

Sound Connections

Case study

innovate 2014: All Together Now – Live Music Now

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**LIVE
MUSIC
NOW**

 National Foundation for
Youth Music

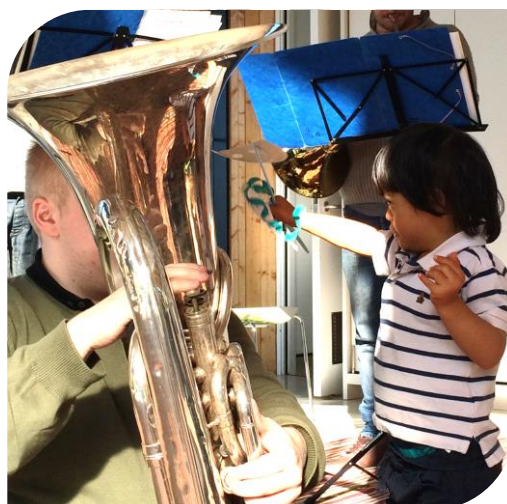

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"That was a wonderful event of live music. We enjoyed it, especially my disabled child was very happy. The event makes us forget about the difficulty"

Project summary

In early 2014 Live Music Now (LMN) South East branch secured funding from Sound Connections to trial a new way of working with children with special needs and their families.



Project detail

LMN had been working intensively with four Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) schools in Lewisham and Southwark as part of a year-long residency funded by the National Foundation for Youth Music. We wanted to continue to develop relationships outside of school with the children and parents we'd met, and to develop our organisation's offer to families with children with SEND. We hosted a really successful sharing event in partnership with the Horniman Museum and Gardens in their Pavilion as a part of those residencies; this pilot family project evolved from that event.

For our musicians this project offered an invaluable opportunity to learn how to work in groups of mixed ability children, to use their musical skills to keep all participants engaged throughout a session, and to stretch their programming and creative music-making skills.

We held two half-day events, one in October 2014 half-term holiday, and one in the following February 2015 half-term holiday.

We recruited our families through the schools we had been working with by sending fliers to our contact music teachers at each place. We also recruited through the Southwark, Royal Greenwich and Lewisham Music Education Hubs (MEH), through the local [Contact-a-Family network newsletter](#), local SEND family pages on social media, and listings in Lewisham Life magazine.

We chose to work with two of the larger ensembles from LMN – Westcombe Brass and Tir Eolas – as we felt that they would be better equipped to deal with large mixed ability groups. We chose one Western Classical group and one traditional Folk group to offer variety.

The musicians from both groups were offered Community Group Leader training at the Horniman, providing the skills and knowledge needed for Leaders to use the museum, its collections and its gardens independently

for their own projects and group visits. The museum also offered one-to-one support, advising on how to use the exhibits and handling objects in the workshops.

Each group was offered a facilitated planning session from experienced workshop leader and mentor John Webb.

"The session with John was really useful. We had loads of ideas; he helped us to focus on a few of them and develop them into a simple plan of activities that flowed and wasn't overwhelming for us or the participants!"

LMN staff were present at each event to observe and offer constructive feedback to the musicians.



Consultation and feedback

After the first event in October we consulted with the families, musicians and venue to find out what they would keep or change for the next event.

They all agreed that the session was a little too long and that the children were finding it hard to keep engaged. As a result we shortened the February session which was much more successful and fit with the physical needs of a lot of the disabled children.

The Horniman advised us to overbook for the second session as we had so many families from the first event pull out on the morning due to illness. This meant that the February session felt fuller and had more of a buzz about it. The museum offered some 'handling objects' for the second session which the musicians were able to choose and then incorporate into their plans.

"The venue was fantastic as well, with all the great props provided by the museum, great for the kids to be able to get hands on!"

At the end of the October session the musicians realised that they were relying a lot on siblings and parents to facilitate the participation; they were asking too many direct questions rather than demonstrating with their instruments and using non-verbal methods of communication. They successfully used the different spaces available to shift the focus of the session and to re-engage the children. The soft start to the session also worked well; the musicians were playing in small groups when the families arrived, taking it in turns to play and greet people. We shared this information with the next ensemble when they were planning the February session.

We agreed to keep the craft activities in to provide an alternative focus away from the music. It offered another activity for the families to do together if they felt initially uncomfortable with the music, and meant everyone had something of their own to take away from the event.

Outcomes summary

Outcome One: “Our music sessions will improve the personal wellbeing of disabled children and their siblings, strengthening family relationships through an enjoyable shared experience”

We felt that questionnaires would be too intrusive for the informal atmosphere we wanted to create in the sessions so relied on personal and group interviews with LMN staff and volunteers. We spoke to families during and after the sessions, as well as inviting their comments on a feedback wall. The children were encouraged to tell us what they thought independently, if they were able.

“Thank you so much. What fun! As soon as we walked in, Kamil instantly calmed down. Please, please, please repeat this session again! We’d definitely be back with more friends and support”

“I like musick. I like gitare. I like eavritheng”

“It was so fun. Also I enjoyed it with my family. I LOVE IT!”

“Lots of joy. Lots of fun and opportunities for everyone to join in”



Outcome Two: “LMN musicians will have improved skills and confidence in working with children with special needs”

The musicians reported that they found these sessions harder than those they were used to delivering in school. They put this down to having to accommodate the mixed abilities of the participants, as well as not having the formal environment of school and teachers to support them. At the end of the sessions they said they felt more confident in knowing what they would do next time, and were able to reflect positively on the challenges they faced.

Both groups said they would be interested in doing this work again with LMN, and two musicians said they would be using some of the ideas with the families in their work outside LMN (with Chickenshed and local early years groups).

Outcome Three: “LMN gains experience in developing programmes in partnership with outside agencies, increasing capacity of the organisation and expanding its core offer to its beneficiaries”

It has been a fantastic experience working with the Horniman Museum. They have been incredible in supporting the musicians on how to incorporate the exhibits, advising us on how best to use the spaces, and in supplying physical and human resources. The sessions certainly wouldn't have been as successful as they were without their input. We have learned what we can ask of a partner, and that in-kind support such as theirs is often more valuable than just financial support.

We are looking forward to developing this offer to families with them as an integral part of their regular community programme.

We are pleased to be able to signpost to these events, and other events at the Horniman, to the children we see regularly in schools, especially as the current residencies are coming to a close.

Legacy and next steps

We are in talks with the museum about extending the sessions to become part of their regular community activity, with events every other month in their education centre.

We have shared the learning from this pilot with our other LMN branches at our most recent Directors' meeting. This has resulted in us putting together a multi-branch bid to Spirit of 2012 and to roll out a national programme.

We hope to expand the project to work with similar community venues in other areas of London, to tie in with schools work we are doing in other boroughs.



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