

The Music House for Children and Grove House Children's Centre

CASE STUDIES



THE DELIVERY ORGANISATIONS

'Boogie Babies' with **The Music House for Children** (abbreviated as **The Music House**) in Shepherd's Bush is a social enterprise offering a range of music participation and learning activities to children ranging from 0-18. The activities took place at Cathnor Road Children's Centre, Shepherd's Bush, which provides care and learning activities for children under five and their families, and is part of the Children's Centre network provided by local authorities in England, as part of Every Child Matters.



Music and staff development at Grove House. Grove House is also a Children's Centre, in Southall, offering care and education for children under five and their families, aiming to develop children's independence, confidence, social skills and creativity by working in partnership with parents, as the child's first educators, to build on the learning which has taken place at home before children come to the Centre.



THE PEOPLE

Participants: babies and toddlers aged 0-2 years, plus parents/carers in the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Staff: Emma Hutchinson from The Music House as Music Leader, Christine Whisker and Iman Hatam, Cathnor Road Children's Centre. Himisha Patel, Grove House with Trish Powers, Music Leader.

THE PROJECTS

'Boogie Babies' took place in 2007 as a Youth Music Action Zone Small Project, running over ten weeks with weekly music sessions at Cathnor Road Children's Centre, engaging multi-cultural families and babies/toddlers with sound, song and activities.

The music project at Grove House took place between September 2008 and March 2009 as part of the Youth Music Action Zone (YMAZ) Early Years Project. A Music Leader worked with all the children in the centre, held sessions with parents and also delivered training to two members of staff.

Early Years Music

These were two separate projects. The 2007 Music House ('Boogie Babies') was a small project that was starting to investigate Early Years work for the first time for Sound Connections. This then helped Sound Connections shape the brief for the Grove House project (which is one of three). This meant the brief had changed slightly.

Work with very young children is challenging, not least because of the practical and creative needs of this group and their parents/carers. The Every Child Matters agenda clearly recognises the benefits and advantages of creativity at early ages, in terms of parenting confidence and skills as well as encouraging social interaction, pleasure and stimulation in even the youngest babies. Notwithstanding this, creative activities for babies are still not widespread.

These projects are examples of the ways in which organisations and artists could engage creatively and successfully with very young babies and children and their parents or carers, through Early Years settings in England. The Music House project took place in 2007 and was a pilot, being the first time that Sound Connections had supported Early Years work. The outcomes helped Sound Connections shape the brief for the Grove House project (which is one of three).

'Boogie Babies'

The Music House wanted to build on Emma Hutchinson's own work with babies, and devised 'Boogie Babies', a ten week collaboration with Cathnor Road Children's Centre, which brought together a diverse group of mothers and babies, to the delight of both The Music House and the Children's Centre. Words and language, particularly 'baby babble' was chosen as the starting point, as something everyone has in common.

'Baby babble' was the key to this music project: adults with their babies were encouraged to utter babbly noises that were then picked up by the Music Leader and developed into simple songs. The exercise could

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be practised and developed at home by parents, and the Early Years practitioner employed by the Centre during the week, to encourage adults to sing their own songs, learnt at their own pace and ability. Over the weeks the babies showed their enjoyment of spontaneous babble language, and parents learned how to feel more confident making natural sing-song part of their play activities.

A core group of 15 was established, at first made up of ethnically diverse and traditionally hard-to-reach babies and parents: young single mothers, Lebanese, Turkish mothers and a Somali father. The Early Years worker fed back that using words, phrases and sentences from languages other than English were "very effective in group work and proved successful when considering participation and belonging – families feeling valued and respected".

Word of mouth soon passed round the area, which led to too many people turning up. This presented problems, as the new participants were generally not from the target groups and would probably be able to afford this type of activity through other channels, unlike the original target group, identified by



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the Music House and Cathnor Road Children's Centre. In the end, a ticketing system had to be operated, and both The Music House and Children's Centre agree that in future they would restrict participation to specific service users, such as homeless families, special needs groups, etc.

'Boogie Babies' was designed to deliver training through practice for the Early Years Key Worker as well as empower parents by giving them tools with which to enjoy music with their babies, but she was also able to bring insight and suggest ideas for parents, too, with her Early Years perspective, for example, making home-made instruments (pans and spoons, bottles and rice, etc), improvising at bath-time with "splish, splosh games", all of which were cheap.

