

Practice-sharing case study

Developing music in an 'Education Other Than At School' setting



Wiltshire Youth Arts Partnership (WYAP), part of Wiltshire Council's Integrated Youth Service, has been working with the Council's EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) team to do music work with young people unable to attend mainstream schools for health reasons. The three-month pilot project was part of their wider Music Matters programme. In this case study, the project leads from WYAP and EOTAS, and the musicians involved, outline what happened and what they learned.

About this case study

This case study has been written to share practice and prompt reflection, discussion and development of musical inclusion work. It has been written for music practitioners working with children in challenging circumstances, as well as funders and project leads/managers, as part of the legacy of Swindon Wiltshire and Gloucestershire's [Musical Inclusion](#) programme (see also last page).



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Carrie and Kirsty's story: forming strong commissioning relationships

The EOTAS service works with families and schools to provide educational support for pupils who aren't able to attend school for medical reasons. It's a new service, created following the closure of the pupil referral units, and the requirement for mainstream schools to provide alternative curriculum for those at risk of exclusion or low attainment.

Most of those who attend have mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue syndrome (ME), eating disorders, psychosis, body dysmorphism syndrome, although one pupil has late stage cystic fibrosis. Most experience low self-esteem, low attendance at school and are at risk of low educational achievement. The aim is to help pupils to return to mainstream education.

The service operates at two sites: in a district hospital in Salisbury, and in an old school, previously a pupil referral unit, in Trowbridge. When pupils are unable to attend, EOTAS offers home visits and online learning.

Although the Music Matters programme has a well established programme and a good track record of delivering outcomes for young people with similar challenging circumstances (including through a referral process with the Integrated Youth Service, Youth Offending Teams and the local college), it had yet to establish contact with the EOTAS team.

Making contact and discussing outcomes and legacy

Despite WYAP being part of the Council (and indeed the same directorate, Early Help), Project Manager Carrie Creamer initially found it difficult to know how and who to talk to, and had to find a different approach: "I went to the head of Early Help. As he was reshaping the service, and WYAP had begun to be involved in the different ways they were consulting with colleagues, it allowed for better inroads to work together. He sent an introductory email and I managed to get a meeting with Kirsty Bentley, Lead Teacher covering the two settings." Kirsty remembers: "My initial response was, 'urgh, music!' My experience at school was terrible ... but I don't like my own experiences to get in the way of others, so it was exciting but I was a little nervous." She recognised that it would bring a wider

range of learning to the curriculum, would help students to develop social skills and confidence, and perhaps take them out of their comfort zones safely. She was less convinced, initially, that there was potential to improve attainment.

Carrie outlined how she felt Music Matters would help with EOTAS's outcomes – in particular, increasing young people's attendance: "That was important to them, as they get money from mainstream schools according to the number of hours a young person is with them. I also said they'd see a definite progression in some of those young people in terms of their numeracy and literacy."

She added that they would map this against baseline data, produce a case study, and could also take the students through Arts Award which Carrie believed were both unique selling points.

Carrie didn't ask the school to contribute financially, but felt it was important that the EOTAS team didn't see this as a one-off 'project': "Firstly, I didn't want to run sessions where their staff weren't involved. So I said I'll give your staff free professional development which could change their practice. And I was clear that if it was a success, we'd want there to be a legacy, that the work would continue but they'd need to pay for it."

Building relationships and trust

Making enough time to get to know Kirsty, her team and the students was crucial to Carrie, right from the start: "I met with Kirsty a lot before we even wrote the bid for the SWAG funding – probably three months before – and then continued to do so while we were writing it. I went to see both sites, met the staff, and we talked about what the offer could be."

Kirsty says: "Some of my team were concerned the musicians would come in and be over exuberant: go too fast for the young people, and even scare them. I had to really sell it to them. Carrie was really good. We met several times before we agreed anything. I said, 'we've got some really vulnerable young people here and if they aren't guided properly this would be a bad experience for them and put them off our setting'. Carrie thought very carefully about which music leaders she'd bring in, and told me about them, but I was trusting Carrie a lot: I just said to the team, 'let's see how it goes'."

This 'getting to know you' approach continued into the start of the project: "We didn't just turn up with our kit to start making music," says Carrie. "We had introductory days where myself and the two musicians, Alex Lupo and Deej Dhariwal went to each setting and just hung out. We had conversations with everyone, looked at what the programme could look like, and then formalised the plan and the agreement. We were queried by our funders (SWAG, see the 'About Musical Inclusion' boxout) about the length of time we planned for a session to last, and the small size of the groups – but we followed EOTAS guidance, and it's paid off."

