense of purpose/belonging
- improved confidence/self-esteem.

1.2 Project Structure

Our project was based around 10 weekly music groups. Initially, 5 of the groups took place in City of York residential care homes, 4 in sheltered housing schemes and 1 – a new community choir – in a local community centre. Due to the closure of 2 of the council’s care-homes during the grant period, we re-located these two groups to a council-run dementia care unit and a private care home on the edge of York. We also moved one of the sheltered housing scheme groups into a neighbouring community centre when it became apparent that the group had become dominated by older people from the wider community, who were ambitious to evolve into a choir.

So, by the end of the project, the 10 groups were spread across the following settings:

- 3 council-run residential care homes
- 1 council-run dementia care unit
- 1 private care home
- 3 sheltered housing schemes, open to both tenants and the wider community
- 2 community choirs, based in community centres on opposite sides of the city

While it was important to us to sustain the work in the care-homes, these groups are closed to the public, and were not therefore relevant to our objective to increase participation from the wider community. However, for completeness, this report includes findings from across the whole of the Musical Connections project.

2. TRACKING DATA AND SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNING

2.1 Results of tracking exercises

During the grant period, over 300 vulnerable older people accessed our project, participating alongside more than 400 children and young people, plus several care staff, support workers, relatives and friends. We were able to complete tracking questionnaires with 164 of our beneficiaries, 86 from the care-homes and 78 from our community-facing groups. These mainly represented our most regular participants – many of the others were in receipt of respite care in the group venues for just a short period, or became too frail to continue attending their group, which meant we were not able to interview them.

Findings from the questionnaires show that the Musical Connections model is highly effective in achieving positive outcomes for its intended beneficiaries:

- **93%** of participants said that going to their MC group improves their mood **that day** (**62%** of this number say it **greatly** improves it)
- **96%** said that going to their MC group makes them feel **generally happier and more positive about life** (**56%** said it **greatly improves their happiness**)

- **90%** said that participating in their MC group improves their **confidence/self-esteem**
- **91%** said that their MC sessions help them to feel **more alert and active**
- **96%** said that participating in the sessions gives them a **sense of purpose and makes them feel good about themselves**
- **94%** said it improves their **overall wellbeing**
- **90%** said that participating in MC events and sessions gives them an opportunity to make **increased contact with other people/the wider community**
- **91%** of care-home residents said that MC sessions help them to spend more time than usual doing enjoyable things with **staff**
- **91%** of community group participants said that going to their MC group improves their **overall life satisfaction**
- **87%** of community group participants believe that participating in sessions improves their **physical well-being**

Of the 77 people from the community groups who answered a question about the number of GP visits made since getting involved in their group/choir, 70% (54) have gone to the doctor the same amount as before, 9% (7) have gone more, 21% (16) have gone less. The numbers are, of course, low and therefore not statistically significant. However, the signs suggest that our work can impact on wellbeing to the extent that some people become less reliant on their GP; see Section 10 for more information on how we plan to build on these findings as we move forwards.

2.2 Factors key to success

While we did not quite reach our target of bringing 80 new participants into our groups from the wider community, we got very close with 74 new participants, and numbers are continuing to grow. The marketing and audience development plan that we submitted with our application to the Arts Council was implemented successfully, and we believe that we managed to increase numbers to the extent that we did because the grant enabled us to:

- work with a designer to produce appealing and effective promotional material, which we distributed widely throughout York and which gave us a much stronger profile than previously
- devote more time to project management, which included a strong emphasis on networking and developing stronger relationships with relevant agencies to encourage third parties to signpost potential beneficiaries towards our groups

- re-design our website, making it more user-friendly than our previous version – while many of our beneficiaries have not accessed it because of a lack of familiarity with the internet, we know it has been used by relatives, supporters, some beneficiaries and other agencies working on behalf of older people.

