



Families:

Strategies for engagement and adapting our work

As an organisation we are committed to working and engaging with families, regarding them as having an essential role in the musical, cultural, social and educational development of the children and young people we work with. This is a very natural consequence of our work being rooted in the music making and pedagogy of cultures from around the world including those outside Western Europe in which the shared community of making music together and oral traditions have remained relatively intact.

There are some specific strategies and understanding that we have developed, particularly through our ECCO (Ethnic Contemporary Classical Orchestras) project that we applied in our work with families on the project WE ARE HERE!! One challenge is in getting families who have never even heard of the Lyric Hammersmith – an arts venue that is a ten minute walk from their local children's centre and just around the corner from a major shopping street that they will probably be familiar with – to attend workshops, recording sessions and events there as part of the project activity. We know that people are often inhibited from entering public spaces that they are not familiar with, and arts venues are spaces that many of the families targeted by the project would regard as somewhere they do not belong, in spite of these being publicly funded organisations with the ambition to be open and available to their local community.

The measures we took to bring families into the Lyric for activities included:

- Developing work in the Children's Centre, which led to a recording session at the Lyric. In this way, relationships of trust and commitment were established
- Scheduling the recording session at the regular time of the Learn and Play session with Children's Centre staff walking the group of families from the centre to the Lyric
- Providing maps in advance with written directions and information about lifts and where buggies can be left
- Providing additional signage in the building on the day and people available along the route into the building to welcome and direct families

A Music Leader's insights on working with families

With trying to engage and work with families it is crucial to make that initial connection, and for us it can be as simple as the "Hello" song. It is a tool that we use to spark that connection – what better way can you get to connect with someone than by learning how to say hello in their home language? As someone who grew up with Spanish speaking parents, I know as a child I would instantly connect with someone who said something in Spanish. It ignited my interest and I was happy someone spoke in the language I used at home. Naturally, many parents when we were working in Children's centres were shy at the beginning and weren't going to just offer up suggestions when you first ask, "Can anyone think of a different way to say Hello?" so it was our job to offer something first, and as this is repeated eventually they begin to give you suggestions and actively join in more, until it just becomes a routine – they know we are coming, they know it's the Hello Song and it's time to offer something up.

I think having a diverse team also helps us connect with the families we work with; they see themselves represented and reflected in us – we are what London looks like. Also, having a diverse team means that although we are all working with the same resources, we all approach things differently but with the same common goal and it is those differences that makes us stronger.

Again, when engaging with parents in a children's centre I think they appreciated how we shared our instruments with them and their children. We also shared some songs so when it came to us asking them if they knew any songs they were a little bit less reticent about offering up a suggestion to us. We had to react instinctually a lot of the time with the families, we always arrive with a lesson plan or structure of what we want to do that session, but we are always reacting to what is going on in the moment as well.

Engaging with families in nursery settings can be a little more difficult as they aren't usually present when we deliver the sessions but with several nurseries we got the parents involved in different ways. With Bayonne Nursery we formed a parent choir that we set up for their Christmas concert, and in Charing Cross Nursery we held a session as part of their International Evening, and the parents were invited to come along and see the work with us. The Nursery manager said: *"the parents really loved that the children were doing music sessions they saw your demo (video the nursery had uploaded for the closed parent network) and were really happy and were asking when are they coming back?"* this shows that the children were going home and sharing what they had learnt with us and the parents, having seen us deliver a demo session, were totally supportive.

Laura Venegas-Rojas (Assistant Artistic Director Musiko Musika)



About WE ARE HERE!!

WE ARE HERE!! was created to provide an outstanding opportunity for 850 children aged 2 to 5 in highly deprived and marginalised communities in the south of Hammersmith & Fulham to secure the development of their speech and language skills through a musical programme specifically designed to address deficits in this critical area of early years development and improve their long-term personal, social and educational outcomes.

We planned to achieve this by the delivery of a specially devised programme based on the highly effective i am here!! model created by Musiko Musika in 2012-14 which is an evidence-based approach to the use of music to achieve significant improvements to speech and language skills in early years. In partnership with the borough's Early Years Advisory Team and the Lyric Hammersmith, Musiko Musika set out to work with local providers and families to deliver a comprehensive project comprising in-depth training, development and support for 72 early years practitioners; the development and delivery of workshops for two cohorts of local children (2 year old funded and 3-5 year olds); parental engagement projects leading to a festival day at the Lyric; and a package of resources created in consultation with speech and language specialists and the local community.

About Musiko Musika

Musiko Musika is an artist-led music education and cultural charity, jointly directed by the musicians Mauricio Venegas-Astorga and Rachel Pantin who founded the organisation in 1998.

Our vision is that the wonderful and remarkable diversity of the world's cultures available in London, England and the world is creatively thriving and celebrated, and is valued and accessible to all as performers, creators, learners and audiences.

Musiko Musika has established itself as a unique and highly respected organisation using world music and the diversity of pedagogical approaches within those different cultures as a tool to connect with children, young people, families and the community and engage them with music as a powerful agent for social change, as a means of increasing our understanding of each other and giving creative and cultural expression to our lives. Our work is cited as an example of exemplary practice in music education and for the creative and social values of our approach to cultural diversity, encouraging and enabling participants to bring the sounds, songs and stories of their own cultural backgrounds into their music-making with us.

We are an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, and are proud to have Baroness Christine Crawley, Baroness Gabrielle Bertin, Martin Morales and Richard Harvey as our very supportive patrons. We joined the Lyric Hammersmith's group of partner organisations in 2015, other partnership work includes EFDSS and Middlesex University, the publishers Victorina Press and the international production music company West One Music Group. As well as projects based at the Lyric our work takes place in Hammersmith and Fulham, and in schools and communities in other areas of London. Our NPO funded programme includes touring projects and collaborations in other regions of England. International work in Chile is also a regular part of our activity.

Project funders & partners:

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