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## **MOPS Take 2 - Term 1 Music Matters @ MOPS**

### **KEY:**

**ML:** Music Leader

**LS:** Little Star Group Music Sessions

**KW:** Key Worker

The Term 1 report was completed by Kath Borer (Project Leader and ML) and reviewed by Kirsty Mees (Evaluation Officer)

## **OVERALL AIMS**

**For MOPS SEN/D children to engage & grow with high quality music, singing & sensory sessions and access live concerts & performances.**

Term 1 of the MOPS Take 2 project started off with all sessions online via Zoom. The children and their families were provided with weekly sessions in Group Music, 1-1 Therapy and various videos & calls with the MOPS team to engage in sensory sessions. The children were invited back to playgroup on Monday 22nd February in two bubbles. Monday & Tuesday (bubble 1) Thursday and Friday (bubble 2). Sessions were adjusted and children joined in with Zoom music sessions either at playgroup or at home depending on the day they were onsite. Many of the group Zoom sessions included children from home and playgroup joining the session together. Finally on week commencing 15th March, music sessions resumed onsite with all children and staff returning full time.

During the online sessions children and families at home were able to explore the musical activities together and for many of the parents this was the first time they had been able to engage with the music sessions and observe how their child interacted. Performance opportunities in Term 1 focused on the ML sharing her musical expertise singing songs, playing a variety of instruments and encouraging the children to explore through sound making, movement and vocalisation. A live concert or sharing concert for the families did not occur during Term 1 due to restrictions around COVID19, however, two live concerts and two sharing opportunities have been scheduled during Term 2.

**Provide MOPS workforce with the tools to become self sufficient in music making sessions, using tuned percussion & ukuleles.**

Training opportunities for the MOPS workforce in Term 1 occurred informally through discussions on the different music sessions, children's responses and the types of experiences the ML was presenting. Formal training for staff in Term 1 included the Sounds of Intent (SOI) framework discussed further in Outcome 1. Formal training relating to musical skill development was postponed in Term 1 due to COVID19 restrictions and access to the instrumentation needed as well as the practical nature of the training requiring face to face sessions.

## **OUTCOME 1 - PERSONAL**

### **To improve communication in a vocal, emotional or physical way in response to group music sessions & concerts.**

The children at MOPS have varying needs which impacts each individual in distinct and complex ways. For many of the children communication can be challenging in both processing communicative input from others and sharing communicative responses through verbal, emotional and physical means. The structure of the sessions in Term 1, with the majority being online, had the potential to create communicative challenges for some of the children at MOPS. The project so far outlines examples of these challenges, however, also highlights the children's adaptability whether sessions were via Zoom with their families at home, Zoom sessions at playgroup, or face to face.

The Zoom sessions provided opportunities for the children to engage musically with their mum, dad, sibling or carer in their own home. This resulted in musical interactions and responses which may not have been observed during face to face sessions at playgroup. The online music sessions also provided families with a different insight into their child's musical potential and ideas for how they may be able to explore music together at home. Many of the children thrived whilst being at home, however, some found it more challenging. Challenges related to (i) technical issues such as sound and video quality, access to platform (ii) distractions within the home environment (iii) individual needs such as accessibility to visual content, sensory needs and auditory processing. These challenges resulted in some children not continuing their access to these sessions.

Changes or reduction in some of the children's communicative responses was also observed during online sessions and as children returned to face to face sessions. These changes may also relate to the broader impact of COVID19 on the daily lives of the children at MOPS.

Additional challenges were also noted by the ML in the delivery of the online sessions in particular the group sessions. ML describes (i) having to be much more animated on screen to gain feedback and maintain interaction (ii) singing louder and talking more as the flow of the session felt very different than face to face sessions (iii) leaving space and pauses to promote independent musical exploration did not have the same impact online and the delivery of online sessions at times felt rushed (iii) difficulty in interpreting responses due to not having real-time feedback and close up visual observation. ML reflected on the benefits of face to face music sessions in allowing flow and in the moment adaptations based on individual responses to support musical exploration, interaction and communication.