In terms of the outcomes achieved for our beneficiaries, we have identified the following factors as key to our success. Many of these have already been identified in previous evaluation work, and remain valid today:

- i) **Continuity:** because sessions are weekly and the programme has run continuously (around the academic timetable), participants have been able to build up trust and confidence in themselves, the musicians and the relationships generated
- ii) **Inclusivity:** we welcome any older person who wishes to join us, regardless of ability or disability. While some creative wellbeing initiatives make a virtue of focussing their work on one particular client group or ‘condition’, we do not believe in compartmentalising people and have been told, particularly by people with dementia, that they prefer not to be ‘pigeonholed’ as such, but would rather mix with other members of the community as they would have done before their diagnosis
- iii) **Avoidance of stereotyping:** we do not make assumptions about participant preferences based on their age, circumstances or musical history, and invite them to engage with all kinds of musical genres and activities
- iv) **Providing opportunities to learn and achieve:** most participants, including those with dementia, have demonstrated that they enjoy and are stimulated by being offered a degree of challenge eg learning and composing new songs. Simply re-visiting old favourites can get boring after a while.
- v) **Building on participant skills and interests:** where participants have shown a particular talent, we have worked hard to celebrate this, and to employ it for the wider benefit of the project. Enthusiastic singers have been offered a stage to perform in a variety of different settings, while others who are interested in sharing the project with a wider audience, have taken part in radio interviews and other promotional activities.
- vi) **Holding sessions away from the main lounge in care-homes:** working in a dedicated space, away from other distractions, has provided intimacy and focus, enabling people to participate more easily
- vii) **Ensuring participants have been fully involved in evaluation and planning activities:** although participants would generally rather be making music than discussing the process/project, they appreciate being asked for their opinions about their group, and for guidance on its future development. These

activities have been very significant in enabling beneficiaries to feel confidence in and ownership of the project

- viii) **Management support for staff involvement:** where carers and support staff are involved, they have been encouraged and enabled to play an active role in the project, thereby maximizing benefits to participants, and adding another dimension to the relationships between carers/support workers and clients
- ix) **Good relationships between the project musicians and care staff/venue managers:** over time, the musicians and care staff/managers have learnt to understand each other's issues, and a mutual respect has developed, which has ensured that the project has been delivered collaboratively, with a shared focus on how to maximize benefits for participants
- x) **Intergenerational practice:** this has been shown to have a key role to play within our offer, delivering immediate and direct benefits to participants, as well as wider sustainable benefits relating to cross-generational understanding. Its success has been built on:
 - a. providing enjoyable opportunities for interaction and communication between younger and older generations, where the music cuts across age and social stereotypes, and can be accessed and enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age
 - b. a collaborative approach, whereby the Musical Connections musicians work with teaching staff to devise projects and events which have a direct benefit, not just for our core participants but for the children and young people too. By working in this way, we have found that educational establishments and community groups are much more likely to commit to ongoing collaboration than if we simply based our approaches to them on a vague notion of public-spiritedness and social conscience
- xi) **Community-linked events:** there is a great appetite and ongoing potential for these events, giving beneficiaries many enjoyable and varied opportunities to feel more connected to the wider community
- xii) **Involvement of volunteers:** the project has benefited from the energetic and enthusiastic involvement of a range of volunteers, specifically students, retired people and employees from local businesses, who have provided invaluable practical assistance and additional community connections. As we move forward, we intend to devote more resources to developing our volunteer network
- xiii) **Provision of free transport to weekly sessions and off-site events:** a large transport budget and the availability of mini-buses belonging to another local charity has enabled us to offer free transport to beneficiaries wishing to

attend off-site events and, latterly, weekly sessions. This has had a noticeable impact on participant numbers and regularity of attendance

- xiv) **Disciplined and productive tracking and evaluation activities:** these have given us great insight into the impact of our work and enabled us to move forward with confidence and understanding:
- a. a mix of approaches ie individual interviews, group sessions and feedback reports has maximized the extent and type of information gathered
 - b. where participants have struggled to understand the process, adapting questioning styles to meet the needs of each individual has facilitated their involvement
 - c. to gauge the accuracy of the information gathered by the musicians in their self-evaluation activities, trustees have visited individual groups to observe sessions and talk to participants and staff
 - d. continuous review of this process has optimized participation and the usefulness of the information collected.

2.3 Ongoing Challenges

While the project overall has been a great success, some areas remain a challenge for us:

- **Making contact with a higher number of vulnerable and isolated older people across the city:** despite offering transport to potential beneficiaries, we have discovered that we were right to anticipate that people who are feeling vulnerable and lacking confidence can be reluctant to join a new group. Equally, the lethargy that often accompanies depression and diminished wellbeing can impact on people's inclination to even make the effort to leave their house to try us out. Although we have a handful of 'music buddies' bringing vulnerable people to our groups on a weekly basis, it has proved a much greater challenge to find people to perform this role than we envisaged. We have now secured new funding to support one of our musicians to work half a day a week specifically on volunteer recruitment and development.
- **Involving more friends and family in supporting the project:** while friends and families are universally positive about our project, and thankful that their loved ones are provided with such a service, it seems that many consider what we do to be a 'given' within the care context. Consequently, there seems to be a perception that we do not require their support, be it financial (eg making a donation or helping with fundraising) or logistical (eg providing transport to enable a loved one to attend a group or special event). We have started to address this by contacting families directly and working harder to explain our status as an independent charity, in need of support from the wider community
- **Funding:** in many people's eyes, our project is now well-established, and this means that some funders do not consider us to be as attractive as new, or 'pilot' projects. Equally, obtaining charity status last year has brought with it additional costs and responsibilities relating to the 'business' of the charity ie 'core costs', which many

