



Sound Connections Challenging Circumstances Music Network

Peer Learning Scheme 2015-16 Review

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Introduction

In spring 2015, Sound Connections ran a pilot work shadowing scheme for members of the Challenging Circumstances Music Network (CCMN). Four music leaders took the opportunity to experience a day in the life of a CCMN organisation. Heart n Soul (creative arts company working with people with physical and learning disabilities), Fairbeats! (music charity working with refugees and asylum seekers), Good Vibrations (running Indonesian gamelan projects in prisons and secure hospitals) and The Village School (SEND 4-19 school in Brent) all opened their doors to an individual willing to learn more about the organisation and its practices, as an opportunity to reflect on and develop their own. The experiences and feedback of the participants was so positive we opened up the opportunity to five more practitioners who were hosted by a new cohort of organisations.

Sound Connections has a commitment to providing high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities as part of its mission to develop, enable and empower young Londoners through music. We believe that by up-skilling the workforce of music education practitioners, we are guaranteeing a better quality of provision and are able to reach more young people across London. The Peer Learning Scheme was both an opportunity to bring new practitioners into the CCMN fold, and to provide a valuable CPD experience for colleagues who have already been engaged with Sound Connections for a while.

Why 'peer learning'?

The pilot scheme was marketed to CCMN members as a work shadowing opportunity. When the practitioners who had been involved in the pilot scheme fed back their experiences at a network meeting, there was a general feeling that the term 'work shadowing' could alienate practitioners at different stages of their career. After a discussion, network members agreed that 'peer learning' better described an opportunity as equally valid for the most experienced of project managers as a practitioner just starting out in their music leading career in this field. 'Peer learning' also encompassed a wider breadth of learning on a placement; one might not just be observing workshop techniques to implement into one's practice, but also having conversations with project managers about the strategic thinking and types of partnerships involved in the project delivery.

In order to keep the language of the scheme non-hierarchical and balanced, we used the terms 'guest learner' for any participant who went to visit an organisation for a day, and 'host organisation' for the organisation or project that offered the placement. 'Guest learner' felt particularly useful as it does not imply a particular outcome for the learner; activity ranged from observational work shadowing to one-to-one time with a project manager or organisation director.

Recruitment

We circulated information about the Peer Learning Scheme to CCMN members through our regular member mailouts. The opportunity was also advertised in our broader Sound Connections e-newsletter, which goes out fortnightly to over 4,000 subscribers, and was promoted through our social media channels (Twitter and Facebook).

We had eight guest learners apply to the scheme, out of which six were matched with host organisations.

Host organisations

Our call for host organisations for the Peer Learning Scheme 2015-16 drew a varied cohort of music organisations, all working in some way with children and young people in challenging circumstances. Appendix 1 is a table of those organisations, and the experiences or activity they were offering to guest learners for a one-day placement.

Guest learners

Like with the host organisations that offered to join the Peer Learning Scheme, the individuals who applied to be guest learners came from varied backgrounds in music education, and represented a spectrum of experience and career-stages:

- Two guest learners were recently trained music leaders at the beginnings of their careers and keen to get some hands-on practical experience.
- Two guest learners were business partners in the process of setting up a new company delivering one-to-one music sessions with young people at risk of exclusion.
- Two guest learners were experienced practitioners and music teachers who were interested in diversifying their practice and experiencing projects targeted at groups they hadn't worked with before.

As the application forms came in, it was encouraging to see that changing the wording of the opportunity from 'work shadowing' to 'peer learning' seemed to be encouraging a more diverse range of practitioners to apply for the opportunity.

Feedback

After each placement, both the guest learner and the representative of the activity/organisation with which they were placed were asked to complete a feedback form (Appendices 2 and 3).