The sessions were originally meant to last two hours, but this didn't make sense financially or logistically. One musician was

travelling from three hours away; and settings staff advised that longer sessions were needed – and so the plan was reshaped to deliver a whole day, every other week on a Friday (alternating between each setting each week).

This ended up helping to deepen the relationship-building approach, giving the musicians longer to get to know the young people (particularly as there were often new participants, or others might be missing for certain weeks), and respond to how they were on the day.

Briefing and debriefing – critical for the work and for sharing practice

Each day started with a briefing session with musicians and settings staff: “This was important,” says Carrie, “as the young people’s moods and abilities could vary greatly from day to day. There were quite critical things happening for them and it was important we could be responsive to that. And there could be different young people coming each week.”

The students decided what they wanted to do each day during a run-through of proposed activities at the start of the day, and were asked regularly how they felt it was going and what they wanted to do next.

Each day ended with a debrief between the professionals, based around reflective conversations about what has worked well, what hasn’t worked well, and what people would change. Once a month there would be a longer meeting that, as Carrie says, “really unpacked it a bit more, finding out how setting staff were feeling about the work, how each young person was doing, anything we needed to change or be aware of.”

Informal practice-sharing built in

“The way we exchanged practice was very informal,” says Kirsty. “In the debriefings we’d say we’ve tried this, this young person is struggling with this. We noticed that some students were struggling with one-to-one work, so we suggested that they pair up in small groups. We had a young person who had Aspergers, and we talked about not starting off with the music, but building the relationship first by talking about the computer [see ‘Alex and DeeJ’s story – What we learned’]. Little bits of advice and observation came from different people and together we worked out approaches that would work. Those exchanges were really valuable for our own practice – it was a cross collaboration rather than direction. We wouldn’t usually get that type of learning.”

In between these ‘setting’ sessions, Carrie, Alex and DeeJ also met regularly to support each other and reflect on what had been happening. The EOTAS team similarly discussed the programme in their regular staff meetings.

Learning from other professionals: facing fear

Carrie says that the most interesting outcome for everyone – and the biggest challenge – was to do with the learning that



came from working with other professionals: “Some setting staff found it hard to be in the position of not knowing, allowing themselves to be a learner again, having that fear, rather than being in the role of teacher. The way we work, we tell the young people ‘we’re learning from you, you’re learning from us’. It took staff a while to understand the value of that. Kirsty’s an exceptional teacher though and she also likes learning. And this project also gave her the space to discuss how they do things, and what they could do differently.”

“It’s made me more open to new ideas,” says Kirsty “and to letting people in, being more trusting”.

Gradually, the staff became more comfortable with the approach, and a number learned music skills. Kirsty learned guitar and how to use Garage Band on an iPad, and another teacher is continuing to practice the guitar at home. Staff also enquired about training to be Arts Award assessors.

The Music Matters team also needed to adapt: “We were quite clear in the beginning that we needed to complete our paperwork,” said Carrie, “independent learning plans and benchmarking for each person ... but they explained we just couldn’t expect to do that so early on. This was the best piece of advice for us. And we learned that if there is a barrier or a delay, we had to trust the judgement of setting staff. Tearing up the rule book and being a maverick doesn’t help in this situation. If we had ignored their desire to delay completing paperwork it wouldn’t have been so fluid – or equal. We also learned the importance of really listening to what they were trying to tell us, either directly or indirectly.”

Next steps: integrating music into the work of EOTAS

Kirsty is now looking into the logistics and funding for further work as part of EOTAS's ongoing provision, and negotiating with Carrie. She also wants to explore ways that Music Matters can work with the students as they progress back into mainstream education. One idea is that students will be transported to a central setting to work together, and the work might be extended to excluded primary pupils. In the meantime, the relationship is continuing through a theatre project (with one of the musicians as the key contact, to act as a bridge between the two projects), and through Carrie guiding some of the students through their Arts Award.

"We definitely want to continue," says Kirsty. "It's certainly increased their confidence and resilience to cope in new situations. It's too difficult to say at the moment what the impact has been academically, the ultimate test is that pupils have gone back into mainstream education as successful learners, with improved predicted levels. I'm setting up our data tracking system at the moment, but we have seen pupils attendance improve and their engagement in those sessions. And we know it's helped relationship-building between pupils, and between us and the pupils – that was a completely unexpected outcome."

What they learned

Build in time for briefing/debriefing with setting staff at the start, end and during the session but ...