fundings do not wish to cover. While we acknowledge that this is an issue for many charities in a similar position to us, the fact that the bulk of our costs are 'people' costs (without our musicians, the project simply could not run) presents us with additional challenges when approaching grant-givers who instinctively balk at funding salaries.

3. AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Prior to the grant from Arts Council England, Musical Connections had never had sufficient resources to market its work consistently and effectively to a wider audience, be it in terms of materials or time. The new funding enabled us to do both, and this has had a marked impact on our profile and reputation, thus increasing our ability to bring more participants into the project.

3.1 Promotional Materials

With Arts Council money, we were able to work with a designer to produce the following:

- I. **Leaflets:** The leaflets incorporated information on all the community group days and times, as well as endorsements from current participants and Age UK York. In designing them, we considered it essential to avoid stereotypical images and ideas around older people and, in response, our designer came up with visuals which clearly showed that our groups would be for older adults, but would also be participatory, contemporary and fun. Feedback on the leaflets has been universally positive, and we have found them to be invaluable in spreading the word about our groups. They have been distributed in shops, libraries, community centres and GP surgeries, as well as being sent to numerous potential third party signposters, as mentioned in Section 3.2
- II. **Flyers/posters:** In addition to the leaflets, we produced flyers and posters specific to each of the 5 community-facing groups, and distributed them in areas closest to each group. Some of our participants got involved in organised 'letter box drops', and local councillors and residents' committees also helped with distribution.
- III. **Infographics:** Our infographics contain information about the benefits of getting involved with Musical Connections, portrayed in a very immediate and accessible fashion. Data from our own evaluation activities is used to highlight key outcomes while secondary data from other organisations and relevant graphics are used to reinforce the message. The infographics have been extremely useful in providing extra evidence to healthcare professionals and potential third-party sign-posters.

Musical Connections does not have its own offices and, prior to this grant, lacked a professional address and telephone number. The grant enabled us to set up a PO Box address and a 'virtual landline' (a landline number which diverts to a mobile - research tells us that a significant number of older people feel more confident ringing a landline number than a mobile). These are displayed on our promotional materials, and feedback suggests that they communicate a professional and reassuring image to our target audience.

3.2 Signposting

Conscious that such materials, no matter how striking, would be sufficient to mobilise the number and type of people we were seeking to engage in our project, our project manager put a lot of extra time into connecting with related agencies, other charities and relevant local initiatives ie:

- Several care agencies providing support to older people and carers in their own home
- Agencies acting on behalf of people living with dementia: Alzheimers Society, Dementia Forward, York's Dementia Action Alliance
- York Hospital
- City of York Council's new Health and Wellbeing representatives
- Charities: Age UK York, York Neighbours, OCAY (Older Citizens' Advocacy York)
- York CVS's 'Ways to Wellbeing' social prescribing pilot
- York Medical Group (which covers GP surgeries responsible for 40,000 patients)

Particularly pro-active partnerships have been established with Age UK York, OCAY, the social prescribing pilot and York's Dementia Action Alliance. As well as developing good working relationships which have resulted in people being signposted towards us, these organisations have encouraged us to run taster sessions, write newsletter articles, and attend networking events and meetings aimed at providing a 'joined up' service to older people in York. The support and interest of these organisations has been a key factor in increasing the number of participants attending our groups.

York Medical Group has also been an active partner for our project, inviting us to present to patients and staff, displaying promotional materials in surgeries and supporting funding applications. Having watched our development over the last year, and aware themselves of the link between creative participation and health/wellbeing, we are now working with them on a plan to set up music groups on-site at their GP surgeries.

