

# JOHN WEBB CHILDMINDER DROP-IN GROUP



## THE DELIVERY ORGANISATION

This project was devised and run by John Webb, a freelance musician who has worked with early years settings for the past 10 years, including the Wigmore Hall's Chamber Tots project. He has also worked with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Operahouse Music Projects, Excellence in Southwark and London Philharmonic Orchestra. He is particularly interested in the way young children learn and in the role music can play in a balanced and experientially rich education.

Kintore Way Children's Centre was established in September 2006, combining a long-established Nursery School with newly built day-care provision. It provides services for children aged under 3 and 3-5, breakfast and after-school clubs, holiday play schemes and Family Education and Support.

## THE PEOPLE

**Participants:** The childminders' drop-in group meets once a week at Kintore Way Children's Centre in Southwark. Over the eight sessions, 17 children and 14 childminders attended. Most children were under three years old. 19 adults attended the training session. Eight were childminders from the Kintore Way drop-in; nine were childminders from elsewhere in Southwark, and two were network co-ordinators.

**Staff:** John Webb was supported by two Network Co-ordinators at Kintore Way and South Bermondsey.

## THE PROJECT

This activity formed part of a larger project, working with Kintore Way Children's Centre and in South Bermondsey. It aimed to explore how relationships develop between artists and education settings, especially those working with freelance artists for the first time. More specifically, it explored how childminders can be supported to develop music-making skills with the children they look after. Eight hour-long workshops with children and adults, four in the summer term and four in the autumn, were supplemented with a training session for childminders. This aimed to increase the childminders' use of music in their work, as well as their creativity and confidence. It also explored the relationship between independent childminders, the local authority-led childminding network and the children's centre.

Funding for the project was awarded funds through Sound Connection's Youth Music Action Zone, with match funding from Kintore Way Children's Centre.

# CHILD'S PLAY

*Lullabies, clapping songs and nursery rhymes have been woven into children's learning throughout human history. Helping childminders to develop the way they use music in their work with very young children was at the heart of this project. Beginning by researching the group, and following up with feedback opportunities, were crucial steps in understanding the context and impact of the work.*

An initial questionnaire established the way music was already being used: through songs, movement to music and using instruments including unpitched instruments, keyboards and recorders. Most wanted new ideas, songs and activities to use with the children they looked after. Child-initiated music-making was a key activity – though more challenging than adult-led activity.

To enhance the project, a successful bid was made to Grants for the Arts to provide percussion instruments for the childminders' use. Two xylophones and sets of hand-held percussion instruments were purchased – one for the Kintore Way centre and one for the South Bermondsey centre. In addition 20 sets of chime bars, beaters and small hand-held percussion instruments were purchased which were given to regular attendees of the music sessions for use at home.

Following feedback from participants, John was able to say that *"Providing the instruments has had a positive impact, allowing the children to play more freely with childminders and following their musical lead."* The children's skills improved – for instance, wanting to lead 'stop and start' instrument games with the adult.

***"The children really love it. I've gone home and they've carried on with the songs – that's all I hear all day long."***

## Follow my leader

Sessions on adult-led songs and activities aimed to encourage movement and singing, and to allow songs to be changed creatively, for instance in their speed or volume. Stories and props, such as finger puppets and a large sheet of Lycra, encouraged engagement, rhythmic movement and creativity. Occasionally, a microphone was used to encourage children to vocalise and to listen to their own voices. Using the instruments, adults learned simple accompaniment patterns and nursery rhymes. They enjoyed taking part and practising, and were eager to try out their new-found skills and knowledge each week.

*"Child-initiated music-making was slightly more challenging,"* John points out. *"Ideally, this should consist of putting some instruments out and letting the children come and play whenever they want to: the adult with them mirrors and develops their musical ideas by careful listening, copying and playing alongside them. There was evidence of this occurring before I arrived each week... However, as soon as I arrived, everyone would come over to the carpet and sit down ready to begin."* This expectation that John's arrival meant more formal, adult-led circle-time activities gave a different emphasis to the session.

Feedback was very positive *"The children really love it,"* responded one of the childminders. *"I've gone home and they've carried on with the songs, especially the older ones that can sing it and learn it – that's all I hear all day long."*

## Night school

The childminders were invited to an evening training session after the workshops with children were completed. This was open to a wider number of childminders than used the Kintore Way drop-in, though eight who had attended the music sessions also attended this training.



