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# Musical Connections: Project Evaluation November 2014-2016



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## **1.INTRODUCTION**

In 2014, subsequent to a very successful project funded mainly by a Big Lottery Reaching Communities grant, the Musical Connections project was awarded a second 2-year grant from the Big Lottery Fund (Project ID: 0010242428), supplemented by contributions from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and City of York Council. While the first grant had focused on delivery of a participatory music programme in City of York Council's care homes for older people and people with dementia, the second one enabled us to not only sustain our work in the care homes, but also to expand the project to include tenants from some of the council's sheltered housing schemes. This evaluation focuses on the delivery, impact and development of the project during the second grant period, from November 2014 to November 2016.

Please note that many of the findings from our evaluation of the first project have remained valid throughout the second grant period and are therefore included in this report, with supporting evidence from current participants. There are also a number of new findings, particularly in relation to our work with sheltered housing tenants.

Given the length of this document, we have decided not to include photographs, but have focused on quotes from participants and stakeholders, to try to give a voice to the people within the project. However, a wealth of photos and videos may be viewed on the website [www.musicalconnections.org.uk](http://www.musicalconnections.org.uk) and the Musical Connections Facebook page (search on muconnections).

### **1.1 Target Outcomes of the Musical Connections Programme**

When we received our second Reaching Communities grant, we committed to working towards achieving the following outcomes for participants:

1. *Participants (ie care home residents and sheltered housing tenants) will experience improved wellbeing and a more positive outlook on life.*
2. *Participants will experience reduced isolation and increased positive contact, communication and understanding with others in their care setting and the wider community.*
3. *Participants will experience increased self-esteem and self-determination through opportunities to learn, achieve and contribute to the programme.*
4. *Participants will benefit from improved learning and confidence amongst care staff and arts professionals to work creatively with older people.*

The following pages will demonstrate that these outcomes have been fully achieved, and that the project has made a very positive difference to the lives of its participants. Section 2 provides monitoring data relating to our target change indicators and, although these targets were significantly higher for the second grant, we have been successful in exceeding all of them. The rest of the report provides a qualitative exploration of the reasons for this success, as well as explaining how learning from the second project has informed our plans for the future.

## **1.2 Project Re-Structure**

Please note that, due to the closure of two of our participating care homes earlier this year, we were forced to re-structure the project in its final months. Subsequent to discussions with our funding officer, we re-located to the dementia unit at one of the remaining care-homes, and started a day-time choir at a local community centre, used by tenants from a neighbouring sheltered housing scheme.

## **2. MONITORING DATA AND SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNING**

Our monitoring and evaluation procedures are discussed in detail in Section 8. Suffice to say at this point that our methods have enabled us to provide the following numerical information, which shows performance against the agreed change indicators for each target outcome of the second Reaching Communities grant. Please note that the number of each indicator relates to the outcome of the same number as shown at 1.1.

### **2.1 Results of Tracking Exercises**

The figures below are the result of tracking exercises conducted over the life of the project ie from 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2014 to 9th November 2016, and show that we have surpassed all of our targets, most of them quite significantly.

#### **Indicator 1a: Participants feel and/or appear more alert, engaged and proactive during and immediately following sessions**

End of Project Target: 195

Number Achieved 256

#### **Indicator 1b: Participants state that taking part in sessions makes them feel happier and more positive about life**

End of Project Target 165

Number Achieved 200

#### **Indicator 1c: Participants report that taking part in the project improves their overall well-being**

End of Project Target: 165

Number Achieved: 200

#### **Indicator 2a: Participants enjoy and play an active role in intergenerational events**

End of Project Target: 215

Number Achieved 262

**Indicator 2b: Participants report that taking part in sessions facilitates increased positive interactions with others from their care settings, visiting relatives and members of the local community**

End of Project Target: 165

Number Achieved 200

**Indicator 2c: Participants report that participation in the project helps them to feel less isolated and more able to make contact with others**

End of Project Target 215

Number Achieved 242

**Indicator 3a: Participants state that they feel a sense of achievement at what they accomplish in sessions and that their contributions are valued**

End of Project Target 165

Number Achieved 196

**Indicator 3b: Participants are actively involved in planning and delivery of the programme through in-house planning sessions, the production of feedback reports and representation at steering group meetings.**

End of Project Target 165

Number Achieved 183

**Indicator 3c: Participants report that participating in the project gives them a greater sense of purpose and personal worth**

End of Project Target 165

Number Achieved 199

**Indicator 4a: Care staff and arts professionals attend formal training on the Musical Connections model**

End of Project Target 40

Number Achieved 55

**Indicator 4b: Staff express increased confidence in attempting creative activities by themselves with the people in their care**

|                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <u>End of Project Target</u> | 30                                |
| <u>Number Achieved</u>       | 37 'very likely'<br>12 'possibly' |

NB: Most of the delegates who did not answer this question unequivocally in the affirmative indicated that their job roles did not allow for direct implementation of the activities

#### **Indicator 4c: Participants report more enjoyable and constructive interaction with staff and additional arts professionals**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <u>End of Project Target for Residents</u> | 140 |
| <u>Number Achieved</u>                     | 161 |

### **2.2 Factors key to success**

The success of the project in meeting these challenging targets suggests that the Musical Connections team has worked effectively in developing the model beyond care homes, and adapting to the needs of sheltered housing tenants, thereby improving the wellbeing of both types of participant. The action plan which was in place at the end of our first Reaching Communities grant has, for the most part, been implemented with great success.

We believe that the factors below, most of which were identified in our earlier work, have remained key to its success, not only in the care homes but also in the sheltered housing schemes:

- i) **Continuity:** because sessions are weekly and the programme has run continuously (around the academic timetable), participants have been able to build up trust and confidence in themselves, the musicians and the relationships generated
- ii) **Avoidance of stereotyping:** participants have confirmed our belief that they are open-minded regarding session content, are curious about all musical genres, and do not need or wish to focus on the 'old songs'
- iii) **Providing opportunities to learn and achieve:** most participants, including those with dementia, have demonstrated that they enjoy and are stimulated by being offered a degree of challenge eg learning and composing new songs
- iv) **Holding sessions away from the main lounge in care-homes:** working in a dedicated space, away from other distractions, has provided intimacy and focus, enabling people to participate more easily

- v) **Ensuring participants have been fully involved in evaluation and planning activities:** this has been very significant in generating confidence in and ownership of the project
- vi) **Management support for staff involvement:** staff have been encouraged and enabled to play an active role in the project, thereby maximizing benefits to participants
- vii) **Staff training:** in addition to management support, encouraging and sensitive training for care staff has made an enormous difference to their inclination and ability to support the project both within and outside the core timetable
- viii) **Good relationships between the project musicians and care staff/managers:** over time, the musicians and care staff/managers have learnt to understand each other's issues, and a mutual respect has developed, which ensures the project is delivered collaboratively, with a shared focus on how to maximize benefits for participants
- ix) **Intergenerational practice:** this has been shown to have a key role to play in the project, delivering immediate and direct benefits to participants, as well as wider sustainable benefits relating to cross-generational understanding. Its success has been built on:
  - a. revising our initial performance-based approach, and providing more and better opportunities for interaction and communication between younger and older generations
  - b. an appreciation that, where our intergenerational project partners can see benefits for themselves and the children/young people for whom they are responsible, they are much more likely to commit to ongoing collaboration than if we rely solely on a vague notion of public-spiritedness and social conscience
- x) **Community-linked events:** there is a great appetite and ongoing potential for these events, both amongst participants and the wider community, giving beneficiaries many enjoyable and varied opportunities to feel more connected to the wider community
- xi) **Involvement of volunteers:** the project has benefited from the energetic and enthusiastic involvement of students and retired people, who have provided practical assistance and additional community connections
- xii) **Disciplined and productive tracking and evaluation activities:** these have given us great insight into the impact of our work and enabled us to move forward with confidence and understanding:

- a. a mix of approaches ie individual interviews, group sessions and feedback reports has maximized the extent and type of information gathered
- b. where participants have struggled to understand the process, adapting questioning styles to meet the needs of each individual has facilitated their involvement
- c. staff support in helping with the production of participant feedback reports has enabled participants to play an integral role at steering group meetings
- d. continuous review of this process has optimized participation and the usefulness of the information collected.

In addition, since the inclusion of sheltered housing tenants in the project, we have been able to:

- I. make closer connections with the local community
- II. capitalize on the skills and energy of some of the more able tenants to include more performances from participants in our larger events
- III. increase the profile of the project across the city, particularly amongst local organizations/charities which are working for the benefit of older people in York, and who are beginning to see the potential benefits that our groups can offer to people living in the wider community.