Despite these challenges, providing online sessions to the children at MOPS during this time was vital in ensuring that the children had opportunities to continue their learning and to create a sense of routine whilst not being able to attend playgroup face to face. Below are ML observations and reflections of the children's musical explorations via Zoom sessions at home, Zoom sessions at playgroup and face to face sessions at playgroup in Term 1.

## Music Therapy

**Zoom - A2:** Sibling would encourage A2 to tap her drum or say 'A2 do it'. Sibling would also play the same instrument with her (drum kit they had made out of a cardboard box). This encouragement and also excitement from her sibling to join in with music was very motivating for A2 as they explored musical elements such as rhythm and pulse, social contact, turn taking and shared their love of music together. It was fantastic to see how the relationship supported A2 and gave her the confidence to play alone and with her sibling. For example her sibling would sometimes sing a song or vocal phrase before her. This gave A2 the confidence to share her vocal skills and repeat what her sibling had sung.

**Zoom - A1:** A1 had a baby sister during this lockdown and one session was adapted to include the new addition. The ML composed a simple song with signs to include her new baby sister. We signed the song, sang the song and video'd the song so she could use it at home. Mum shared that 'A1 loves the video, we have been told to play it again and again. It has really helped her to bond with her sister'. A1 really enjoyed the song, signing all the signs with lots of vocal sounds and giggles, and sharing her excitement that this song was just for her. A1 had a sense of ownership which made her feel proud, supporting her emotional awareness and understanding.

**Zoom - S:** S usually joined in the sessions from his playroom. He was quite distracted by all the toys and often wanted to play with them. Sometimes we tried to use his toys in the session. e.g. S put on a cowboy hat, so we sang Horsey Horsey. He galloped around the room. Mum and Dad were so eager and wanted S to engage fully. Mum and Dad tried to make S sit on their laps which would often cause agitation or less focus. Eventually parents let him wander and the ML began responding and acknowledging his actions and sharing of preferences. This meant S could join in how he wanted which made a big difference to his participation and engagement. He was more communicative verbally and also with turn taking games. S is usually quite chatty and joins in with singing and creating vocal sounds. Mum commented that during lockdown he has become less verbal. This was noted by the ML who tried to encourage further verbal responses with familiar songs that S enjoys. Signing and playing familiar songs supported S to gain a sense of achievement and build confidence in his vocal exploration which was noted by his smiles, eye contact, motivation, focus and communicative responses e.g. call & response, singing, vocalising & signing, filling pauses.

**Zoom - D:** During one session D was playing with a computer that when she pressed a letter would speak a sentence about that letter e.g. E is for Elephant. D and ML turned this into a musical game. D would not look at the Zoom screen just at her toy computer. She would press a letter and then the ML would sing back to her what the computer said. This became a call and response game. Gradually she would smile after each turn. She would wait and only press the next letter when the ML had finished singing, after some time D looked at the screen and prompted the ML with her eyes and facial expression as to when it was her turn. D sometimes made vocal sounds whilst the ML was singing. This was one of the first times that D engaged with ML in a musical interaction for an extended period of time.

**Zoom - D:** When D returned to playgroup she continued her Music Therapy sessions via Zoom with the ML. The first session D was very upset and tired, however she did stop and listen when the ML played the piano which seemed to soothe her. D appeared to find the online format overwhelming at first and it was difficult for ML to interpret what she was finding challenging via Zoom. The following session the ML immediately worked out that D

did not like the sound of the guitar. Every time it was played D would become agitated and upset. This was a huge breakthrough and ML then moved the session focus to sound making with various instruments and vocal sounds. The ML sang Wheels on the Bus more than 10 times with different instrumental sounds for each section e.g. Cabassa wheels, Cymbals doors. D appeared very engaged. She watched and listened intently, she was very still and did not appear agitated in any way. D seemed to be eager to hear the next sound by either leaning forward or tilting her head. From around the 5th repeat of the song, D started to make vocal sounds when the ML left a pause. D progressed with tuneful sounds and by the end was blinking when she wanted the ML to move on. Repetition played a huge part in her communicative engagement.