3.3 Transport

The Arts Council grant included a generous budget for transport that we originally envisaged would be used to enable participants to attend off-site intergenerational and community events. However, early in the grant period, we made contact with a local charity, the Alan Bott charity, who agreed to train up some of our workers to drive their minibuses which they were prepared to let us use for nothing. This took the pressure of the transport budget, and enabled us to begin piloting free transport for people wishing to attend weekly sessions. A local 'dementia-friendly' taxi firm has since delivered a sensitive and reliable weekly service to a small number of our participants; such has been the success of this venture that we now consider it essential to provide free transport if we are to be able to reach those people most in need of our support.

4. PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Having managed to encourage a significant number of new participants to join our project, we were keen to ensure that their experience delivered significant and ongoing positive outcomes for them. Newcomers weren't sure what to expect, and we found that it could sometimes take time for people to feel comfortable with the activities with which they were presented but had not necessarily expected (older people's music groups are widely assumed to offer little more than traditional singalongs). However, the welcoming demeanour and supportive encouragement of our musicians and existing group members meant that any uncertainty quickly dissipated, and new participants soon relaxed into the process and the many new friendships made. Equally, the innovative nature of our work, the challenges and opportunities it presents to participants, and the intergenerational programme seemed enough to keep people interested and engaged in the longer term.

4.1 Self-Reported Benefits of Participation

With the involvement of a higher number of people from the wider community, we found that, despite variances in lifestyles and living accommodation, be it residential care, sheltered housing or their own home, beneficiaries from across the project faced many similar difficult issues regarding age-related health problems, loss, social isolation, diminishing opportunities and, consequently, quality of life. At the same time, regardless of group attended or personal circumstances, participants reported the same high levels of therapeutic benefit experienced through their involvement in the project.

It should be noted that, while the benefits articulated by participants were the same across our groups and choirs, the project content and delivery were not; we believe the reason that these outcomes were achieved so widely was because our work was tailored so carefully to the different circumstances, needs, interests and abilities of each group, and of each person within that group.

Specifically, participants highlighted the following benefits generated by attending their weekly group:

- 1) A general feeling of improved wellbeing

'I know when I come that I will leave feeling better'

'It makes things easier'

'You go out happy'

'The choir very much improves my wellbeing. If Fiona had another session I would attend'

'It lightens my mood – I'm a happier person'

- 2) A reduction in social isolation and feelings of loneliness

'I feel lonely on my own. This lifts me'

'I feel less lonely – I love all of it'

'I'm able to mix after a few years of caring'

'Gets me out on a Monday. Enables me to socialise'

'Enjoyment and meeting new people – you see more people, meet more people'

- 3) A focal point which provides something to look forward to and, for many, is the only regular social and creative activity available to them

'An opportunity to give me an activity to do. Without this, I would have nothing to do'

'It gives me a sense of purpose...better than staring into space'

'There's so little I'm ever part of'

'I always look forward to Mondays'

- 4) Increased mental and physical stimulation from learning and applying themselves to something meaningful with others in a relaxed and supportive environment

'You're stretching your mind'

'It certainly gives you something to get going, instead of sitting around'

'You've got to be alert and active – you can't fall asleep'

'Wakes me up'

'Learning something new – it does you good'

- 5) Reduced introversion and a renewed sense of personal worth delivered through a sense of belonging and opportunities for self-expression, decision-making and achievement

'I didn't realise I could sing until coming to choir'

'There's a sense of achievement when we get it right'

'Getting your confidence back!'

'I think it's very good – not too easy – I think it's just right'

'I feel a bit full of myself!'

- 6) A decrease in lethargy; people feel more energised and 'alive'

'It's exercise. We love it – meeting our friends at Glen Lodge'

'It's still going inside you when you go back'

'It's very nice – rhythm makes me stomp'

'Singing is best – you keep singing, you keep going!'

'Music puts life into you – that's why we go to music'

'Lifts up your soul a bit- puts a bit of spirit into you'

- 7) Distraction from everyday worries and medical issues

'I love to go to the group – takes my mind off my worries'

'It's great fun and while I'm there, I don't think about anything else'

'Always go away with 'a smile on my face'. Helps me concentrate on one thing'

'Makes me more positive and get problems into perspective for a while'

'Today I'm not feeling well. It made me forget about my feelings'

- 8) A stronger connection and meaningful active involvement with the wider community

'Having a good sing and using energy – meeting lovely people in a super-friendly environment! Feeling at ease is so important for confidence-building;

'I love singing and meeting all my nice music friends'

'This choir is all about the most important and therapeutic benefits of music. We have the best laughs and fun ever, while benefiting from singing and learning a very good variety of songs'

'As someone who can't sing, it's great to feel 'carried' by the choir!'