### **2.3 Ongoing Challenges**

While the project overall has been a great success, three areas which we identified for improvement during the first grant period remain a challenge for us:

- **involving additional secondary schools:** we have increased the number of secondary schools involved from 3 to 4, but had hoped to have connected with more than this by now – our lack of impact appears to be down to a combination of a shortage of time on the part of both the schools and the Musical Connections team. This is something that we hope will be addressed with a new team structure going forwards

- **involving more friends and family in supporting the project:** it has proved very difficult to mobilize relatives and friends of participants. A key issue is that the project has had very little promotional material and no real brand identity, so people have had little to go on beyond the sessions themselves. However, the team has secured new funding to implement a concerted marketing strategy, which will not only be targeted at potential beneficiaries, but also at their friends, families, carers and other potential supporters

- **recording starting points more consistently and formally:** this has proven very difficult, primarily because management/administrative staff are uncomfortable about sharing confidential information about their clients with



the music team, particularly where participants are in the care homes/sheltered schemes for respite care and will be returning home at some point. As a consequence, we continue to rely mainly on the informal observations of the musicians and participating staff, who are able to see at first-hand the difference the project makes to the lives of participants.

## **2.4 Additional Learning**

Despite not having had a marketing budget for the project prior to the aforementioned new funding, we have managed to attract a small number of community-based participants into all of our sheltered housing groups. During tracking and evaluation, it has become apparent that they reap exactly the same benefits from participation as our core beneficiaries, and this has given us cause to believe that we should expand our work still further to include vulnerable and socially isolated people living in the wider community. Given the fact that two participating care homes were forced to close earlier this year, reflecting government plans to keep people in their own homes for longer, this also seems a sensible move for the sustainability of the project in the longer term.

More information on how our plans for greater community involvement have evolved is included at Section 7.1.

## **3. PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MUSICAL CONNECTIONS**

Individual interviews, group consultations and feedback reports have all highlighted key issues affecting the lives of participants, which the work of Musical Connections is felt to address. As we anticipated from our pre-project consultations, sheltered housing tenants have shown themselves to have very similar needs to care home residents, and to benefit from our project in similar ways; although the care home model has been adapted for delivery in the sheltered groups, the therapeutic outcomes are identical. The findings below, for the most part, replicate those from the evaluation of our earlier lottery-funded project, but include comments from participants in sheltered housing, as well as in carehomes.

### **3.1 Needs Addressed By the Musical Connections Programme**

There is universal agreement amongst participants that taking part improves their wellbeing:

*'It makes me feel revived...it makes me alive right up my spine – music is part of my life. With being blind, it helps me a great deal'*

*'I feel better for going'*

*'We all go away feeling happy for the rest of the day'*

*'When you arrive, and I'm feeling about 90, I start to feel about 15'*

*'I am always glad I have joined in the session – it makes me feel positive and much more alert'*

*'It makes life really worthwhile'*

*'I do feel I'm not giving in, just because I'm older'*

- It addresses the loneliness that most people feel at times by offering an appealing reason for them to come together and to share activity, ideas and experiences

*'It's nice to have get-togethers... (otherwise) people go up to their rooms and shut the door'*

*'We form a group...I don't feel cut off'*

*'If we don't have these sessions, we don't know other people'*

*'I like them, I like being with everyone else and not on my own. I like joining in with other people, it's great fun'*

*'When you all get together, you feel as if you're not lonely'*

*'It's an enjoyable get-together. I try to take part in it...it's a break – people don't speak to thee much and it breaks it down a bit'*

*'Gets me out of the flat and gets me motivated because, before...I used to go to work, and this has got me talking to people again'*

- It relieves boredom and provides mental and physical stimulation

*'I must admit it makes me more active'*

*'It keeps my mind going'*

*'I enjoy it – keeps me awake and clears my ears out!'*

*'They are very good sessions, there's a good atmosphere, it's relaxed but with high levels of concentration'*

*'It's fun – it's learning...I feel cheerful...get up and go!'*

*'It's something different and something I enjoy. It gets your brain cells going and the physical stuff is good. It gets your joints going. And it's nice to be amongst everyone'*

- It counteracts the effects of living in an institutionalized environment, where strict routines and care needs can make it very difficult to feel 'normal'. This is particularly the case for care home residents, who have

less control over their lives and routines than sheltered housing tenants, who live in their own flats, albeit with support

*'We have nothing apart from you. We just exist otherwise'*

*'I always take part – it makes it much more homely'*

*'It makes you feel that you belong'*

*'It makes me feel wanted'*

*'We make a lot of noise. We let everyone know we're here...and that we've still got our voices'*

*'It makes me feel better. It makes me feel like I'm not in a home'*

- It provides a break from monotony

*'It's a change from what we normally do'*

*'It's a change from looking at yourself'*

*'It's very, very good, I like everything. It makes a break and you're seeing people. Gets you out of your room'*

*'We do bingo sometimes, that's the only thing that happens'*

- It counteracts introversion and provides opportunities for self-expression, decision-making and achievement, thus providing a renewed sense of personal worth

*'I made my stage debut at gone 80!'*

*'I achieve and see others doing so – they encourage me and I respond'*

*'It makes you feel better when you mix with other people, you can make a fool of yourself and you don't care'*

*'I didn't know I had talent!'*

*'I feel proud of what I can do'*

*'Do you know, I think I'm right clever'*

*'It brings something out in you and everyone enjoys it and you join in with it'*

*'I enjoy the songs we sing – like them all. It's the joining in and how she gets you to the point where we can do it better. And she explains it well, so you can do it'*

*'It's nice when you can sing in harmony...if you haven't got confidence, if you can sing in a choir, it boosts you'*

*'I like following a structure with the tuned instruments because I'm learning'*

- It counteracts lethargy and helps people to feel more energized and alive

*'It keeps you awake and feeling positive about things. You feel grateful'*

*'It wakes me up – I would be asleep now if it wasn't for the music'*

*'We're freeing our spirits!'*

*'It's like after you've had a shower – you come out and you feel great'*

*'I feel happier. It gives you more get up and go instead of sitting and being miserable and thinking'*

*'We're inclined to drop into a stupor and this kicks you up a bit!'*

- It provides a distraction from the pain and frustrations of daily life

*'They're very good – keeps us going. I feel like a child again – in a good way – I'm not going to sit and yell – but I can if I like!'*

*'Takes my mind off my pain and worries'*

*'I think it's very joyful – it takes you out of yourself. Are you staying all day?!'*

*'It's a fun time – it alters your mood for the day'*

*'You lift us up and make us feel happy again'*

*'It's very informal, and people probably feel they can do whatever they like...it takes away from all your everyday worries and cares'*

- It offers opportunities to mix and share experiences with other generations, particularly children and young people. Aside from the sheer enjoyment of these interactions, these opportunities also help residents to feel that they still belong to and have a role to play in the wider community

*'I've done it for a long time now with the children – I feel as if I know what I'm doing – and, yes, I've been doing it for donkey's years'*

*'It's lovely to have the kids come in, it makes you feel in touch. If you're in a wheelchair, it's hard to get out, and you feel a bit (pulled a face)...but when the kids come you feel better – more in touch'*

*'I love being with the children, it makes you feel young again'*

*'It's very good to get amongst younger people. It brings you back to life'*

*'It's a good idea – broadens your mind – Better than just having your own age group – it's nice to have a mix'*

- It provides a fun and creative means of interacting with care staff, which helps to improve relationships with them

*'I like the staff joining in, it's a way in for them'*

*'I love it when the staff join in – we are one big family'*

*'It makes me think that everyone still cares about us'*

*'They hear what we've got to say, which gives them a different view of us'*

- It gives people a sense of purpose and, where they do not have dementia, something to look forward to

*'We look forward to our Mondays'*

*'I feel more fulfilled'*

*'We've all been coming for a long time – the more you come, the more you like it'*

*'I look forward to it every week, it makes me feel good. It lifts me and makes me feel happy'*

*'Very, very good – they put you in the limelight instead of just sitting. I'm very happy to join the session, they treat you very well'*

While the carehomes and sheltered housing schemes do try to offer occasional activities and entertainment, participants in Musical Connections sessions state that there is nothing else happening that brings them such a strong sense of enhanced well-being by addressing so many of the difficult issues that they face on a daily basis.

*'I feel they do some good. I think it is something different. I feel more awake and alive'*

*'I'm very grateful to have a regular music slot – it gets me out of my flat'*

*'I've always liked it – I feel really at home here'*

*'You feel like you're not in a home when you're here, it feels different'*

*'I'm part of it, I feel like I belong to something'*

*'We don't have much talk in our room – you have to sit and listen. You get to do more and be involved when you're in the music group'*

It seems that participants have come to depend on the weekly sessions to bring much-needed purpose, vigour and personal contact into their lives, and the evidence suggests that a cessation of the programme would have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing and quality of life. They are even disappointed when the musicians have breaks during holiday periods, and so the team is now looking at how to increase the number of sessions on offer.

*'It's very important to keep them going – we wouldn't have anything without the sessions'*

### **3.2 Views on Programme Content**

Having proved in our earlier work that it is a fallacy to assume that older people and people with dementia can only enjoy, connect and express themselves through 'the old songs', we have continued to include all of the following in our sessions:

- music from other countries and cultures
- tuned and untuned percussion
- learning of new songs and, with support, singing them in parts
- composition (eg songs, raps, soundscapes)
- exploration of rhythm
- dancing (circle or traditional, standing or sitting)
- use of props
- related art forms eg poetry, textile arts.