**Face to Face - D:** As a result of ML adaptations based on interpretation of D responses, D appears much calmer and more settled in the group face to face music sessions. D has developed confidence with the ML and the musical experiences and has started to explore musical instruments in new sensory and musical ways such as creating sounds with different movements and listening. In previous sessions D had often explored instruments by mouthing them to provide sensory feedback and her new confidence within the music sessions has resulted in extension of musical exploration and learning.

**Face to Face - J:** The ML abandoned her lesson plan as J came to the face to face music therapy session with three tiny toy animals. The whole session focussed on his animals and what musical sounds, songs and activities could be made with them. J focussed for the full 30mins without leaving the session or being distracted by the rest of the playgroup. J was supported by a lesson structure based on his interests and input. ML and J bounced the animals on the drums, dropped them on the drums, put them inside the drums and under the drums. Joint attention, focus and motivation were observed from start to finish. J made lots of eye contact, vocal sounds and singing, signing and initiating preferences. ML has also noted sustained engagement for J during the group music sessions with J showing his awareness of the ML and seeking musical interactions through eye contact and instrumental play.

**Face to Face - YW:** YW was a little unsettled on her return to playgroup post lockdown and needed time to re-build confidence. In this example YW was much more settled and shared her excitement and enjoyment of the musical experience. The face to face session started with a tongue drum and YW was happy listening to this and was then supported to feel the vibration. Initially she withdrew from this appearing a little unsure, however when the ML started to sing 'YW can you play the drum', she made movements towards it smiling, and lightly came into contact with the drum. The ML then introduced a musical device called a Skoog. This was the first time YW had explored this instrument. The ML asked 'YW can you squeeze?' YW needed some support to apply enough pressure to the pads to create her own sounds. YW was actively listening to the sounds made and vocalised along when ML created different sounds. Some of these vocal sounds were reflective of the musical key of the Skoog. ML also placed the iPad near enough for YW to play the keys from the accompanying Skoog app and YW moved her hand across it creating different sounds. YW appeared very engaged with this activity, listening to ML instructions and sharing her music ideas and preferences. The iPad app was much more accessible to YW needs than the Skoog device allowing YW to create her own sounds independently.

YW was then given a soft piano; due to limited fine motor skills she often brings her hand down in a striking motion and with this action she was able to play the instrument confidently and independently. YW had both hands on the keyboard, the ML sang 'I play for YW' and she listened intently smiling the whole time keeping her focus on ML, not moving her hands until ML sang 'YW play for me' at which point she vigorously played! This continued in a turn taking manner, each time she would stop and wait while she was being played to by ML and then move her hands when she was asked to play. The ML varied the activity by singing 'YW let's play together' YW continued looking at the ML smiling. It appeared YW was enjoying being asked to play by herself again rather than jointly. When given the line 'YW play for me' she played again, and this time she also joined in vocally by singing along to the melody. For the goodbye song YW appeared relaxed and let the music wash over her, joining in with vocalisations when the ML paused. KW shared that 'It was a really special interaction to see, and clearly shows how motivated the child is by music and in particular one to one'.

## **Group ZOOM Music**

ML allowed a few minutes before each session started for the children to see each other, wave, sign, and for those who were verbal to say hello to each other. ML opened the session and remained off screen, giving time for the children to settle into the session and for parents to chat. ML then entered the session and began with a Hello Song. This was a calming and inviting way to start the sessions. One child: S kissed the screen emulating what he would normally do when greeting one of his friends face to face at playgroup. The online session format provided a consistent routine and structure as the ML kept as many elements similar to face to face sessions as possible to support the children's familiarity within a different platform. Awareness of peers, initiating interactions with others, and the excitement of exploring music together remained present during the online platform.