- 9) An opportunity for care-home residents and other individuals who attend sessions with carers and support workers to interact with staff in a different way, and for these relationships to be enriched and strengthened through shared creative interaction

'It helps the staff learn how to do things – it helps me relate to them and they say 'Come on, let's do more!''

10) A small number of people stated that, since coming to their music group or choir, they had been less dependent on medical interventions

'Choir has distracted me and I'm no longer having treatment'

'I'm asthmatic but since coming to choir, I've been using my inhaler a lot less'

'They're (GP/health professionals) very pleased with me that I'm coming to the group'

As we have noted in earlier reports, it seems that participants come to depend on the weekly sessions to bring much-needed purpose, vigour and personal contact into their lives. Many participants have invested heavily in their groups and the friendships they offer, which makes it all the more important to sustain sufficient funding to be able to continue running them. In addition, we need to keep working on building participant numbers - while it is clear that Musical Connections has delivered many positive outcomes for an increasing number of participants over the life of this grant, we have also noted that group numbers can fluctuate, largely because of health issues, a change in living arrangements or, sadly, death. This is hardly surprising given the nature of our client group, and makes it even more important to bring our work to as wide an audience as possible; while the occasional session may be a crush, the likelihood is that not everyone will be present at every session, no matter how important their group is to them.

4.2 Views on Project Content

During the grant period, 146 participants took part in planning and feedback sessions, which we instigated in order to review perceptions of the content and delivery of the groups and to determine any adaptations needed to ensure optimum outcomes for beneficiaries.

Findings from these sessions confirmed what we had learnt from our earlier work, namely that it is a fallacy to assume that older people and people with dementia can only enjoy, connect and express themselves through 'the old songs'. We have therefore continued to include all of the following in our project:

- music from other countries and cultures
- tuned and untuned percussion
- learning of new songs and, with support, singing them in parts
- composition (eg songs, raps, soundscapes)
- exploration of rhythm
- dancing (circle or traditional, standing or sitting)
- use of props
- related art forms eg poetry, textile arts.

These activities have been employed according to the different character and interests of our different groups; the two community choirs have focussed almost exclusively on singing, while our music groups and intergenerational sessions have been much more varied in content, drawing on all of the elements listed on the previous page.

Our beneficiaries have welcomed the various challenges and learning experiences offered to them as a chance to employ under-used skills and interests, and to work with others. It is clear that they find the activities stimulating and refreshing, and enjoy making an active contribution, as opposed to simply 'singing along'.

'Why not learn new songs?! We don't want the same thing every week'

'I like the variety, singing rounds, banging the drum'

'It makes me excited – I'm a music man!'

That said, we have also incorporated personal favourites, so that people have had the opportunity to enjoy some familiar music, and to share their tastes and interests with others; this has proved a really effective way of enabling people to get to know and appreciate each other. Where individual participants become associated with particular songs and are helped to express and share their specific talents, this provides an enjoyable point of recognition and a reinforcement of their personal worth. We have found that some participants have really enjoyed planning for and giving performances of their favourite songs at our larger events.

5. INTERGENERATIONAL WORK

Previous reports have discussed at length the benefits and key drivers behind our intergenerational work. For the purpose of this report, suffice to say that this aspect of our work is now thoroughly embedded within our offer, and we can state with confidence that our intergenerational programme of projects and events is both flourishing and highly regarded. Based on strong partnerships with local primary and secondary schools, the sixth form college and both of York's universities, this work enables isolated older people to get involved, or re-involved, in the life of their local community and to make closer connections with other people and generations.

'Very good. I've got grandchildren but I don't see them – this is a chance to spend time with children because you never see them otherwise'

'Makes me feel younger – cheers me up, more connected to people...'

'I enjoy it with the children because they enjoy it – they get used to being with older people'

A wide range of music, including reggae, pop, African and Bollywood, and activities such as composition and improvisation are used as a platform to help the different generations communicate, interact and make music together. Examples of this work include:

- Workshops and extended projects in care homes and sheltered housing schemes with school pupils and college/university students, covering a variety of themes and topics
- Workshops runs by students from the University of York, where group participants are invited to play and learn about orchestral instruments, the ukulele, samba/African drumming and the gamelan – a large and ornate Indonesian percussion ensemble
- ‘Big Sings’ with local secondary schools and students
- ‘Little Sings’ where our beneficiaries visit local primary schools to make music with the children
- Community concerts where our choirs join forces with school and other community choirs to deliver performances together.