***“One of the older children has taken the lead on delegating the songs to follow.”***

*“During the training session,” John explains, “I was able to further explain the theory behind many of the activities, which we had not been able to do in the practical sessions with children. So, we discussed the value of music, noting its power as a tool for bonding between adults and babies. We were able to look at a video of children and an adult playing freely with a xylophone to see how interactions develop from the child’s ideas. We also went through a great deal of practical material which could be used by childminders with all ages of young children, as well as some of the reasons for using specific songs, and possible ways to develop and extend them.”*

The training session was well-received, and highly rated by all the participants who gave feedback, with some asking for further training to be provided. The Kintore Way network co-ordinator wrote: *“This was a very informative and interactive session which focused on the impact [music-making] has on children early speech and cognitive thinking through sequencing.”*

### Impact and ideas

John gained important feedback from the network co-ordinators at both Kintore Way and South Bermondsey. They noticed progress among the childminders in terms of increased confidence and enjoyment, and increasing engagement on the part of the children. The Kintore Way co-ordinator wrote that the children were fully engaged within the session even before John’s arrival, as the instruments were set out for them to access straight away. *“This allows a free flow of children initiating their own instrumental and musical capabilities. One of the older children has taken the lead on delegating the songs to follow.”*

The importance of the project seems also to have included the structuring of the group to enable them to develop musical skills. The Kintore Way co-ordinator noted: *“One of the childminders has taken the lead on continuing the work that John has started. The children have become familiar with the songs and are now empowered to take the lead as the childminders mimic their actions on the instruments. This has supported children to become more engaged for a longer periods of time.”*

Childminders who only took part in the training session were equally motivated. The South Bermondsey co-ordinator gained a lot of verbal feedback from a variety of childminders across the borough, saying *“they were inspired to make changes within their child-minding drop-in groups, to plan a varied song time, encouraging turn-taking and different songs, sounds and rhymes”*.

### Spreading the word

The South Bermondsey co-ordinator also added some important ideas on how to encourage childminders to use instruments and develop music within the drop in group. She identified the following points:

- ▶ To plan a programme with extended music times within the drop-in group sessions, to give childminders plenty of time to get the feel of all the instruments provided
- ▶ To use the musical instruments at singing time so that the children can take part within the activity
- ▶ To recognise and explore how sounds can be changed, use techniques shared by John, such as voice changing within songs to low, medium and high pitches, exploring how sounds can be changed
- ▶ To tap out simple repeated rhythms and make some up
- ▶ To introduce a variation of songs encouraging all children and adults to be included
- ▶ Build a repertoire of songs and dances – use dressing up or make props such as masks and connect with books and stories to make it interesting for the older children, linking all into music and movement
- ▶ Helping childminders to link the music session area within the drop-in group to all six areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (see below).

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Her/his final point is perhaps the most important. The Early Years Foundation Stage includes Problem Solving; Reasoning and Numeracy; Physical Development; Creative Development; Communication Language and Literacy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; and Personal Social and Emotional Development. Linking the music sessions to these areas could be achieved, according to the co-ordinator, *“through samples of short or medium term plans being disseminated throughout the childminding team, [and] also going through with them on how they can extend these plans within their own settings to help the children in their care to reach their full potential”*. □

## LESSONS LEARNED

***“There was progress among the childminders in terms of increased confidence and enjoyment, and increasing engagement on the part of the children.”***

### What we would keep or build on

- ▶ The obvious positive impact of this project could be extended to childminders’ networks and drop-in centres all over the country. They can support each others’ development over the longer term.
- ▶ Linking music activity with the six areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- ▶ Secure funding to provide instruments for childminders to use at home.

### What we would change

- ▶ Provide a training event at the start and the end of the project, which could also be open to childminders not taking part in music workshops.
- ▶ Assess in more detail how the workshops are impacting on childminders’ music provision.

- ▶ Produce further support materials: songs sheets and ideally a CD
- ▶ Focus on the childminders as a specific project, rather than as part of a larger project. This would enable a greater number of sessions, and more in-depth learning, including exploring child-initiated musical learning.

### What relationships need to be built

- ▶ From the outset, any new project needs to include awareness of any local authority structures already in place, and to create relationships with network co-ordinators.
- ▶ Use the opening training session to create a good relationship between the artist and the childminders – particularly important if the artist is male in a largely female environment.

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