As we anticipated, most residents have shown themselves to be very open-minded and have repeatedly demonstrated an interest in experimenting with unfamiliar musical genres and new ideas. They have also welcomed challenges and learning experiences which have given them a chance to employ under-used skills and interests.

*'I'm willing to learn new songs...composition is quite funny. I like the idea of people making their own suggestions and putting them together'*

*'We enjoy soundscapes and conducting each other – that was fun!'*

*'Learning something new...something that's completely out of this world that we live in'*

*'Composition is quite amusing, it's good for the mind – Very constructive ideas from everybody, it gets the brainpower going'*

*'We're not going to grow old. We've got to fight it. Learning something new keeps your brain active. Otherwise, we'd just get fed up and vegetate'*

*'We like to be challenged'*

*'You want a change, you don't want the same thing all the time'*

*'Incredible – don't think I'm exaggerating – it amazes me – from kookaburras to....fascinating and interesting'*

*'It's exciting –I like a bit of a challenge – I liked it when we sang the two different songs at the same time'*

*'We're all of an age - no preference to old or young people'*

*'I would like to learn more songs in foreign languages'*

*'I'll have a bash at anything'*

It is clear that many older people and people with dementia remain curious about the world and thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to experiment with music in many different ways. That said, we also incorporate personal favourites, so that people have the opportunity to enjoy some familiar music, and to share their tastes and interests with others. In particular, since the inclusion of sheltered housing tenants and a few people from the community, we are finding that some of them are really enjoying performing their favourite songs at our larger events.

### **3.2.1 Related arts projects**

While music is at the heart of the Musical Connections project, we have always been keen to include other art forms, to add variety to the programme and to attract additional participants. Most participants enjoy having a go at these other activities, particularly as the artists employed are selected on the basis that they understand the client group, and are able to design a project that is accessible and enjoyable for them.

*'It's miraculous! I'd never have thought of it. I never thought I was the arty type'*

*'I can't speak, it's so brilliant! I didn't know I was so clever!'*

*'It's like magic! Where did that come from?!'*

Managers and staff can also see the benefits of including additional art forms:

*'...from what I observed, the residents...were really into it... the music was lively too. The artist seemed really keen and there was some good interaction going on in the group'*

*'I thought the last art session was great – the session I saw had a large group of residents involved with their favourite photographs and were making photo frames. The session was entertaining and lively...the other art sessions I have seen over the years have always been good, and the residents have been fully involved and active in these sessions. They work at their own pace and ability, supported by the artist'*

Nevertheless, music always features alongside the art, so that participants do not miss out on what they are used to getting, and to ensure that, if interest in the art wanes, there is something to fall back on.

#### **4. BUILDING PARTICIPATION IN THE SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES**

While feedback from participants in the sheltered housing groups is universally positive, it is worth noting that establishing and growing these groups has not been plain sailing. There have been a number of reasons for this:-

- I. care teams are not permanently on-site, so there is not always someone available to support tenants and to bring them to the group
- II. although our consultations suggested that tenants would be happy to make a weekly £2 contribution to the group, in reality, particularly in the early days, this was not always the case. This placed pressure on the Musical Connections team, as a minimum contribution of £20 per group had been agreed prior to commencing the project
- III. there is a wide variety in the abilities and disabilities of people living in the sheltered housing schemes, making it a challenging task to deliver groups that suit everyone. We have also found that, where very disabled or infirm people are core attendees, this can discourage people who consider themselves more independent and less 'in need'
- IV. Factions and 'in-fighting' within the schemes have occasionally played out in the group, whereby certain people jostle for position and, in some cases, refuse to come if a certain person is taking part. At times, this has made it difficult to keep participant numbers stable.

Notwithstanding these issues, the musicians have worked hard to build relationships and to find ways of circumventing the obstacles presented eg

- I. involving people from the community who are used to paying for clubs/groups has:
  - a. boosted numbers
  - b. set a culture of financial contribution



- II. making the decision to increase the requested amount from £2 to £3 has helped to highlight the need that the project cannot survive without contributions from participants and, interestingly, appears to have made people more inclined to donate
- III. making the contributions optional has meant that people do not feel pressured (although the vast majority are quite happy to give)
- IV. where carers are not on-site at the time of the group, the musicians have been given flat or phone numbers, so that they can knock on doors or ring round, and invite people along themselves
- V. larger social and musical events, particularly where they are intergenerational, help to dilute the idea that the groups are just for very disabled people
- VI. the building of relationships between the musicians and participants and within the group overall has helped to generate a culture of tolerance and understanding of others' needs, abilities and interests. While it is clear that the weekly music sessions do not completely overcome personal differences within the schemes, the atmosphere they create and the very positive and friendly approach of the musicians to everyone in the schemes, not just those attending the music groups, go a long way in dissolving tensions and creating a more benign environment (although this does not always translate into people joining in with the group together!)
- VII. good relationships with the managers of the sheltered housing schemes have been enormously influential in enabling the groups to develop. This is discussed further below.

#### **4.1 Relationships between Musicians and Care Staff**

Our earlier work in care homes demonstrated how positive working relationships between musicians and care staff can have a very beneficial impact on delivery of the project. Over the years, a mutual respect has developed; care staff acknowledge the skill and commitment of the musicians in consistently delivering positive experiences for their clients, while the musicians fully acknowledge the difference that staff support and participation make to the impact of the project. The musicians have used learning from this experience to inform their approach in establishing the new groups within the sheltered housing schemes. They have worked hard to foster good relationships with the scheme managers, and this appears to have been effective in generating an atmosphere of mutual support and collaboration. Most of the managers have been very pro-active in promoting the project to tenants, and in advising the musicians on effective ways of connecting with potential participants.

*'I feel Barstow House will really benefit from knowing that the music sessions can continue for the next two years after receiving the new grant...The group has such a warm feeling to it, and you can see this looking at people's faces and expressions. They simply love it. As a group, we need to continue to find more people to join the group to keep it fresh and alive. A quote from one of my tenants was 'It brings such joy to my day''*

*'Emma has been superb here at Glen Lodge. Her general personality, flexibility, helpfulness/attentiveness, positive energy and hard-working nature has really helped from day one. I couldn't be more pleased to invite Emma into the scheme and I know my tenants are thrilled to see her when she comes. They have enjoyed the sessions, not only from a musical and singing aspect, but mainly for the social aspect. The laugh and banter they have when they get together really creates an enjoyable atmosphere. This has decreased isolation within the Scheme and helped introduce neighbours to each other, helping to foster friendships.....'*

Unlike staff in the care homes, care staff in the sheltered housing schemes are not permanently on-site and have much more restricted and ringfenced duties. As a consequence, they are not available to participate in the groups, or to provide much extra logistical support. To plug this gap, the scheme managers are much more involved in facilitating the weekly sessions, and making sure all goes to plan. They will also liaise with the care teams to ensure that, wherever possible, people are provided with the support they need to be able to participate.

Where difficulties have arisen, senior management has stepped in to emphasise the importance of the work that we are doing, and to identify ways in which managers can be helpful and involved. The following section provides an insight into specific management and staff actions which have made a difference to delivery and development of the project.

## **5. MANAGEMENT AND STAFF ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS**

In practice, supporting the sessions means that managers and staff across all venues understand that familiar routines have to be interrupted and adapted, and attention needs to be paid to things that make a difference to people's ability to engage with the sessions.

In the sheltered housing schemes, this means:

- reminding tenants about the sessions, rather than just assuming they will remember
- when the care team is on-site, ensuring that they are aware of the session start time and make the necessary effort to help people get ready in time and to bring them down personally, if necessary
- ensuring people have everything they need to participate eg reading glasses, and being prepared to go back to their flats to retrieve anything important that has been forgotten.