Families supported the children during the online sessions at home in a similar way that the team do at MOPS. Families would help their child to find and explore instruments and support them to engage in the activity. ML reflects that it was wonderful to see how the children interacted with their parents/siblings during group music making and the bond and enjoyment this can bring in the family home. Parents were eager to support their child to engage and interact with the online sessions as much as possible, however, at times children preferred to explore in their own way. For example some parents encouraged their child to sit on their lap, with focus towards the screen, however it appeared the child wanted to be free to move and explore musically in their own way. Freeness to explore music in their own way is very much encouraged at playgroup by the MOPS team and both the parents and ML tried to find a balance between encouraging interaction with the ML and activities and supporting free exploration.

**Zoom - A1:** Joined in every group session with her mum, sometimes dad and new baby sister. A1 expressed her delight in attending the music sessions by signing and waving to her friends as soon as she could see the other children on the screen.

**Zoom - YW:** During the group zoom sessions YW appeared less vocal overall however continued to make her usual vocal sounds to get ML to move focus towards her and acknowledge her communicative responses. Once settled back into face to face sessions at playgroup YW returned to her confident vocal exploration.

Overall the children appeared to engage with the ZOOM sessions and enjoyed using the instruments they had at home and/or objects around the home that made sounds. Some children found it more challenging and appeared less active/animated compared to face to face sessions and others found the platform difficult to interact with. Attendance in the group ZOOM sessions was consistent for some of the children, however, not all children attended and some dropped in and out.

***Comments from KW's regarding the group ZOOM sessions included:***

For some of the children 'Zoom sessions created a difficulty due to positioning a screen so they could see. Some children have visual impairments and trying to engage through a screen was less successful. These were often the children that dropped in and out of the music zooms, where as the other children joined each week.'

'Children engaging face to face is much more successful and the interaction with the adult leading the session has more meaning.'

'I was surprised how well the children adapted to the Zoom music sessions when at Playgroup. I felt that both BB and AB behaved no differently to music delivered face to face or via Zoom.'

'The children aren't as vocal or as animated as they would be during face to face.'

'Zoom sessions were good but sadly only the same handful of children accessed them. Those who did access them seemed to become more comfortable with them the more they attended and we saw some lovely reactions when they saw their friends on screen.'

'Engagement obviously varied greatly with the needs of the children - much more difficult for those children with visual impairment.'

'When the Zoom sessions were held in-house, it was good to see the reactions of the children who had not accessed them from home and good to see a high level of engagement. I think input from supporting staff was a great help here as not all parents feel comfortable joining in with the sessions.'

When reflecting on the group Zoom sessions throughout the term, ML noted that those who attended regularly appeared to become more and more engaged over the weeks. The consistency and routine of attending music regularly remained an important element of support for the children. If this platform needed to continue for the group sessions in the future, the ML may look at different ways to support those who found it more difficult to access. This may include (i) introducing shorter sessions for some children (ii) audio focused sessions for those with visual needs (iii) discussions with staff and families on how to support different needs within the music sessions.

## **Face to Face Sessions**

**LS:** As soon as ML entered the playgroup three children became very excited and ran up to ML making lots of vocal sounds and huge movements to get ML attention. S1 was very excited and scooted over in her chair making lots of vocal sounds.

**LS:** ML started playing the guitar whilst setting up. C and J came running up with lots of smiles, jumping up and down and then started to dance. C reached for the guitar and gestured that he wanted to play. ML explored this with C for around 5 mins until the main music session started. The children's excitement of hearing and feeling live music face to face was evident from the children's movements, facial expressions, and vocal sounds.

**LS:** R returned to the face to face group sessions during the second week. He appeared to be experiencing similar sensory processing challenges as when first attending the group music sessions last term. R's sensory needs include auditory processing difficulties where he appears to find the volume as well as unpredictability of sounds within the group session overwhelming. Before the current lockdown R has become confident and familiar with the music sessions and their structure, engaging in all aspects, playing drums and loud sounds with the group and exploring all activities and props.

The impact of lockdown for children with sensory sensitivities may be more challenging and further support and time may be needed for children to re-familiarise themselves with their environment. For R, having time away from the playgroup environment appears to have impacted his ability to self regulate his emotive responses to the auditory stimulus and confidence in the musical experience and structure. The MOPS team and ML note however that the children are resilient and through consistent and sensitive support continue to achieve and progress. ML notes that there were improvements in R's responses in the following session as she adapted the session structure to reduce auditory stimulus. R stayed for most of the following session, leaving for the drumming section only. ML will continue to adapt sessions to support R as he builds confidence and is supported to join in all aspects of the music sessions.

