



# THE MUSIC HOUSE FOR CHILDREN

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PIANO ★ GUITAR ★ VIOLIN ★ DRUMS ★ PERCUSSION ★ TRUMPET ★ CELLO  
UKULELE ★ SINGING ★ MUSIC FOR BABIES ★ MUSIC FOR UNDER FIVES  
INSTRUMENTAL LESSONS ★ HOME TUITION ★ WORKSHOPS ★ CONCERTS

## BBC Children in Need/The Music House for Children Evaluation/Final Report for The Bridge Academy Music Project 2007-9

### Overview

Since the last evaluation and mid-project report the environment of our music project has shifted and improved undoubtedly for the benefit of the participants.

We agreed to change the site of the project for Bridge students (referral children between 11 – 16 years old attending The Bridge Academy Pupil Referral Unit). There were several issues with youngsters attending activities off-site – mainly involving attendance and reliability. This created immense time loss and fluctuating numbers of children turning up, either with a tutor or independently.

We therefore transferred all the equipment to The Bridge Academy where a designated music room was given to the project. This in turn took time to establish since much of the room was inappropriate to inspiring students in music making or even attendance.

Due to staff changes the supporting infrastructure was improved. The equipment was able to be stored permanently within the music room (instead of a disused lift), as well as being able to utilise other musical equipment available.

There is now a separate area for the drum kit, creating obvious new advantages. The tutors have seen a range of young people of the course of the year and created 3 major pieces of creativity.

### Working with puppets

After many weeks of encouraging young people to write and record a new method and ethos was established by the tutors. With rap (which all students enjoyed and wanted to try) a certain bravado was induced, making natural creativity difficult. In particular young people did not want to 'look foolish' in front of their peers, no doubt and in part influenced by embedded lack of confidence in themselves.

The tutors created a situation where young people 'did not care'. They brought in hand puppets, and over a period of 3 weeks put together a short TV show. This incorporated 3 young people. After they had surpassed the challenge they put music with the images and found ways of building the mood through writing on screen and humorous sound effects. In many ways this was the most successful activity created, since it was multi-tasked, held their attention and attendance, and incorporated independent humour, writing and music as a team effort.

### Creating music and poetry

The tutors concentrated on Mathew Sweeney's 'Fishbones dreaming'. Students created their own poems based on this piece. They understood the structure and form of the piece, and became quite engrossed in the process. Following this, they created random pieces of music recorded in one take to accompany the poem. They found that the young people responded well to the very immediate artistic challenges. The immediacy of the challenge meant they cared less whether it was good or bad and simply 'had a go'. Getting young people to 'have a go' is clearly the hardest challenge of all.

### Creating a horror song for Halloween

The process of creating a horror song which used a whole cd full of samples in order to build a mood and atmosphere was another challenge. In the ensuing weeks where there was a half term break, concentration broke down and many young people did not show up. This may have been hampered by the lack of insistence by the school to enforce attendance – one which music tutors have no control over.

### Challenging pupils

There were three students who deserve a mention because of their consistency throughout the year.

Conor has been reasonably consistent throughout the project. Together, tutor and youngster built up a strong relationship. It is believed that Conor is applying to a music college in the coming year. Tutor influences have been positive overall to Conor and in many sessions they have simply sat together working on riffs and building new songs. Despite some problems with concentration Conor has gained a great deal from these weekly sessions.

Jordan demonstrated lack of energy and anti social strains during sessions. He found respecting tutors hard and subsequently creating any music was very hard. The area Jordan most responded to was the puppet workshop. This is being explored further as a way of getting youngsters with his issues on board.

Yunnis is capable and can deliver creatively when not being influenced by others in his group. His concentration span overall was erratic and smoking before sessions did not appear to help.

### **Difficulties throughout the three year project**

#### **Changing young people.**

This cannot be done via part-time measures, nor was it our intention to do this. Despite our very real desire to influence each participant for the greater good, in the end, as with previous projects the end result and onward progression is up to the individual. All we can do as an organisation or group of skilled individuals is to show these young people pathways to alternative ways of thinking and responding as a positive influence on their existing lives – if they wish.

#### **Discipline outside the classroom/studio**

With no apparent routine or guidelines of behaviour expected from these young people, the in and out flow of people in every session made concentration, focus, development and seamless progress of the project extremely difficult. For those who genuinely did want to maintain regular visits, this was ‘frowned upon’ by peers and subsequently did not help to instil personal confidence.

#### **Technological issues**

Over the three years the computer equipment as funded by the project became dated and out of favour over other equipment that were developed. Bringing the equipment from one site to the other was difficult, however establishing a permanent set-up was eventually achieved, even despite the lack of storage up until September 2008.

#### **Conclusion**

As with any project involving two or more different groups of skilled deliverers we need to ensure effective communication and set up from the outset. Allowing young people excluded from mainstream schools just to ‘have a go’ is not enough. Opportunities are vital, as long as the disciplinary infrastructure is in place and maintained throughout by all key people concerned. Unfortunately, as with many institutions staff changes do occur, more pressing issues take place and specialised organisations such as The Music House struggle to retain something that may have genuinely started off on the right foot, with the right intentions and goals in mind.

However, importantly and how ever little our achievements may have appeared overall in terms of numbers of young people and with the Bridge Academy, the overriding view from tutors and lead officer was that for a few youngsters such as Conor, their achievement was immense. It is likely to remain with them into the future where they now feel strong enough to make a decision and go into society with their views and their talent and to make it for themselves. That alone is the reason why this project should continue, albeit in different formats, for different young people but with the same aim in mind – to inspire, support and nurture possibilities for each one.

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