In the care homes, the following adjustments are made for each session:

- residents are escorted to a dedicated space for their music, away from the distractions of the main lounge (TV, visitors, medicine trolley etc)

- tea-rounds take place before or after the session, to ensure that participants are not distracted, and have their hands free to play instruments
- a member of staff is expected to be present and participating alongside residents in sessions
- if a resident needs extra support to attend the group eg with a wheelchair or hoist, then staff provide this
- when children and young people come into the home, allowances are made for the environment being louder and more chaotic than usual (usually, furniture has to be moved and extra chairs brought in from other rooms), and refreshments are provided

*'On the whole, we fetch in about 18 residents, so it's a very busy session. It's very, very interactive, you're going from one to another, encouraging them to join in, which, on the whole, they do'*

### **5.1 Opinions of the Programme**

We know that staff and managers are prepared to make the above efforts to help people participate in sessions because they have seen what a difference it makes to their clients' well-being. In evaluation reports and interviews, all have testified to the beneficial impact of Musical Connections, and the need to retain this resource:

*'The residents enjoy the social aspects of the music sessions and it really brings people out of their comfort zone. Music is an important part of most people's lives and has a big influence on people with dementia, even those in the later stages who may no longer speak benefit from these sessions. I think it is important as it engages people who may be at different stages and brings them together. Music sessions promote emotional well-being and can enable individuals to be more relaxed and content'*

*'The sessions do promote residents' wellbeing, they engage body and mind, and they give residents the opportunity to sing, play, perform, listen and move. The physical activity involved in singing, playing, and the instruments, the focus and concentration required can create a sense of control and purpose. The residents can achieve this together, creating a social connection. The music session transforms the atmosphere and the effects of this ripple through the home'*

*'The sessions are lively, engaging and have a huge impact on many residents' wellbeing. The sessions not only help our residents reconnect with their emotional past through familiar songs, they also engage residents in the spontaneity of the present, promoting fun, animation, community bonding and family relationships'*

*'You are doing an amazing job, and we love working with you - the residents look forward to your weekly sessions as they enjoy the interaction,*

*especially with the schoolchildren. Your sessions are always varied and fun-packed'*

*'It's something for them to look forward to. As soon as you say 'Fiona is coming', they leap out of their chairs!'*

*'It's very important for it to continue. It's nice to have the continuity – even when they've got the dementia. They don't really get out, so this is something to look forward to'*

Great value is also placed on the excellent connections the musicians have with local schools and universities, and their ability to run large workshops and extended projects with people of all ages, something which requires training, confidence and experience. Community connections and intergenerational work are considered hugely beneficial to residents and are not believed to be something that the homes/schemes could deliver by themselves.

*'The residents would definitely miss the sessions if they were to stop, it's not only the sessions, it's the intergenerational visits and work done that the residents love, and the Big Sings. The other musical experiences are more entertainment (ie the ones occasionally organized by the care settings themselves), with Musical Connections, it's more about participation'*

## **5.2 Staff Participation in Carehomes**

Our earlier project worked hard to promote the importance of staff participation, and managers are now completely supportive of this approach, having seen the impact it can have on both participants and staff.

*'...the sessions really do showcase the power music has to reach people's emotions...music is very beneficial to building relationships between staff and residents. Music can make a connection when words are not able to'*

*'...it allows staff and residents to interact in different ways to the normal resident-staff relationships. It gives the staff increased confidence and experience in dealing with residents and helps to improve the dynamics of the relationship between both parties. Residents see the staff in a different role and the relationship changes from one of staff support to mutual support whilst engaged in the activities. This helps raise confidence and self-esteem amongst the residents'*

Care staff who get involved in sessions have also recognised the way in which shared participation impacts positively on their relationships with residents and, indeed, on their own frame of mind.

*'It gets us involved with the residents and helps us create an atmosphere that is pleasurable for them...we enjoy it too!'*

*'The other week, I was in an awful mood, and I came in – I think because everyone was enjoying it, it rubbed off on me...it's uplifting'*

*'It touches my heart, pulls at my heartstrings – that's what life's all about...This is a must. I can't imagine this session not running in this home'*

*'Sometimes I get carried away! It's nice to let off a bit of steam. And if they see you doing it, they join in more'*

*'It makes an unbelievable difference...it looks like they feel young again inside...I absolutely do enjoy the experiences – I love seeing their faces light up'*

*'You relate differently with them in here because you have the time. On the floor, we don't have the staffing levels so, because there's fewer of them, you can integrate more easily, have a laugh with them. And you get a response from them'*

*'It's not difficult (to join in) at this time – usually we've got writing up to do but I did mine this morning so I could join in this afternoon. You're that busy running about that it's nice to spend the time doing this with them. Nice to be able to do something different with them as well'*

### **5.2.2 Training**

Training sessions for care staff and managers have also made a significant difference to the attitudes of many. The sessions have been led by the lead musician, and, as in our previous project, have covered:

- an explanation of the Musical Connections programme and its target outcomes
- an exploration of the role and importance of music in human evolution
- a demonstration, via participatory exercises, of the physiological, emotional and social impact of active engagement with music
- an explanation of the importance of staff support for and participation in musical activities alongside their clients
- provision of resources and ideas for use or adaptation by staff.

During training sessions in our earlier project, it became obvious that, despite a desire to participate in music alongside their clients, many carehome staff felt that their colleagues would resent them neglecting their other duties in order to 'have a nice time' with the residents. It was as if it was not seen as real 'work', and staff therefore felt guilty and uncomfortable about getting involved. These concerns were fed back to managers, who immediately stepped in to provide their unequivocal support for the project. Rotas were changed to enable the most enthusiastic staff to be available at session times, and other staff were informed of the importance of what they were doing. This made a huge difference to staff attitudes and we saw a big change in the number of people coming forward to help in different ways.

Over time, there have been some staff changes, and we have discovered that the issues identified earlier are still likely to rear their heads now and again, particularly when care homes are short of staff, or internal issues are causing problems for and between staff. We therefore continue to offer training to staff, and have also linked up with the council's workforce development unit, in order to share our work with people working in other care settings and in other aspects of health and social care eg social workers, representatives from relevant charities, community-based workers, private care home employees etc.

Feedback from this training has been extremely positive, and its impact seems to be significant in a variety of ways eg:

- care staff are given the confidence and understanding they need to be able to support the groups enthusiastically and effectively

*'I'll be honest with you, we've all been wondering what the hell you've been doing! We were asking ourselves why you weren't just singing Roll out the Barrel, but now I understand – it all makes sense! I'll be telling the other staff about it now too!'*

*'Very useful, gave insight into why things are done as they are...a fun event, staff should be encouraged by managers to attend'*

- care home/scheme managers notice that staff who have attended the training bring back a different and more enthusiastic attitude to their work and the project. They also see staff making greater effort in their own interactions with residents outside the sessions

*'Staff feel the training received from yourself has made them feel more confident and given them a better understanding...Workload can get in the way, but staff do understand how important the sessions and the music are to our residents, and it is always a joy to see residents' well-being change because of this'*

*'All staff thought it was great...it made me smile last week when I heard your tape being played and staff using a balloon to stimulate the residents. I'm not sure whether I would be able to designate a single member of staff (to run music activities outside of the sessions), but I would be more than pleased to know that your training has given some staff that confidence to think about positive interaction'*

- people who have not connected with the project to date are learning of its existence and acknowledging the potential for us to influence the sector more widely. For example, Age UK has asked us to run additional training sessions for their support workers, and private sector professionals are recognizing that they can learn a great deal from what we have been doing:

*'Loved this – totally loved it, and feel very inspired'*

*'Taken away lots of tools I can share with support workers and families'*

*'FANTASTIC! It has inspired me deeply. I feel uplifted and full of energy. Just the kind of direction that Dementia Care needs...Participation, truly creative and person-centred values that Fiona imparted so naturally, supporting the creative growth of people with dementia'*

## **6. FEEDBACK FROM RELATIVES**

The musicians find connections with relatives, where this is possible, to be invaluable in terms of understanding more about individual participants, and in developing a shared sense of purpose regarding their well-being.

As in our earlier project, several relatives and friends have observed or participated in sessions periodically. They have all expressed their support for our work and their gratitude for the benefits it offers participants.

*'Really enjoyed the session myself! Everyone seemed to be interested...My friend Beryl...was the most animated and lively I've seen her in a long time. So well done to all. It was well organized in a way everyone understood. Was very impressed!'*

A theme retained from our earlier project is that Musical Connections gives relatives an opportunity to see their loved ones return to being someone they recognise and can relate to; the obvious engagement of participants, and the pleasure and vitality they exude provides comfort to relatives - they see diminished personalities regain strength and a renewed ability to enjoy life. Several also comment on the physical nature of our activities, as a positive counterpoint to the sedentary lifestyle of most of our participants.

Hello Fiona, I don't know if you remember me ? I came along to Barstow House on Monday the 16th Feb to pick my mother up to take her out for the day, and she was downstairs with you and others having a music get together.

I sat and waited in the room, and may I say what a delight it was in seeing you entertain, and how the residents interacted with you . Not only did they have a good sing-a-long and play along with the instruments you supplied , You could see on there face's (sic) how much fun they where having. And when I spoke to my mother afterwards she even told me " it was like having a exercise lesson as well ".

Since tending the music group we have noticed an improvement in her upper body movement as she is confined to a wheelchair And her general mood

has improved too .

So I would just like to say a big thank you for what you do for my mother, and all the other residents of Barstow house .

Please keep up the good work that you do, they really do appreciate it.

Yours.

Tony Samuels

Several relatives have also witnessed intergenerational sessions, and testify to the positive impact of creative interaction across the generations.

*‘The session today was great for all the residents. They were actively involved with singing, dancing and laughing. The students were good with the residents – about half of them were really outgoing, encouraging residents to join in. It was lovely seeing my mum join in with singing and dancing, She was more alert and active than when I usually see her. She was happy and loved being the centre of attention. She came away feeling happy and relaxed’*

## **7. CONNECTIONS WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

### **7.1 Additional Participants**

#### **7.1.1 Sheltered housing groups**

A key objective of our work is to break down barriers between people living in care settings and the wider community. As a consequence, we have sought to encourage people living locally to access our groups via a combination of word-of-mouth, distribution of posters and leaflets, and, most recently, through connecting with local charities and care initiatives. We have gradually started to see new people from the community getting involved and, interestingly, reaping exactly the same benefits from participation as our core beneficiaries.