## ***Summary of Online and Face to Face sessions***

ML and KW reflections and interpretation of responses observed during both online and face to face sessions suggests that the preferred medium for the majority of the children and staff is face to face. Extended joint attention, prolonged exploration of musical instruments, tactile and sensory responses to instruments, vocalising and sound making, social interactions with their peers, confidence and turn taking were observed more frequently and consistently for many of the children during face to face sessions. The children appeared more confident and engaged when able to join in and take part with their friends, ML and staff during face to face sessions.

**Using the Sounds of Intent Framework music leaders & MOPS staff will document individual communicative responses and engagement and track how children interact/progress/learn in a group setting and how this effects them individually.**

ML and MOPS staff found the first training session via Zoom on the Sounds of Intent (SOI) framework very informative and the whole team really enjoyed the session. A second session with LS ML was also provided where the team watched videos of the children at MOPS in music sessions/concerts and as a group marked where they thought the children were on the SOI framework. The team found using MOPS children to assess responses and progress really helpful in understanding the framework and were much more confident in attributing responses to particular categories within the SOI framework with children they knew well.

***Feedback from MOPS workforce on SOI training and framework includes:***

‘I really enjoyed this training; it was interesting to break it down to see the different strands. I felt it was easier to relate it to our children than the videos we watched as part of the training session, therefore knowing your child well is helpful rather than going in to assess someone you are unfamiliar with. However, I think that once we are used to evaluating using the scales, I would feel more confident on assessing an unfamiliar child.’

‘Having done the TACPAC training it reminded me of the how much music, beat and rhythm work to form the most basic route of communication. Being able to assess a child in this way gives some positive feedback to share with parents and measure growth/development in an alternative way, when some children appear not showing any signs of development because criteria that we measure development against.’

‘Sounds of Intent training was good and we will start to implement after the Easter break. I feel this will give more focus to observations on music sessions and help staff to know what to aim for as next steps. The training highlighted the importance of music for communication, particularly for children with additional needs.’

**Families will report on communicative responses developed as a result of music sessions through informal discussion at sharing sessions / concerts.**

This occurred very naturally during Term 1 of the project due to sessions being online for the majority of the term. Families shared their interpretations of their child’s responses as well as surprise and joy in their child’s musical learning. Examples of parents comments after sessions included ‘I didn’t know she was doing that’ (using her eyes to communicate a preference). ‘Thank you she has really enjoyed that and was so vocal today’. ‘Wow what great listening he did today’. ‘She loves that song’.

On return to face to face sessions at the playgroup the parents continued to discuss their child’s musical explorations with the MOPS team. The MOPS team have a consistent dialogue with families as part of everyday practise and will continue to share and discuss all areas of the children’s explorations including during music sessions. In Term 2 there will be further opportunities for families to attend and share in their child’s musical experience



as well as discuss achievements as a result of the music sessions during two sharing concerts.

***Comments from families regarding Zoom Sessions include:***

‘BB enjoyed the music sessions very much, she has become quite used to Zoom and adapted quickly. As a parent I was very appreciative of the classes during lock down they were a great distraction.’

‘SM and siblings really enjoyed the musical input via Zoom but SM certainly seems to benefit much more from the face to face sessions.’

‘R didn't like the Zoom sessions at home but he seems to enjoy his singing face to face sessions when at playgroup, it might be as it's part of his routine and he's with his friends.’

‘AB and SM mum enjoyed the music sessions at home. It was ideal for all of SM family to enjoy.’

**Music leaders will document the development of communication responses within the group and individually.**

Weekly observations and written notes have been documented throughout Term 1 by ML and KW's. The MOPS team and ML have also begun initial training in the SOI framework and explored how they may utilise the framework in assessing communicative and musical achievements. In Term 2 they will begin to incorporate this framework into their observations and assessments, tracking progression and discussing the results as a team.