It is encouraging that care-home managers make sure that their clients are just as able to attend such events as participants who are not living in care settings

‘The residents really enjoy going out and attending intergenerational events in the area, it makes them feel a part of the local community. It is also great when the schools and colleges come to Morrell, it is fab to hear all the noise of chatting, laughing and singing... Having the transport paid for has made a massive difference as we no longer have to worry about how we are going to get the residents and staff to such important, worthwhile events’

Photos and videos of this work may be found on our website www.musicalconnections.org.uk, and also on YouTube (search for Musical Connections York).

6. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

6.1 Relatives

Participants’ relatives have been very appreciative of our work – they can see what a difference our sessions have made to their loved ones:

‘You can see John liven up when something starts happening – he’s so bored, there’s nothing happening the rest of the time – it’s wonderful what you do’

In the care homes, managers make families aware of the sessions, and encourage them to get involved:

‘Families do know about the group and at the moment, I believe we have a few family members who attend the session when they visit their relative. This is a really good opportunity for some of the ‘couples’ to spend time doing an activity together.

Relatives have also gone on sessions to the school to support their mum. It's so lovely for the families to see their relative happy, having a good time and engaging with other people in a positive way'

Over the last year, we have become increasingly active on social media, sharing photos and video clips of our work, and this has proved a very effective way of sharing the project and its impact with younger relatives, some of whom have taken the opportunity to communicate their appreciation to us, particularly via our Facebook page:

'Thank you for this wonderful video you have made, it's a lovely thing to look back on, seeing how happy my mum was, especially during the music sessions'

'Love seeing my grandma enjoying herself. Everyone looks like they are having so much fun. Great job guys'

'Just randomly found this video, and I know it's a few months old now, but it's lovely to see my auntie enjoying herself so much, she's always loved music and in this video, I can see a bit of her old self in her, so thank you x'

'I think you guys are absolutely fantastic. You do a great job and bring joy to so many people'

6.2 Volunteers

The involvement of volunteers has proved to be a major asset for Musical Connections. The commitment of these people (most regularly retired people and students) makes a huge difference to the successful delivery of our sessions and events. We are also now starting to involve working people who are prepared to provide support on a more ad-hoc basis.

It is clear that, while giving their time freely, the volunteers are nonetheless reaping non-financial benefits from their involvement – they value being involved with a project that has such a powerful impact, and they are glad of the opportunity to use their time constructively.

'Gives me an interest that I am absolutely committed to! Good for me to be walking distance'

Their feedback on what we do is also useful additional evidence:

'It reinvigorates them'

'They communicate with each other in a way they don't do the rest of the time'

'If there's something on their mind, or they've got a hospital appointment later, they forget about it when they're in the music group'

'It gives them an interest, gets them talking together stimulates them. They all tell me they feel better afterwards. Staff tell me that they can tell when they've come on duty who has been to the music and who hasn't based on how perky they are'

(Off-Site events): 'Gives them something to look forward to, a visit. Stimulates them when they get there, they meet different people. Something they can talk about when they come back. Keeps them in touch with the local community'

'They really look forward to that (intergenerational work) – some of them do genuinely make friends – some send children personalised Christmas cards'

Given the difference that volunteers have made to our work, we are now keen to involve more. We have recently secured new funding to enable one of our senior musicians to dedicate time to building and developing our volunteer network across a variety of roles, especially:

- 'music buddies' who will accompany and attend sessions with our most vulnerable participants – a handful of people are already doing this, and we believe that increasing the number of 'buddies' would have a marked impact on numbers attending our groups
- drivers who are will transport participants to and from sessions and events
- fundraising.

6.3 Care-Home Staff

We stipulate that care-home staff should always participate alongside residents in our music sessions, not only for reasons of health and safety but also because taking part together has a very positive, equalising impact on the 'carer-cared for' dynamic. It also gives staff an opportunity to see the benefits the project provides to participants, which provides strong motivation to many of them to ensure their clients are helped to access the groups and to get the most out of them. In interviews with care home staff, they observed that the sessions and off-site events have provided an opportunity for residents to:

- Engage in something different and uplifting
- Express their 'real' personalities that often get masked by the dementia
- Use their abilities without worrying that they can't do things
- Make a contribution to something interesting and worthwhile
- Connect with each other and the wider community

'It cheers them all up, it takes their mind off things and brings the true person out. They come to life. Their true personalities are shining through...When you do the African ones, they remember the words. I can't believe it, it really puzzles me, given their dementia'

'They like the song-writing – they like contributing. They can learn stuff and they come out with stuff'

'To see them all interacting and helping each other – they get together more, not so separate'

'It has been wonderful to see Margaret so engaged – more alert than I have seen her in a long time, smiled and laughed and interacted with the pupils who so charmingly and kindly played balloon with her'

'Both Ian and Freda came to life with the balloons and laughed together, it was beautiful to see'

'The music lifts people's moods and lets staff see residents enjoying themselves, not just seeing them as people to be looked after – they want to have fun too'

There is also an acknowledgement, particularly amongst quieter members of staff, that the sessions actually do them some good too!