The Grove House Early Years project

Grove House has a focus on the Italian Reggio d'Emilia approach¹. This encourages children to lead instead of being directed, and have creative independence from adults, so that lessons become artistic 'provocations' rather than set task regimes. Believing that music is a universal language, and a way of communicating with children before they can talk, Himisha Patel, Head of Grove House and Trish Power, Music Leader devised this music project together.

It differed from 'Boogie Babies', in that the children were not with their parents/carers, but it developed the skills of the Early Years practitioners alongside the benefits for the children, so the skills will be left within the Centre and used after the formal completion of the project. For example, the children's progress is followed during the week after the session, and the Early Years practitioners use their new skills all the time, for example, turning 'Tidy-up Time' into a song. Trish and the team worked with ten children in the nursery, who were 3+ and a small group of under-3s, but later extended it, so that all the children now have some activities with Trish and later with their key workers.

Grove House has made sure that parents are informed: using newsletters, daily contact and updates and their website to communicate, as well as inviting them to join in a session. Himisha has found that parents are "coursed-out", so don't drop in, but they are positive about the project. Parents have been feeding back to her and the Early Years practitioners on the changes they have observed in their children, who often chat about Trish's visits spontaneously, obviously being a highlight of the week.

This pilot was seen as a great opportunity to build on the Centre's child-centred curriculum and 'learning through play' philosophy. Previous experience made Himisha determined to embed the music within Grove House practice and ethos, so having two members of staff involved was just the start, and now other Early Years practitioners are learning from Trish and sharing knowledge with their colleagues: "We're using this to learn, so it's not lost when Trish finishes." As well as Grove House's clear desire to work creatively, Himisha enjoyed working with an artist who was flexible and felt that there was a strong, two-way relationship: "... she's what made the difference". Himisha would definitely keep this element the same in the future and says that the secret is being matched with the right

practitioner, in this case, one with experience of very young children and therefore a flexible approach to working.

The future

After the success of (and clear demand for 'Boogie Babies'), The Music House has continued to work with Cathnor Road Children's Centre, this time with a specific group – deaf children and babies. Cathnor Children's Centre has agreed to invest in this project, thereby understanding the clear benefit that music brings to families. To date, this is going well: "families are keen to ensure a seamless, open-ended music session with out apparent pressure to 'learn' or 'educate' each other". Emma is clear about the benefits she observes: "the increased confidence shown (in particular) by different cultures and their desire to bond with their baby. They are now dancing freely, singing 'nonsense' to their child and getting the intimate responses they expect".

This work is likely to develop alongside The Music House's existing activities, which make it a thriving enterprise, offering music classes, drop-in sessions and tutoring to children and young people between 0 and 16, with extensive experience in working with hard to reach and vulnerable groups.

The Grove House project completed in March 2009, and Himisha would like to continue some music activity along these lines, funding and resources permitted. She would also ensure that everyone was involved in the process and idea from the beginning, parents as well as staff. The team have been thinking about ways they can achieve this, for example, sending instruments home with the children.

References
1 <http://zerosei.comune.re.it>

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"families are keen to ensure a seamless, open-ended music session with out apparent pressure to 'learn' or 'educate' each other."



LESSONS LEARNED

“ Reflection and documentation allowed us to appreciate how all the children benefited and how to engage them more. ”

What we would keep or build on

- ▶ The Music Leader has to have the flexibility (thinking and session planning) as well as the technical skills for working with babies and very young children.
- ▶ Restricting activities to specific groups that would not normally access music activities of any kind.
- ▶ The work can be embedded through building in CPD and active staff involvement.
- ▶ Identifying and targeting specific groups

What we would change

- ▶ Running the project for more sessions, ideally 20 weeks.

- ▶ Finding more ways to involve parents from the start, so they can build on the work at the Centre.
- ▶ Better systems/filtering to ensure participants are from the identified target groups (channel demand appropriately)

What relationships need to be built

- ▶ Arts organisations, individual practitioners and Children's Centres should continue to discuss and experiment with ways of working together.
- ▶ Continuing to collaborate with the Children's Centre and other, related agencies within the borough to identify future target groups in a very specific and focused way (channel demand appropriately)

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