When reflecting on feedback and observations from Term 1, KW's and the ML have noted the overall impact lockdown may have had on vocal and communicative responses for some of the children. As children returned to face to face sessions, KW's have observed examples of children using less vocal communication to express their needs and preferences and in their interactions with the musical stimulus, adults and peers. However, examples of new forms of communication and extension of communicative skills was also observed for some of the children.

***Comments from KW's relating to communicative responses include:***

‘My key child's communication has stepped back, she has been very unsettled, and this has limited her communication responses.’

‘I have seen that other children have grown in confidence and are communicating as well as they were previously.’

‘B and A are signing and talking more, using new signs that have been taught at home.’

'We have noticed that some children's development has changed since the last lockdown. BB is much more vocal and now putting together sentences. SB has more single words but behaviour has become more challenging. However on the whole the children have adapted to being back at MOPS very quickly and seamlessly.'

This impact of lockdown on communication and musical learning has varied significantly for each child and we may see further examples as we progress into the new term. For the children at MOPS, the support and consistency provided by MOPS staff and the ML has allowed many of the children to continue their progress and feel a sense of security in multiple learning environments. This has supported many of the children in their transition back to face to face sessions. Results overall show examples of the children's resilience and ability to adapt to new forms of exploration as well as the importance of social opportunities on communication.

## **OUTCOME 2 - WORKFORCE**

**To develop MOP's Workforce musical skills to enable them to become a self sufficient music making setting.**

**Trainers will document workforce/leaders progress through written reports, evaluations and video/photographic evidence.**

**MOP's workforce will report on each other's achievements progress & improvements after they have used their skills in group music sessions through informal discussion and note taking.**

**Music Leaders will report on improvements in MOP's workforces ability, to develop music making opportunities for the children.**

Due to COVID19 the ML was unable to deliver face to face training for MOPS workforce focusing on music skill development and practical elements of delivering music making opportunities. Two training events exploring these areas have been scheduled for Term 2. In Term 1 training focused on the SOI framework and its application with two training sessions being held online. The MOPS workforce also developed their skills and understanding of music provision during Term 1 by reflecting on the online music sessions, feedback from ML and families and the children's responses as they transitioned back into face to face sessions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall the first term of Music Matters at MOPS - Take 2 has highlighted the benefits of continued musical experiences for the children at MOPS. Examples of the children's resilience, adaptability as well as vulnerability to the ever changing circumstances surrounding COVID19 have been observed. The value and importance of face to face sessions particularly in supporting communication needs has been noted and MOPS staff and ML are hopeful they will be moving forward into a consistent face to face format from Term 2.

The MOPS team and ML have reflected on the challenges as well as the achievements observed during Term 1 and have included these reflections in their planning going into the new term. In Term 2 there will be an emphasis on promoting sound making, vocalisation and communication to extend progression and support those whose communicative responses may have been impacted during lockdown. Activities will incorporate the use of microphones, piano/guitar led songs which the children are familiar with, lots of sound making and call and response activities.

Using Music Therapy to strengthen the children's engagement and confidence in group music making will also be an important objective in Term 2. The ML plans to focus on supporting individual children's needs, preferences and interests in the small group/one to one sessions and extending this in the group sessions to support their musicianship skills. Sing and Sign sessions will also commence in Term 2 which will provide further support for the children's communicative responses and enable them to build on their existing signing skills. Term 2 will also further develop the ML and MOPS workforce understanding and utilisation of the SOI framework in their assessment of individual responses to capture the children's progress. Term 2 will feature two summer concerts and sharing activities with families in the MOPS garden as COVID19 restrictions are lifted.

With acknowledgement of the challenges and impact of lockdown for many of the children at MOPS we also highlight the commitment of the families, ML and MOPS team in providing a consistent and engaging learning environment online and in supporting the transition back into playgroup. Including music in the online provision offered to families acknowledged the importance of musical experiences for the children at MOPS in supporting wellbeing, connection with others and creating moments for musical learning and interaction in the home environment.