'I'm not an outgoing person, but it does help me. I've got more confidence now...I look forward to the sessions now'

Managers are generally very supportive of care staff participating in music sessions and escorting residents to off-site events. They are clear on the benefits for both residents and staff, they embrace our innovative approach and they are very responsive to all the challenges involved in ensuring that sessions and events achieve maximum impact for beneficiaries.

'Massive positive impact, the music group is such a happy event where everyone can join in for however long they want to, as the residents at Morrell are all at different stages of their journey living with dementia. It is amazing to see them all in the session enjoying themselves and looking so happy'

'It's great to hear all the different genres of music. We have recently had a new member of staff and she was amazed by the music she heard, she stereotypically thought it would only be 'old people's music (she has a lot to learn!).'

'Staff at Morrell love to go on the events, it is never an issue asking them to go, they are always willing, they love to join in and this is a great experience for the resident as they are all then 'equal' - it lifts their moods and boosts morale to see the residents enjoying themselves and having such a positive experience'

7. SHOWCASING THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK: CELEBRATING OUR PARTICIPANTS AND OUR NEW COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

One of our stated project objectives was to showcase community connections and the creative engagement of participants. To this end, we have posted photos and videos on social media over the course of the year, as well as continuing to circulate a newsletter every few weeks. The Musical Connections website has a link to our Facebook page, so that the latest post is always available to people browsing the website, and we have also uploaded videos onto You Tube, providing links on Facebook, Twitter and in funding applications. Staff, relatives, students, some beneficiaries and other interested parties are now accessing and sharing this information, and we are finding that our profile is increasing accordingly. An example of this was when we were contacted by local TV station 'That's York TV' who found out about one of our Christmas concerts from our Facebook page and decided to showcase the event and our wider project on their evening news programme.

Towards the end of the project, we had the opportunity to apply for funding for one of our sheltered housing groups. To support our application, members of the group participated in a video, sharing their experiences of the work and singing the song 'Side by Side' with lyrics re-worked into a pitch for funding. Needless to say, we were awarded the grant! Please follow the link to watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARcRqvgaeb4>

To round off the project and to celebrate all the new community connections made over the course of the grant period, our two community choirs participated in a large concert at York St John University, one of our most important project partners. They performed alongside Communitas, a choir for users of mental health services which is part of York St John's Converge programme, and 40 children from St Aelred's primary school, a key partner in our intergenerational programme. The concert was attended by members of several of our other groups, friends, family and supporters from the university. For the finale, all four choirs joined together to sing two songs composed by Communitas member, Laurie Farnell. This was a fantastic event – the biggest stage our choirs had performed on and something they thoroughly enjoyed. We hope that the format will be used as a template for future collaborations across York's communities.

'...It was great wasn't it? Thank you Fiona for all your hard work and the fun it gives us. Also how lovely to have the students and Emma in our midst for the singing giving us the confidence to find those tricky notes! Thanks everyone'

I really enjoyed it. It was really good to hear us all together in the acoustic of the church. All the practice paid off'

'It was great to see the children singing along to the Bruno Mars, with actions! We have obviously found our audience...'

'Glad you're proud of us Fiona, because you really work hard to bring joy into our lives. Thank you'

A 'Golden Moments' video has been created to showcase many of the wonderful moments that have happened over the lifetime of the project, and can now be found on our website and on You Tube.

8. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

8.1 Importance of Project Management

The Arts Council grant enabled our Lead Musician to formally assume the role of Project Manager. This has made a huge difference to the impact of the project, providing time and resources to 'sell' our work much more widely to both potential beneficiaries and other agencies working on behalf of older people. As a consequence, we are now much better known and more widely respected than previously.

Having a formal Project Manager role (now Project Director) has also ensured that the project is run in a more focussed and structured way, with a single individual having oversight of all the groups and being a conduit for communication with all stakeholders, project partners and funders. As an organisation, we are now on a much more professional footing than at the start of the grant and consider it essential to retain this organisational structure going forwards.