*‘I think it’s lovely – helps people to have more contact with others...it make me feel better – I’ve got osteo-arthritis, and it helps me to meet people. I feel a lot better after I’ve been here’*

*‘It starts us off for the day – puts you in a good mood. I was crying my eyes out this morning because my grand-daughter wrote something on Facebook about her granddad. This cheers you up’*

*‘It’s really helped to know that he is somewhere where he can sing. He definitely wanted to come back. I believe in anything that gets the community together, and singing is one of the biggest things that draws the community together’*



One of our groups has developed a strong relationship with a local group of adults with learning disabilities, who now come to their session on a regular basis. Initially, we were not sure how this combination would work, but thanks to the skill of the musician in delivering activities which transcend the differences between the two groups, as well as the welcoming attitude of the sheltered housing tenants, a close bond has formed. The manager has made the following comments about this arrangement:

*'I think it is good that the group with learning disabilities come, the residents enjoy them being here and they have such fun. The tenants seem to really enjoy their company. They were shy at first on both sides, but with every joint session that occurs, and people getting to know one another, little by little, both groups are becoming more confident and this makes for a more enjoyable experience for all concerned'*

### **7.1.2 Community choir**

When two participating care homes were forced to close earlier this year, we decided to replace one of them with a day-time choir at a local community centre. Up until this point, we had been unable to engage tenants from a neighbouring sheltered housing scheme in our project – there were not many people within the scheme who were interested in attending a music group, and those that were interested felt overpowered and embarrassed by those who were negative about the idea. Setting up the choir in their neighbouring community centre has proved the ideal solution; tenants from the scheme attend a lunch club at the community centre every other Tuesday, and so we scheduled the new choir to take place on Tuesday mornings. We knew that people tended to arrive very early for lunch, and so we planned sessions in such a way that these early arrivals could be encouraged to take part in the singing. The choir only started in mid-April, but over the intervening months, we have found that several tenants from the scheme have started to arrive earlier and earlier, so as to be able to join in with the singing for longer. We have also been able to run a music event in their care setting, involving the choir and tenants from another participating scheme, which has helped to further integrate Musical Connections into the lives of the people living there.

*'I really enjoy Tuesday choir and it gets me out of the house – it's fun but we also work hard. We really enjoy the singing and meeting new friends – enjoyable for all levels of singing ability'*

Given that people living independently in the community are now connecting with our work, we have decided that this will be our next focus. While sustaining the project in all the care settings where the Reaching Communities money has enabled us to operate, we now wish to open up the project for the benefit of vulnerable and socially isolated people living in the wider community. We hope that our presence in both care settings and the community will provide a cross-over which will be of mutual benefit to all participants.

Further information on our plans to develop the project is provided at Section 11.

## 7.2 Intergenerational Work

In our earlier project, we were amazed at the impact of our intergenerational work, not only on core beneficiaries, but also on the children and young people taking part. We have continued to build on this aspect of the project; it is now seen as an integral element of what we offer, with the project musicians able to work very effectively with and across the different age groups.

*'Musical Connections seems to fit in with younger and older generations'*

*'I like to see the children. I think it gives them an idea of what we are and where we are'*

*'When you have kids here, it's a lovely thing. I think the kids enjoy it too'*

*'They bring the children to see us because they know I like to see them'*

*'They absolutely love to see the children, and they interact very well with them. And it's brilliant for the kids to see that older people are a part of life. In the past, people used to get shut away and it was 'Bye Bye Grandma''*

*'They love it when the children come – they're the highlights of the year. It's a bigger crowd than normal when they come from school. It's the youth and energy they bring. They just adore them. It's community spirit'*

The intergenerational sessions and projects are focused on bridging the gap between generations, and are therefore very interactive. Activities are developed to appeal to anyone, regardless of age, and to help participants find common ground, thus helping to dissolve the awkwardness caused by unfamiliar surroundings, physical differences and a shortage of things to talk about. The musicians know from their prior experiences that there is no need to stick to the 'old songs'. Equally, they understand that rhythm invokes an instinctive and energetic response regardless of age, and that many older participants enjoy expressing themselves in ways that belie traditional stereotypes about older people. They are therefore able to be adventurous and ambitious in their planning for intergenerational sessions, and this continues to bring about very positive results:

*'They interact more, they have fun, and they interact well with the children and young people...they come alive, and humour comes out. The humour comes naturally because the ambience is there'*

*'The event at Huntington School was brilliant...it was a bit awkward to start with, but once younger and older started talking, it was lovely to see what they could learn from each other. Everyone's a bit out of their depth to start with, but you've got to make the effort'*

*'One of the most pleasing parts of the programme for me is the positive interaction between the generations. I was initially apprehensive about how the residents and children would interact, but these fears were quickly allayed and the benefits for both parties are quite significant'*

*'The residents at Grove House thoroughly enjoyed the music sessions with the children from St Wilfrid's school. The excitement of seeing the world through younger eyes inspired the residents to 'get up and doing', sharing the instruments and singing together. Seeing the children brightens the day for our residents and the visits from the children have seen the development of relationships between residents and the children – this was evident when I heard a child say 'I love B, she's so funny, I like coming to Grove House'. Some of our residents do not have family connections – seeing children promotes well-being and alleviates depression'*

Particularly effective activities have been:

- clapping/action songs and games, which involve touching hands/reflecting each other's movements
- dancing
- singing in parts/teams
- dressing up/'photo shoots'
- parachute and balloon games
- rhythm exercises
- composition
- question and answer/'show and tell' activities

As well as one-off workshop sessions, the musicians now regularly run:

- sessions and projects related to school topics
- projects using school resources eg
  - spare ukuleles have been brought in for residents to play alongside the children
  - art equipment has been brought by a school to one home every term to enable residents and children to share in art activities together

The two 2-year grants from Reaching Communities have been a key factor in helping us to develop and consolidate our relationships with schools and other organizations involving young people. It has given us time and opportunities that we would never have had without the certainty of ongoing funding, and has enabled us to continue developing our intergenerational work organically – when someone has an idea, we are usually able to put it into practice. We are also able to replicate successful projects in different homes with different groups of children and young people.

All the care homes now have an expectation that intergenerational sessions will take place regularly, and some of them go the extra mile to encourage and accommodate involvement from local schools:

*'I am still very headstrong about supporting you with various projects such as the video session with Ralph Butterfield school. I also suggested (depending on good weather) the sessions can be held in the garden where the children can have full run of the area while the residents who do not wish to participate in the video get the full benefit of watching. Haxby will provide tea, juice and biscuits for all involved'*

### **7.2.1 Local Schools**

Over the years, we have built and maintained relationships with many primary schools across York, four secondary schools and the local sixth form college. We have learnt that it is important to explain to teachers exactly what is involved in the work, what their role will be within it, and to reassure them that we will not add to their workload. After their first session, the teachers usually realise that our professional musicians are extremely capable of taking the lead, thus requiring little of them except support and enthusiasm.

One new school was very uncertain about getting involved in the project, and so the lead musician went into school to explain the work to the children and class teachers and to run a trial session with them. We found this to be very effective in building the children's confidence – and also excitement! – about their forthcoming visits to the care homes, and have decided to offer this opportunity to all new schools who are interested in getting involved.

Once schools have participated in sessions, they are usually keen to remain involved with us, and it is obvious that many of the teachers are very invested in the project – several have been working with us for a number of years now. A teacher from a secondary school, which has hosted our Christmas Big Sing for the last few years, was heard to remark '*Christmas doesn't start for me until we have the Big Sing*', and another one wrote to say:

*'Thanks for another fantastic day, we all had a great time! It's nice to hear how much the residents enjoyed the session as well as the children, and it would be really nice to keep up the link between my class and Willow House, we should definitely put a date in the diary for the summer term!'*

We have found that, where teachers are enthusiastic, they make great efforts to sustain their involvement, contribute ideas and work closely with the musicians in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for all age groups involved. Indeed, while schools are conscious that participation in the programme helps them to meet an Ofsted requirement to engage in activities which promote community cohesion, it is apparent that they consider taking part to be much more than a box-ticking exercise. In fact, they see clear benefits not just for our participants, but for the children and young people involved, particularly in relation to developing insight, empathy and having an opportunity to express themselves in a different context with people with whom they might otherwise have no contact. These benefits to the wider community were not something which we had really thought about prior to conducting this work, but have

proved to be a key factor in its sustainability - partnerships are based on mutual benefit, rather than a reliance on one party's altruism.