Carrie: "A good 40 per cent of my time on the project was spent in keeping the relationship healthy – it was important to build that in - the music bit has been excellent, but the key to it all has been giving time to developing good relationships..."

... intense activity with large gaps in between can affect momentum

Kirsty: "Having the team in every other week in each setting wasn't ideal, particularly when there were holidays in the middle, sometimes that meant there would be five weeks between sessions."

Be aware that adults are vulnerable about learning too ...

Carrie: "The young people have been amazing, they've exceeded themselves – nothing has been that challenging from them, and that's been made easy by the support of the setting staff". But for the support staff "having the fear, and trying something new was a challenge".

... but learning alongside students develops stronger relationships

Kirsty: "It took the team out of their comfort zones which was brilliant, definitely me! It helped us pick up on things going on with the young people. Just to come alongside them and break down some barriers, because we were in the same place as them – we had no idea either! – made it easier for pupils to approach us."

Listening to and reflecting on recorded music can build relationships and new perspectives

Carrie: "The formation of identity through musical preference is so important to adolescents, so this was something that really engaged them. And it revealed such a lot – often prompting them to talk about their lives. It was basically mindfulness, but we didn't call it that, we called it listening."

Kirsty: "One of the young people said, 'I've really enjoyed these sessions, they've helped us learn more about each other and become better friends'. Alex and Deej turned it into a safe environment where they could use music to express how they were feeling and what they thought."

"Music helped us to notice things about the pupils too, perhaps when they were having a harder time of it, just being able to sit back, see them in this different situation ... it fed back into us being able to better support them in the rest of their learning. It also helped because it was about what they listened to not what they could do, so they all felt empowered that they did in fact already have involvement in music."

Benchmark, but be prepared to adapt this

Carrie: "We'd intended working with each young person to complete an independent learning plan questionnaire in the first two weeks, so we could benchmark and then review it termly, to look at distance travelled. But they'd say 'I don't know what I can do, so how do I know what I want to learn?'. The settings staff explained it just wouldn't work. And they had to build a relationship with us first. So instead we collected notes, constantly, about each young person, asked them how they were, what they wanted, and those formed their plans. And we reviewed the plans only at the end. In the meantime we just suggested to them that they did some drawings, write some notes, keep a log about their experience – it was up to them."

Be prepared to adapt and change constantly

Kirsty: "The original plan was for pupils to have one-to-one sessions with larger group sessions in the afternoon. But some were finding one-to-ones too difficult: with all the focus on them, they felt pressured. So instead we paired them up and they did small group work."

"Another example was in where the listening session became less reflective, and more just about playing some music. We all picked up on this, and decided to change the direction. And the best piece of work has come out of that. We started to listen to sounds in the environment, record them, and then they'd make their own tracks, working together in a group, and all contributing to it."

Let young people lead, and agree their own ground rules

Kirsty: "The sounds in the environment work is quite fantastic. It's forced team work and discussion and it's been really nice to see. They've all been allowed their opinion and it's never been taken in the wrong way. It's through the guidance of Alex and Deej, modelling behaviour and setting ground rules with the group. Ground rules is something we'll ask the group to reflect on and use again."

More about the project

The project in numbers

- 25 young people, two music leaders, four staff at the setting
- Age range: 11-18 years
- 18 introductory sessions
- 59 one-to-one sessions and small group work
- 31 group sessions
- 22 group sharings plus additional sharings
- 1 Arts Award presentation

What it involved

"We never enter a space with a plan – we never say it will be music tech or drumming etc – we arrive prepared for anything and are then led by young people."

Carrie Creamer, Project Manager

Recorded music – active listening: Each day started with each young person, and each professional, playing a piece of recorded music they liked (eg on their phones, or on YouTube), and talking about what they liked about it, how it made them feel, and why it was important to them.

Agreeing what young people wanted: Each day's activities were responsive to what students wanted. The musicians sometimes suggested things they might do, tried things out, or young people asked to try certain things. The plan would often change during the day, with young people asking to have a go at certain activities.

One-to-one and paired composing with music technology: Young people used Logic to create music in collaboration the musicians. Logic was something that most of the students have been successful with and particularly enjoyed.

One-to-one and paired instrumental lessons: Learning guitar through learning a song they like, and then collaborating with each other to sing and play.

Quotes from students

"I didn't think when I woke up this morning that I would be making my own track today!" Young person, children's ward, Salisbury.

"Without music life wouldn't be worth living." Young person, Trowbridge.

"I just put my headphones on now and I can forget about everything else." Young person, Trowbridge.