Key themes from guest learner feedback:

Gaining/developing valuable practical skills

- *"I have learnt about how to compose songs as a group and how to use each young person's ideas to contribute and to ensure everyone is engaged in the activity."*
- *"The ability to construct a varied piece through the repetition of a simple idea, embellished by supporting musicians, was something I may well use in future."*
- *"I will definitely try group composition and some of the other musical activities (using ukulele, games and music technology) I observed when I run similar sessions in the future."*
- *"A warm-up exercise we did which I'd not tried before, i.e. the standard 'football terrace clapping' rhythm but with half the group including an extra beat (played as a stamp of the foot) between each cycle, so both halves get progressively out of phase with each other and then back in again. I will try this out next week at an after-school club."*
- *"[I learned] to invite the young people's opinions and suggestions as much as possible – 'what would you like the music to say?' – encouraging their own ideas and choices."*

Developing skills relating specifically to working with young people in challenging circumstances

- *“Irregularity of attendance was a serious issue for the project leaders, but the material was planned in such a way that this could be worked around. Ultimately a very effective performance was fashioned out of a relatively small amount of learned material.”*
- *“I learnt how to communicate with young people with different needs more effectively and more about the other things you need to teach children (social skills, boundaries, communication) when working in this area [SEN/D].”*
- *“[I learned] The value of creating a sense of space - where the young people don't feel pressured (while at the same time being taken seriously), and can take hold of their own learning.”*
- *“The practice of blogging as a means of generating evidence and in support of celebrating achievement with a wider audience including family, friends and support agency staff who have an interest in the participants' progress.”*
- *“How learning can go ahead in a noisy cramped environment, even when participants are working individually with lots of noise intrusion from their peers.”*

Identifying gaps in their skillset

- *“Using music technology (sampling) - I have some experience in this area but not much.”*
- *“I need to work on self-promotion/running a business.”*
- *“Database management – how to collect and then process data collected from projects to be able to explain and assess impact.”*

Having the space to think about future CPD/next steps

- *“I have some similar projects in the future with SEN/D young people in respite care which I feel a lot more prepared for (as prepared as you can be). I would like to do more of this type of work and run my own business as a practitioner working with young people and music. I would also like to work with young people with mental health issues and the elderly one day. I plan to do a Masters in Music Therapy in 2017 so I feel this is the right direction for me.”*
- *“This particular project is continuing in the new year as a partnership with the Royal Academy of Music. I'm already involved with the Academy and, having participated in this peer learning session, have asked to be a part of the project next term.”*
- *“[My experiences on the Peer Learning Scheme are] inspiring me to pursue some kind of after-school Jam Band at my new school”*
- *“We left the meeting with new ideas and potential avenues that we could pursue alongside practices that we could map onto our current scheme of work.”*
- *“I have no ongoing work with young people currently, but this recent experience will help my prospects in this area.”*

Key themes from host organisation feedback:

The desire to share good practice

- *“To give more practitioners the opportunity to observe and take part in our projects; to share good practice”*

- *“We feel that it is our duty through Youth Music [the project’s funders] to pass on the skills and knowledge that we have learned through our work. I also feel strongly that musicians should be encouraged to work in SEN settings and to challenge our thoughts about disability.”*

A guest learner could be a potential new collaborator/facilitator

- *“[We offered to host a guest learner] to get to know new and emerging practitioners.”*
- *“It was very easy to incorporate Isabel into [the organisation] and we would welcome her back.”*

That arranging the placements through Sound Connections had been simple and the experiences positive

- *“It was all very straightforward.”*
- *“It’s a great scheme, and we’d love to be involved again!”*
- *“It was nice to feel like we had helped her in some way.”*

Conclusion

Overall, the Peer Learning placements that took place were positive experiences not just for the practitioners, but also for the organisations hosting them. What was clear in the feedback was that host organisations were flexible enough with what they offered the guest learners so that the learners’ needs were met – the experiences were authentic and provided valuable professional development, whatever stage of career they were at.

It was very positive to receive feedback from all the host organisations volunteering themselves to host guest learners again; we are looking at ways to develop the offer in the near future.

We are also considering broadening the type of activity on offer from focusing on music in challenging circumstances to incorporating early years music making – another of our core strands of work. With this Peer Learning Scheme under our belts, we have a strong foundation of evidence upon which to start building a case for regular peer-to-peer working, and a need for this type of support and collaboration across the music education sector.