The children and young people involved are also remarkably insightful about the way in which the project has broken down generational barriers and familiar stereotypes; the vast majority are extremely positive about their experiences and the way in which they help them to understand and interact more comfortably with older people. One group of primary school pupils gave the following responses when asked what they had learned from participating in an art project at a dementia carehome:

*'Don't judge them on what they look like'*

*'If they ask you the same question, just give them the same answer'*

*'Basically, they're the same as us, aren't they?!'*

This re-framing of perceptions is exactly the kind of effect we hoped to achieve when we evaluated our early intergenerational work and changed our initial performance-based approach, so as to increase interaction and communication between the generations.

Something we have to bear in mind is that, if supportive teachers leave the school, it can take time and effort to replace them with another Musical Connections champion. This highlights the importance of continually seeking to nurture and increase connections with schools, and thus to sustain a flourishing network of potential partners. On the flipside, we are occasionally benefitting when teachers leave one school for another; they take their enthusiasm for the project with them, and this can result in a new school getting involved with us.

### **7.2.2 York's Universities**

We continue to benefit from the lead musician's strong connections with both of York's universities, which are very supportive of and interested in the impact of our work and the way in which the Musical Connections project has developed and grown. We are able to provide students with opportunities to learn more about community music, gain experience 'at the coal-face' and appreciate what is involved in working as a musician with older people and people with dementia. On the other hand, we benefit from extra pairs of hands, free performances, and multiple intergenerational opportunities.

York St John University continues to include us in their recommended placements for Community Music undergraduates, and a gamelan workshop has been part of the timetable for York University's Community Music MA students for several years now. For the last four years, the University has borne the cost of hiring a van to transport the instruments, and the students have set them up and run a workshop in the dining room of one of the care homes.

These relationships continue to flourish, and we count both universities as very significant partners in our work.

### 7.2.3 Off-Site Events

Wherever possible, we take care home residents and sheltered housing tenants out of their living environment, to enjoy musical and social events in the community. One primary school opens its doors to our participants on a regular basis, and this has enabled them to enjoy school performances, music lessons and tea and cakes with the children, as well as with other members of the wider community. Other schools have invited participants to take part in curriculum-based workshops or to view dress rehearsals of their school productions, while some of our sheltered housing tenants have become occasional public performers themselves – they have led singing at a local community centre’s AGM and, most recently, performed at Age UK York’s AGM.

Keen performers are also given the opportunity to showcase their talents at our hugely popular Big Sings. These take place in community venues around York, and provide an opportunity for participants from all of our groups to come together with young people, making and performing music together. We are delighted that these occasions appear to have become almost legendary amongst staff and participants, as huge efforts are made to ensure that as many people as possible are enabled to attend and take part in them.

*‘I’m a real believer in the Big Sings. Coming along to one recently was a real eye-opener for me – they really enjoyed it’*

Everyone involved in these events reports how much they enjoy taking part – school and student performers relish the high energy, enthusiastic atmosphere, staff love to see their clients enjoying themselves and appreciate the opportunity to participate themselves (the scratch staff choir which is put together on the day has become a real talking point and morale booster), while regular and not so regular participants clearly value the opportunity to take part in such a large and upbeat musical event. Participants in our groups who have a taste for performance are encouraged to take the stage, alongside children and students, and there is a fantastically supportive and respectful attitude to everyone who wishes to make a contribution.

We are conscious that such events create increased workload for managers; the dates are unpredictable (largely because of the need to accommodate school and student timetables) and managers must organise additional staff cover. Transport costs also have to be watched closely. However, managers and staff remain extremely supportive, as they perceive significant benefits for participants, many of whom relish the opportunity to go out and be part of the wider community, if only for a short while. Managers often leave their administrative duties to escort clients, and care staff regularly help out in their own time.

*'It's not too difficult to organise the off-site activities. Just need to keep it to a sensible amount and ratio of staff to residents. Sometimes, if something occurs and we are short of staff, we have to adapt'*

*'We have identified a number of staff who take a lot of pleasure from supporting residents to attend outings, they enjoy the variation to the usual day to day workload. The secret is planning....'*

*'The Big Sing is always very popular'*

There is sometimes uncertainty amongst new staff and managers about why such an effort should be made for the Big Sings, but once they have attended one themselves, they are usually delighted with what they experience. The following email was received from a new manager after the last Christmas event.

Hi Fiona and Emma , every one has enjoyed today and I want to thank you both so much, in fact I was unsure what I was going to, but I enjoyed it very much , The Children at Millthorpe school were lovely to the elderly and caring as well and there are so many talented people there, it was a great success , Thank you

Kind regards,  
Julie

We have been delighted to discover that senior managers also step in to encourage reluctant staff to be pro-active – one staff member recently said:

*'We're not able to go out with the tenants on trips and outings usually – it's only yours we're allowed to go to!!'*

It is extremely encouraging to witness such a high level of management support for something which we have worked so hard to develop and which we intend to include as a mainstay of the programme going forwards.

## **8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION METHODS**

We continue to be rigorous in our monitoring and evaluation, and the lead musician has produced regular, detailed self-evaluation reports, which have been submitted to the steering group before each meeting, as well as to our Reaching Communities funding officer. This report includes many of the quotes and observations made in these earlier reports.

After our first Reaching Communities grant we made some minor modifications to our tracking and evaluation procedures, although the overall structure and approach has remained largely the same. While helping us to monitor and review the impact of the project and to determine any necessary changes, the quantitative and qualitative data amassed during this exercise has also proved extremely helpful in providing evidence for new funding applications.

## **8.1 Tracking**

We implemented a timetable of tracking exercises to provide a numerical monitor of our progress towards the outcome change indicators set at the beginning of the grant. These exercises included questions which related specifically to the indicators and comprised the following:

- records of attendance at all sessions and planning/steering group meetings.
- individual records for all participants, completed by our musicians after each session, noting participant engagement and key responses
- feedback forms completed by staff after each session
- one to one interviews with participants. Interview sessions took place at least three times in each year of the grant, which meant that some participants took part in several interviews, while others were interviewed less, often because they were respite patients, became ill or died, or moved to another home.

The tracking interviews were an extremely useful part of the evaluation process. At the same time as collecting very specific, numerically useful answers to questions on the change indicators (see the monitoring data in Section 2), we were able to probe behind these responses to understand more about perceptions and experiences of the programme. Musicians and staff doing the interviewing were also able to adapt their questioning pace and style to each individual, and this meant that we often gleaned more detailed and personalised answers than during the feedback sessions with the whole group (discussed at 8.2.1).

## **8.2 Self-Evaluation**

The following evaluation activities have taken place three times a year:

- group feedback and planning sessions with participants
- structured interviews with staff
- feedback reports from managers of all homes
- steering group meetings, attended by participating residents
- feedback reports from participants

We have reviewed different issues and aspects of the work at different points in the above activities, so as to avoid repetition and to ensure that we have received information that is pertinent to what is happening within the project at the time. It should also be noted that, outside of this structure, participants have always been encouraged to take ownership of the project, to comment on the work as it happens, and to make suggestions, whether for adoption immediately, in future sessions or for the project as a whole. This has also been the case with other project stakeholders.



### **8.2.1 Feedback and Planning Sessions**

We have conducted group feedback and planning sessions in addition to the tracking interviews because we believe they have the potential for participants to share ideas and to bounce ideas off each other in a way that one to one interviews do not. Given the nature of our client group, particularly in the care homes, the extent to which this actually happened has been variable, with sheltered housing participants, perhaps unsurprisingly, more able to engage at a higher cognitive level.

Participants were certainly interested in what their colleagues in the groups had to say, although as we learnt in our earlier project, a directive approach was often necessary to enable as many people as possible to participate and contribute. People with dementia or age-related memory loss were not always able to discuss aspects of the work out of context, and many struggled to answer open questions about what they would like to see from the project; some did make suggestions for singing particular songs, but it was apparent that few were likely to have ideas beyond what they had already experienced and was familiar to them.

We therefore ensured that participants had plenty to work with when being asked to give feedback, and did not need to remember things; we demonstrated exercises and activities and asked what they thought and whether they would like to see them included in future sessions; we told them of upcoming plans and asked if they had any thoughts about what we were planning to do/anything they would do differently; we shared ideas from other groups and asked what they thought of those. We also asked a lot of closed questions, so that people did not feel under pressure to come up with complex answers unless they actually wanted to.

Where participants had such advanced dementia that they were unable to contribute in a structured way, the musicians remained alert to any verbal or non-verbal signals given during sessions. Their relatives and/or carers were also invited to give feedback.

### **8.3 Additional Evaluation Activities Focussed on the Future of the Programme**

While assiduously evaluating the current project, the Musical Connections team has always had one eye on the future of the project, and how it might develop beyond the end of the current funding. As already mentioned at Section 7.1, of particular note has been the influx of people into our groups from the wider community, and their positive feedback about the benefits they gain from participation.

Given the enforced closure this year of two of the care homes which were participating in our project, and signs that other council care homes are likely to be closed at some point in the future, we have decided that our next move should

be to focus on involving higher numbers of people from the local community in our sheltered housing groups.