"Sarah has started coming to maths since working with you, before this she wouldn't engage in anything" "Mel talks about the work with you all of the time." Leona, staff, Trowbridge.

"I feel that I know more about everyone else in the group now after we have shared music with each other." Young person, Trowbridge.

"Taking part has been a chance to socialise around music, adding new depth to music..." Young person, Trowbridge.



About Music Matters

Music Matters gives 0-25-year-olds the chance to write, play and record music – and in doing so learn a range of skills, raise their self-esteem, and achieve. It combines open access youth work with targeted work with young people who are vulnerable or at risk, and are referred by various services as a result of mental health problems, low self-esteem, or lack of engagement in learning

Music Matters is run by [Wiltshire Youth Arts Partnership](#), which is part of Wiltshire Council. It was previously part of Wiltshire Council's Integrated Youth Service (IYS, previously Connections), and now is part of Early Help, within Children's Services. Its focus has been on young people aged 0-25 – particularly those not in employment, education or training, but it now focuses on early intervention, health and wellbeing for all children in challenging circumstances, including people excluded from school, teenage parents, care leavers, young offenders, and substance misuse issues.

Alex and DeeJ's story: working in a new setting, formalising a mentoring relationship

Alex Lupo and Davinder Dhariwal (Deej) were the musicians chosen to work on the EOTAS project. Alex is an experienced community musician, who specialises in music technology and work with people with special needs (he is a Drake Music associate), and is the drummer in a ska/hip-hop/dub band called Babyhead. DeeJ is an emerging practitioner who's been working in music with young people for around five years on an ad hoc basis, partly through his work as a youth worker. He's a self-taught musician (guitar and music technology), who studied film at university and is in an experimental band called Thought Forms.

They'd both worked together before, and reflecting on their practice had formed an integral part of their working relationship. For this project, Project Manager Carrie Creamer offered them the chance to formalise this through a mentoring relationship. This meant that time was built in for regular meetings, contact by phone and email, and writing up of progress as part of individual learning plans. Alex was also being mentored as part of another programme, by community musician Hugh Nankivell.

"We already had a good relationship," says Alex. "We work well together professionally and are good friends. We've always felt open to discuss things about the work that might be challenging or interesting, but it's always been time snatched at lunchtime, in the car or in the pub and it's always been just part of a conversation about many other things."

Working in a new environment

The work was a steep learning curve for DeeJ, and so the mentoring relationship was essential. DeeJ explains: "I'm used to running open sessions with young people who want to make music, where we have a load of instruments in the room and I get people interacting straight away to create a band. So when it was explained it was young people who had psychological or health issues, and the Salisbury one was in a hospital, I was really worried. I imagined hospital beds, and very ill people, and I was concerned not only about how they'd feel with us being in their space, but also practical things like, 'what if I hit a wire or a tube that was part of their medical treatment?' Alex gave me some tips and advice, he said it's natural to be nervous about running project, that he's nervous all the time – I was surprised by that."

Deej was aware of the importance of understanding and being sensitive to the issues the young people faced, but he didn't feel confident that he could spot what was going on for them as well as Alex could: "You need a lot of awareness of what's going on for everyone in the group. Alex seems to do that easily, I was worried about missing something, or not doing the right thing where someone was a bit distressed. In these sessions you're juggling balls, there are so many things that are going on, particularly when you're working in a group."

Challenging perceptions of self

Alex was confident that DeeJ could deliver: "Deej isn't a trained musician and hasn't done a great deal of music leader training. But he draws from a wide range of experiences, and his skills are down to the nature of his character – he's naturally compassionate, considerate, very innately skilled in being with young people and he creates a really open space for the work. I really enjoy being around him professionally. A lot of his learning was really about changing the way he viewed what he was capable of."

The mentoring relationship, and the fact that this was an ongoing project over a number of months, all helped DeeJ to learn and gain confidence: "It always used to be a bit weird when we used to do the sessions. Alex does it as his main job but I was just doing it a bit here and there. I did youth work which was consistent, but this type of work ... I'd feel a bit rusty in-between each job – so working on a three month programme with Alex, and having that consistency, really helped. And through the process I gained more confidence and realisation of what I was doing."

The project challenged Alex's perceptions of himself too: "I've been trained and been involved as a music mentor to young people, but never to my peers. I definitely struggled a bit with how it was been framed. I was working with a number of musicians as part of the mentoring part of the wider SWAG project, and I consider most of them to be my peers. So I was quite clear with DeeJ about this: I said, 'I want you to know I think there's a lot I can learn from you as well'. I think there's so much that's brilliant about his practice."