Next steps

With the knowledge and experience of effective peer learning summarised in this report, we are keen to continue and build upon the scheme in a sustainable way. With this in mind we will relaunch the Peer Learning Scheme as an opportunity for potential guest learners to request a maximum 1-day placement on a rolling basis:

1. Guest learners complete a short form outlining the type of placement that they are interested in.
2. Sound Connections identifies host practitioners, projects or organisations within its network relevant to the guest learner application.
3. Sound Connections brokers a relationship between guest learner and host organisation who then arrange the placement directly.
4. Once the placement is complete both parties complete a short feedback form to aid ongoing monitoring and reflection of the scheme.

Name of organisation	About the organisation	Type of activity offered
<u>CEDA</u>	CEDA is an independent registered charity and not-for-profit company limited by guarantee which provides learning and social opportunities to disabled people in Devon.	A one-day placement incorporating CEDA Rhythms, a Youth Music-funded project working with young people aged between 5-21 years with a range of SEN/D. CEDA take advantage of some of the latest assistive technology as well as traditional instrumentation, with a clear focus on mainly improving young people's social and personal skills – with music being the tool.
<u>Haringey Shed</u>	Haringey Shed is an inclusive theatre and performing arts company for children and young people aged between 7-16 years old. They provide a range of term time after school activities and holiday programmes as well as outreach work in the community, working in local schools, nurseries and community centres. Haringey Shed believe every young person, regardless of their ability and background should have access to a safe, respectful and creative environment. "Where everyone has a part to play" is a slogan that they are very proud of.	A weekly Band Night rehearsal and jamming session.
<u>Noise Solution</u>	Noise Solution are a social enterprise working in the Suffolk/Essex area using music and technology with people who are disengaged from the mainstream through problems such as mental health, addiction, offending, challenging behaviour or chaotic lifestyles. Their programmes work on a one to one basis with the hardest to reach learners and the key outcome is increased confidence as well as re-engagement with professional or education services and, potentially, progression to other appropriate opportunities. Clients learn the skills that they need to create music they view as relevant to them – it could be grime, dubstep, trance, hip hop or any other genre. Many clients undertake Arts Awards which are meaningful qualifications which can be used to build up credits towards a college place. Noise Solution uses cutting edge music technology and has an absolute focus on excellence in provision. As a result they have consistently impressive results with clients for whom there are often few choices left.	Observing a one-to-one music mentoring session between practitioner and client.
<u>Soundmix</u>	Soundmix provides regular music-making sessions to young refugees and asylum seekers who are separated from their families. They use guitars, keyboards and percussion to develop existing talents and teach new skills with a focus on performance and composition. Their participants have often escaped extremely traumatic circumstances in their home countries, and the music sessions make a direct and lasting impact on their emotional wellbeing. Making music is a creative and therapeutic activity and an enjoyable break from the appointments and assessments asylum seekers and refugees have to attend.	Music workshops at Refugee Council, working with young people from various different countries aged 12 – 19 years. The sessions are an hour and a half and a mix of group and one to one work, including rhythmic games and ice breakers, instrument learning (guitar/piano/drums), singing and band work.
<u>Wigmore Hall Learning</u>	Wigmore Hall Learning provides access to chamber music and song through innovative creative programmes, online resources and events. They invite a broad audience to get involved in music-making of the highest standard, particularly focusing on those who may be excluded from regular arts provision. They make connections through projects and partnerships, using music to inspire people, to explore opportunities and to enhance learning and development.	Observing the culmination of the Cardinal Hume Centre project, a series of weekly music session with vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness.

Appendix 2

Guest learner feedback table

Why were you keen to explore this area of work?	
What did you learn? This could be relating to practice, the challenges of the setting, etc.	
Is there anything that you'll take away and apply to your practice or a current project straight away?	
What next? Has this inspired you to pursue similar work in future? Do you already have a project in place that this experience is relevant to?	
If you were to pursue work in this field, what further training/skill development do you feel you'd need?	
Anything else you'd like to tell us...	

Appendix 3

Host organisation feedback table

Why did you offer to host a Peer Learning placement?	
Was there anything you needed to do to prepare the guest learner for their placement? Was it easy to incorporate them into the group or did it feel in any way disruptive?	
Did you learn anything through having the guest learner with you or experience any particular benefits?	
Would you be keen to offer a placement again in future?	
Is there anything else we could do to help you prepare for placements?	
Anything else you'd like to tell us...	