In preparation for such a step, we have conducted a significant amount of research, key findings from which are detailed below:

1. In July 2013, the Institute of Education published research, which suggested that healthcare costs for over 65s could be reduced if more community music groups were set up, as participants in such groups were happier and healthier than non-participants. Equally, guidelines published earlier this year by NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) recommend that the NHS should provide opportunities for older people to engage in creative group activities in order to support independence and well-being – community choirs are specifically recommended.
2. Census and other published data tells us that our current participants are representative of many more people living in similar circumstances and with similar needs who, because of a lack of awareness, encouragement and support, are not currently engaged in groups like ours.
3. We have had discussions with local charity representatives, community healthcare workers and a local GP Alliance, all of whom tell us that they are in contact with people in the wider community who could potentially benefit from connecting with our groups.

Our research and networking to date has been extremely fruitful, and we have received some very positive feedback from the people and organizations we have approached for support (more detail on our Action Plan is provided at Section 11).

*'As a GP, I've been keen to support Musical Connections in their excellent work. The potential to relieve social isolation and provide much-needed human connection, spirit and warmth, enriched by the life blood of melody and rhythm is so precious in the communities we serve...and we hope to bring it to more as Musical Connections develops'*

(Dr Andrew Field: City and Vale GP Alliance)

*'It (a presentation from the lead musician) was really well received, thank you. Certainly more interesting than the usual meeting. Hope it helps spread the word. It's a fabulous project'*

(Age UK: York)

## **9. THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT**

Ever since the Musical Connections project began running in City of York Council care settings, we have worked very effectively with the local authority, which has appreciated the ability of the team to drive the project forward, both professionally and creatively. This has made for strong working relationships. However, with ongoing pressure on local authority budgets, it has become increasingly apparent that City of York Council is unable to help the project

develop any further. In response, the Musical Connections team has decided to move forward independently and, in March this year, gained charitable status.

Notwithstanding this move to independence, City of York Council continues to support the project. It will continue to make both financial and in-kind contributions and will provide practical support to the team on a daily basis, as before.

### **9.1 Charity trustees**

The new charity's Board of Trustees is made up of two of the original CYC project team, plus two members of the local community:-

- **Val Sutton, Chair of Trustees:** Val was formerly Head of CYC Adult Services, which involved managing the care of older people across York. Her appointment as Chair of Trustees has been a natural progression from her position as chair of the project steering group, a role she has held since her retirement from City of York Council in May 2012. Her extensive experience in managing and delivering care for older people makes her an invaluable source of knowledge, insight and connections
- **Sara Marshall:** Sara has been a financial administrator on the Musical Connections project since it began. As the council will no longer be responsible for administering the project's finances, Sara wishes to be involved with the charity in a voluntary capacity as a trustee
- **Jo Farrington:** Jo is a member of the local community, with significant experience in business and marketing. Given the charity's need to operate professionally and, indeed, 'commercially', Jo's experience and expertise have been invaluable in helping the team set themselves up as an independent organisation
- **Dr Hazel Brown:** Hazel is a retired GP who is convinced of the value of Musical Connections in improving health and well-being for local older people. She is able to offer connections with the medical community, and an understanding of the way in which GP surgeries operate, something which will be key to generating community-based referrals into our groups.

### **9.2 The Steering Group**

When we received our previous Reaching Communities grant, Musical Connections gained a continuity which it had previously been lacking. We were able to look forward with greater confidence, and decided that the programme would benefit from the formation of a steering group; we believed it would create a greater level of formality and professionalism, a structured framework for reporting, and an opportunity for members of a wider group to contribute to forward planning for the project. In practice, this has worked just as we had

hoped, and we consider the steering group to have had a very positive impact on the delivery and development of Musical Connections.

### 9.2.1 The Members

Members of the steering group are:

- **Val Sutton:** Val retains her role as Chair of the Steering Group
- **Penny Gregg:** Penny represents the Alheimers Society. She brings guidance and feedback from her work in the field of dementia, and is able to provide updates on current thinking and new developments
- **Chris Bartram:** Chris is Senior Lecturer in Community Music at York St John University. He brings academic expertise, creative thinking, and connections with students and other academics. In December, Chris will become a Musical Connections trustee
- **Project participants:** while we currently do not have any project participants who are permanently involved with the steering group, we rotate our meetings around each care setting, so as to include participants in each one. This approach also ensures that a different setting is represented each time, and responsibilities and opportunities for involvement are shared

NB: While the musicians are not members of the steering group, they are asked to attend every meeting.

### 9.2.2 Meetings

Prior to each meeting, and with the help of care staff, participants contribute to a feedback report, which is subsequently presented to the group; participants are then invited to give more detail on their opinions and ideas at the meeting, and to offer thoughts on all other issues discussed. We have found this approach to be very effective; it has given the steering group an opportunity to meet participants and staff from all of the care settings, and to hear perspectives from people with a range of needs and personality types. The meetings have generally been very enjoyable for all present, with participants always at the centre of the event.

### 9.3 The Musicians

- **Fiona Chapman, Lead Musician and Project Manager:** Fiona worked closely with Val Sutton on the early development and implementation of the Musical Connections project, drawing on both her practical and academic experience (she completed an MA in Community Music in 2007, and began working at Morrell House, one of the participating care homes, during this period). Fiona remains fully committed to the programme and has developed considerable expertise over her years of leading the work.

She has developed excellent relationships with staff and management in all the care settings, and within related council departments. She has shown herself to be wholly reliable, with very high standards and a passion for her work which remains undimmed as time goes on. She continues to approach the project with thoughtfulness and creativity, which bodes well for the new direction it will be taking in the future

- **Emma Tatnall, Second Musician:** The first Reaching Communities grant enabled us to recruit a second musician to work on the programme from the beginning of 2012. Emma has remained with the team since then, and has proved herself to be a great asset. She is a talented and adaptable singer and instrumentalist, and is very popular with participants. She has benefited the Musical Connections programme by bringing great energy, new creative ideas and additional connections with the wider community (schools and the Brownies). She also has excellent computer skills, which she has used to construct a Musical Connections website. She is now a fully-fledged, experienced member of the team, and our future plans include an expanding role for her, particularly in relation to publicity and building a profile for the new charity
- **Emma Dickinson, Third Musician:** Emma Dickinson began volunteering with us at the beginning of the current grant period. At that point, Emma was doing an MA in Community Music, and her interest in and commitment to Musical Connections was apparent from the start. Over time, her role within the project has grown and, registering her interest and ability, the project team secured some additional funding from the Two Ridings Community Foundation for Emma to start an additional group at a scheme not covered by the Reaching Communities grant. This has enabled her to continue to develop her experience and to benefit from being trained and managed by the lead musician. With the advent of new funding, Emma's involvement in the project will increase still further.

#### **9.4 Volunteers**

Volunteers continue to play an essential role in the Musical Connections programme. As before, the volunteers tend to fall into two camps: students and retired people:-

- **Students:** when we received the previous Reaching Communities grant, students at both of York's universities were already volunteering with the programme. Over time, we have noted a pattern, where some individuals attend just for a couple of sessions, and others become longstanding contributors, often for a year or more. Participants love the energy and youth of the students, and welcome the opportunity to spend time with different, younger people. The students also provide occasional performances and workshops (the last year has seen the advent of ukulele, samba and African drumming in the sheltered housing schemes) and extra pairs of hands at weekly sessions. A gap-year student, who volunteered with us for a year before moving to London to continue her

studies also decided to organise a fundraising concert for the new charity, and raised almost £500

- **Retired people:** The involvement of retired people has been a real boost to the project, with one of them having volunteered at our groups for four years now. As already mentioned, two of our trustees are retired, and a couple of retired care staff have also returned to the project to help out on a voluntary basis. We are finding that more such people are gradually trickling towards our work, and helping out at sessions.

These older volunteers have proved themselves to be extremely reliable, supportive and hands-on. In turn, they gain a great deal from their involvement in the sessions; it gives them an opportunity to continue using their skills, an outlet for their own musical interests, and an opportunity to feel part of a team and meet new people. Their involvement in the groups is also much appreciated by the participants, who love to meet new people and feel connected to others outside their care settings.

*'I distribute instruments, help set up and clear up, rounding people up takes quite a bit of time. I used to feel very intrusive going upstairs, but not so much now. I provide support wherever it's needed....'*

*'We like having Margaret (volunteer) – we like having other people join in with us'*

In our Action Plan at Section 11, we explain more about how we wish to increase the number of people volunteering for Musical Connections.

## **10. USING OUR LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE**

We have always ensured that learning from our experience and evaluation has been used to guide ongoing development of the work. Our foray into sheltered housing has not been easy at times, but our ability to reflect on our practices and to work with sheltered housing staff to find the best ways of establishing the groups has made a huge difference to their success. Given the way the project has grown over time, we are finding that others in the health and education sectors are interested to follow our progress.