What they learned

Formalising a mentoring relationship deepens the practice sharing

Alex: "Maybe it's something to do with permission. From DeeJ's point of view, he's responded to that 'permission', that intentional time where he can say 'I feel like this, I feel like that' and I guess know that I'm listening. I'd be interested to see how it affects our working relationship going forward."

Deej: "Until now, we'd never sat down and had proper discussions that were for me, and so that felt really good, because he could point out, you can do this, improve on this bit, this is my experience, or try reading this. The formalised mentoring does cause you to focus on yourself and your learning more. I'll be more active in asking for support in the future, asking for views on how things went, and thinking in terms of my individual learning plan."

Challenging perceptions of self helps develop practice – individually and collectively

Alex: "Deej said, 'you seem confident, use the right language, and you're aware of what's going on in the room. I get nervous and don't feel confident'. I said, 'that's OK, just so you know, I feel like that too, it's right to feel like that, and you have got those skills you've just not practiced them'. Beyond him learning a set of skills eg expanding his vocabulary for the work, or learning techniques for holding the groups – what was the most useful thing for him to know that it was OK to feel

nervous. Having someone assure him that he was already capable, and that his lack of confidence had to do with his perception of himself as opposed to the skills he possesses.

“Addressing the challenge of the way I felt about that mentoring relationship with my peers, had a lot to do with me challenging perceptions of myself.”

Working in pairs or a team created improved outcomes for everyone

Alex: “We do a lot of team working because we learn so much from each other. There’s a core of four of us who work together and we’ve all got pretty different skills. I’ve learned practical things like how to use Logic as well as more conceptual things about the approaches to the work.”

Don’t assume setting staff will be interested in developing music skills

Alex: “We intended to offer CPD opportunities to staff, helping them to use music technology equipment, maybe even learn some other music skills, but that didn’t happen as much as we expected. Sometimes you really work with a member of staff who’s immediately on board, supports in just the right way, but that’s not often the case. It’s so important we have that relationship with the staff in the setting.

“No-one wanted to write an individual learning plan for themselves – it’s outside of their frame of reference in that job, and there isn’t much onus on them to reflect on their practice and figure out what needs improving. They very much see themselves as either ‘teacher’ or ‘support staff’. So I think we’ve encouraged people to reflect a bit more deeply about their practice. Music-making is a bit risk for non-musicians. Even those staff who we thought would actively join in eventually found reasons not to take part.”

Setting staff may well be protective of the young people and see you as a threat

Alex: “Setting staff can be defensive about the young people: they may not like the idea that you’re talking about students’ wellbeing, and at worst, it can seem like a teacher is trying to sabotage the work. But it’s often unconscious. Where we have experienced this, it has changed over time and we’ve noticed staff become much more supportive, noticing and feeding back positive things about our practice.”

Some young people need you to put the music aside, at least initially

Deej: “One young person had Aspergers, and he wasn’t interested in doing any music. So I said, ‘we don’t have to, what are you into?’ And he said ‘games’. So for the first few sessions, we just talked, built a social connection and trust. I learned how to work with him, to build his confidence. I got him to set up the equipment, and that bridged a way of us discussing the music and he ended up playing the guitar. The teachers said normally if he doesn’t want to do something he won’t do it. So I learned to develop that bond first – but not to give up on the music. I didn’t immediately say, we’ll find something else for you to do. It’s a balance.”

Alex: “His sessions with Deej were a prolonged exercise in trust building. They just spent weeks talking about what he was interested in. If they hadn’t done that, wouldn’t have been anywhere near music making. He probably would have dropped out of school because previously he wasn’t leaving his house or even getting out of bed, he was deeply depressed and the staff were visiting him in his home. He’d started to come in to the Centre for an hour at time and it coincided with our project. Now he’s attending five days a week – not all to do with us, but we’ve certainly had a part to play.”

About Musical Inclusion

Musical Inclusion is a central part of the strategy of [Wiltshire Music Connect](#), the county’s music education hub. It involves ensuring that all children and young people who want to can make music.

This particular project was supported by funding from Youth Music through its Musical Inclusion programme, administered through a partnership between three music education hubs – Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire (SWAG). SWAG was one of 26 Musical Inclusion projects across England, tasked with ensuring that children in challenging circumstances were able to access music-making opportunities through music education hubs.

The work involved delivery of music activities with a range of partners, strategic working to ensure integration of musically inclusive practice in work with children and young people, and workforce development to ensure quality of provision.

Find out more

Musical Inclusion:

<http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/learning/musical-inclusion>

WYAP:

www.wyap.org.uk

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