8.2 Excellence of the musicians

The change in structure has also provided new opportunities for the other musicians working on the project, allowing their roles to expand to take on some of the work that the Lead Musician was previously doing. They have assumed these additional responsibilities with enthusiasm and skill, and it is extremely important to spotlight their contributions as, without them, our project simply could not have functioned. Working in this sector and environment can be both emotionally and physically challenging, notwithstanding the musical and social skills required to deliver to the highest level, and we are fortunate to have such committed professionals in our team. Not only are they excellent musicians, they also possess a high level of emotional intelligence, resourcefulness and adaptability, which has ensured that they have been able to achieve excellent outcomes for their clients.

'You have a good understanding of the different needs – you're adaptable'
(Derwent)

'There aren't any improvements. I think you're really good with them' (Woolnough)

'That lady always does good things with us and she makes us get better' (Windsor)

'Emma is just brilliant' (Community Base)

'The teacher is always well-prepared' (Barstow)

'It's amazing how you tailor the session to everyone – it is really difficult, so I think you do a marvellous job' (Barstow)

Going forwards, as we bring in new colleagues, we will settle for nothing less than the high standards that our current musicians have delivered week after week.

8.3 Board of Trustees

Our Board of Trustees represent a fantastic combination of commitment, enthusiasm and a diverse range of relevant skills and experience. Between them, they can offer advice, expertise and insight on the following subjects:

- Adult social care
- GP working, NHS and general medical issues
- Marketing and project/budget management
- Finance
- Academic experience and connections
- Community music
- Team management

Their expertise and guidance on these matters, as well as their ideas and encouragement, have been absolutely critical to the smooth running of our new charity, and have made an enormous difference to the way our work has developed over the life of the Arts Council project period

9. TRAINING

Given the development of our work and organisation over the last year, we have been well-placed to offer training. We ran a short course for music professionals in October 2017, which was very well-received, despite a low turn-out (6 people attended). This suggests we need to do more to develop the training aspect of our work, and to find ways of advertising it more effectively. All delegates said they would be 'very likely' to use their learning in their future work, and made the following comments:

'Fantastic, really enjoyable. Engaging, and good mix of theory and practical'

'Fabulous – really inspired to make some musical connections myself'

'Lots of great ideas, with very clear instructions'

'Most useful content were the song ideas and how to adapt songs for both children and older residents and in care homes'

'Excellent – a really nice mix of learning about the benefits of intergenerational session work with the theory behind it and practical ideas on tops for running your

own – this has inspired me to explore running new groups locally for the elderly and to try intergenerational classes as well, thank you'

'Very useful, clear, informative, enjoyable – especially interested in the discussion re positive effects of music in healthcare'

10. THE FUTURE

As the project has drawn to a close, we have found ourselves facing new opportunities and challenges. Council plans to close most of the care-homes in which we have been operating suggest that our focus on the wider community has been well-placed and, with the past year's experience under our belt, we now have a much clearer idea of what is required to bring in new participants from the wider community.

At this point, we have secured enough funding to take us through most of 2018 and are continuing to work on generating new income. With new funding, we plan to do the following:

- Continue to increase the number of vulnerable older people accessing weekly groups, particularly those living outside care settings in the wider community. This will involve increasing participation in existing groups and setting up new ones; we are currently working on a plan with York Medical Group to set up groups on-site at their GP surgeries
- Continue to develop and expand our volunteer base, to include more 'music buddies' (supporters who accompany vulnerable people to sessions) and volunteer drivers. This will involve focussing newly acquired resources on volunteer recruitment, management and development
- Provide transport to sessions for members who would otherwise struggle to attend; since piloting free transport this year, we have seen a measurable increase in the number of people able to attend weekly sessions and additional events. We will be continuing our relationship with a local 'dementia—friendly' taxi service and will be using minibuses belonging to the Alan Bott charity, whenever feasible
- Investigate how to promote our training offer more effectively

With these developments, we aim to achieve the following outcomes:

- Vulnerable and isolated older people in York will be healthier, happier and more active
- Vulnerable and isolated older people will have more, and stronger, connections with their community
- More volunteers will be involved with the project, and they will be better supported
- Musical Connections groups and choirs will become embedded within the York community, and we will be recognised as the 'go-to' service for older people to make music and social connections, with more people participating every year.

Website: www.musicalconnections.org.uk, **email:** enquiries@musicalconnections.org.uk