### **10.1 Sharing Learning**

Learning from the project has been shared via the following channels:

- newsletters, produced six times a year and distributed to local councillors, the Alzheimers Society, Age UK and academic institutions, including the Royal Northern College of Music and the University of London's Institute for Education. The newsletters have generated valuable connections for the project across the country, and have also proved an efficient and effective means of sharing highlights of the work in response to ad-hoc requests for information

- the lead musician provides information and showcases examples of best practice to undergraduates from York St John University and postgraduate students from the University of York. As well as providing students with an understanding of how music may be used as a platform for communication and interaction with older people and people with dementia, these sessions offer an opportunity to generate continued student involvement in the programme
- the lead musician has run training for both care staff and professional musicians interested in or already working with older people and people with dementia. The impact of the staff training has already been discussed at length, but it should be noted that the work with professional musicians has also received very positive feedback
- the project's intergenerational work has been featured in the local press – although not as often as we would like. For some reason we struggle to generate interest amongst local journalists, and will be examining ways in which we might be able to generate higher levels of press coverage going forwards
- towards the end of the first Reaching Communities grant, second musician, Emma Tatnall, built a website [www.musicalconnections.org.uk](http://www.musicalconnections.org.uk) for the project. Emma's computer skills have been an unexpected and much-welcomed bonus, and she has also begun to develop a presence for the project on social media
- as the programme has gained momentum, so it has become better known and better supported in other CYC departments. Our lead musician is now the local authority's primary trainer on music and dementia, the Press department has issued press releases (although, as mentioned above, these have rarely been picked up by the media), and community facilitators have begun to circulate information about Musical Connections. The council choir has also delivered performances and raised funds for the project
- we have made connections with our local MP, Rachael Maskell, who has attended a session and provided us with a letter of support which has been used as evidence in funding applications
- the team has increased its use of the internet since the last project, and there are now a number of short video clips on YouTube, as well as the Musical Connections Facebook page, which is administered efficiently by our second musician. We intend to expand this aspect of our work going forwards, hopefully using video for both creative and promotional purposes
- the lead musician has worked with a local film-maker at Morrell House dementia care home, who has produced a film about the impact of creative interaction and Musical Connections on the lives of the people

who live there. This will have its first showing at a community cinema on 29<sup>th</sup> November.

Overall, we have been very pleased with the extent to which learning from Musical Connections has been shared, given the small number of people involved in the project, although an improved media presence will be important going forwards.

## **10.2 Future Development of the Project**

Musical Connections has gone from strength to strength over the last almost 8 years, thanks mainly to the two 2-year grants the project has received from the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities fund. We are very proud that the groups appear to have been fully integrated into the lives of participants and their care settings; the evidence suggests that increasing numbers of participants have led happier and more fulfilled lives as a result, and that there is an ongoing need for the work of the new charity, not just in care settings, but also in the wider community.

## **11. AN ACTION PLAN**

### **11.1 Funding and Project Structure**

The team has worked hard to generate new funding to sustain Musical Connections beyond the end of this grant, and to enable the trustees and musicians to develop the project further. A large grant has been awarded by Arts Council England, with match funding sourced from several CYC ward committees, smaller grant-givers and community fundraising.

The new funding will be used to sustain the existing groups in care homes and sheltered housing schemes, and to finance the marketing plan, thereby equipping the team with the resources to increase participation by vulnerable and socially isolated people living in the wider community. It will also facilitate a new team structure, whereby Fiona Chapman, lead musician and project manager, will reduce the number of sessions she leads (the other musicians will take these over), so as to be able to focus more on project management, training and fundraising.

### **11.2 Project Content**

Through monitoring, evaluation and experience, we have learnt that, to ensure a continued positive experience for participants, we will need to do the following:

- use musicians who have as much emotional intelligence as they have musical technique
- provide a varied and creative programme, which combines a wide range of musical genres and other art forms



- include an element of challenge, which takes participants out of their comfort zone, while always respecting and celebrating each individual's musical history and preferences
- involve as many volunteers as possible, particularly young people
- include regular intergenerational projects and sessions
- provide off-site opportunities outside of the regular weekly sessions
- provide and facilitate performance opportunities for those who want them
- build and maintain constructive relationships with venue staff
- continue to offer training to care staff and arts professionals

### **11.3 Marketing**

Going forwards, a combination of networking, volunteer recruitment, and effective use of marketing materials will be required, in order to achieve greater profile and impact in the wider community.

In developing our strategy, we believe that there are two key obstacles to surmount:

1. People who are vulnerable and socially isolated may lack the confidence or resources to try us out on the basis of a poster/flyer (although these will be necessary to raise awareness and provide information), and are more likely to need support to attend.
2. The sheltered housing venues may be off-putting for potential new members coming in from the community; tight security is in place, which can make access to the building difficult, and there is no reception desk. Equally, we know that people in the community can sometimes have negative perceptions of residential settings for older people.

Bearing these issues in mind, we intend to seek to connect with 'third party signposters' who we hope will help support and encourage people into the groups. These will be:

- GP practices: in the first instance we will contact those that are located near the sheltered schemes and the community centre where the choir takes place
- Carers – individual family members/friends and carers' organizations
- Church congregations and groups
- Related charities eg Age UK, York Neighbours
- Community groups, particularly those local to our venues.

We know that people who are vulnerable or socially isolated are much more likely to attend our sessions if accompanied by a trusted friend/supporter and so, wherever possible, we hope to encourage community volunteers and people from the above 'signposter groups' to become 'music buddies', attending sessions regularly with the same person. Where this is not possible, we will seek to encourage families/friends, support workers and carers to support and encourage participation amongst potential beneficiaries. Equally, once people have taken the decision to try us out, we will ensure that access into the venue is

facilitated and that support and information is provided to ensure that people feel comfortable and confident about getting – and staying – involved. The following specific actions will be taken to help recruit and retain new participants:

- a focus group has already been held with with GPs and a charity representative to identify barriers/solutions to participation
- a search has commenced for volunteer 'buddies'
- the website is to be updated to support new branding and marketing activities
- a database will be set up for existing/target participants and third party signposters
- social media and press releases will be used to publicize the groups
- new branding will be developed, followed by the commissioning of new leaflets, timetables, posters, on-site signage, pop-up displays and stationery – all to be used and distributed appropriately and according to context
- a welcome pack will be designed and given to all new participants
- the project manager will set up and deliver information sessions to 3<sup>rd</sup> party signposters and agree a strategy to disseminate the information through their organisations
- a Musical Connections birthday card will be designed and distributed on participant birthdays
- the database will be used to include family members/key contacts in communications eg regular newsletter.

#### **11.4 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Although we have recently secured enough funding to take the project through to the end of 2017, we are conscious that we already need to be thinking about how we sustain it beyond then. It may be that our next approach is to the health sector; to do this successfully, it is likely that we will need to evidence how the positive impact of our work on health and wellbeing translates into measurable/economic benefits to health funders. We are now researching the best way to gather meaningful and persuasive evidence of this type.

#### **12. A FINAL WORD**

The Musical Connections team has worked tirelessly to sustain and develop their project, and to maximize its delivery to achieve optimum outcomes for all beneficiaries. As it moves forward into a new phase – as a new charity – there is an immense feeling of pride in what has been achieved and optimism for what is to come. The final word in this report comes from our local MP:

*'Musical Connections provides something for everyone, and it was good to know that the group works with people with physical disabilities, as well as mental disabilities, including dementia. Musical Connections reaches out to the whole community and is helping many people. Some feel very isolated when they have a disability of any kind, and they can feel cut off and excluded from social activities. This project makes everyone feel valued and*

*keen to join in. Musical Connections is a huge asset to my York Central constituency, and I am so pleased to see it going from strength to strength'*

(Rachael Maskell MP)

**APPENDIX ONE: NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF PARTICIPATING CARE HOMES**

1. Windsor House  
22, Ascot Way  
York  
YO24 4QZ
2. Willow House  
Long Close Lane  
York  
YO10 4UP
3. Woolnough House  
52 Woolnough Avenue  
York  
YO10 3RE
4. Haxby Hall (additional group set up in the dementia unit here April 2016)  
York Road  
York  
YO32 3DX
5. Morrell House  
388 Burtonstone Lane  
York  
YO30 6EZ
6. Grove House (closed early 2016)  
40/48 Penleys Grove  
York  
YO31 7PN
7. Oakhaven (closed early 2016)  
144 Acomb Road  
York  
YO24 4HA

**APPENDIX TWO: NAMES AND ADDRESS OF PARTICIPATING SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEMES**

1. Barstow House  
St Benedict's Road  
York  
YO23 1YA
2. Glen Lodge  
2 Sixth Avenue  
Heworth  
York  
YO31 0TR
3. Gale Farm Court  
Front Street  
Acomb  
York  
YO24 3DR
4. Alex Lyon House  
St Aelred's Close  
Fifth Avenue  
YO31 0YB
5. City Mills  
Skeldergate  
York  
YO1 6DB

**APPENDIX THREE: CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE NEW MUSICAL CONNECTIONS CHARITY**

Musical Connections (Reg. no: 1165993)  
PO Box 724  
York YO1 0HL

Tel: 01904 373011  
Email: [enquiries@musicalconnections.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@musicalconnections.org.uk)