

# **Sound Connections**

## **Briefing Paper**

**Working with Children and Young People in  
Challenging Circumstances through music**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sound Connections commissioned this research to identify the key skills and qualities needed to be a music leader working with children and young people in challenging circumstances (CCC). It also explored pathways into the sector and the key challenges music leaders face when establishing a career.

In 2012, Sound Connections drew together music making experts working with children and young people in challenging circumstances (CCC) to establish the CCC Network. This research was commissioned in an attempt to establish a number of key factors and thus provide a solid grounding to develop the CCC Network.

The research focused on the views of existing and established music leaders working in London, and comprised of interviews, case studies, a questionnaire survey and literature review.

The primary aim of the research was to provide Sound Connections with a strategic resource that will inform the development of the CCC Network and their approach to supporting 'new-to-the-sector' and established music leaders.

The research explores three key topic areas:

1. What are the key skills a music practitioner needs in order to work successfully with children in challenging circumstances?
2. What are the existing professional routes into this type of work?
3. How can this area of work, and the support available for practicing and prospective musicians, best be improved?

## **SUMMARY**

### **1. Skills and Qualities**

- Primary importance is placed on personal qualities and values – particular to the CCC sector is being open minded and tolerant, kind, calm, empathetic and patient.
- Emphasis is placed on creative and adaptable musicianship - and knowledge of the music culture of young people - over technical musical skills.
- Music leaders identify, and are aware of, the importance of core generic skills, including excellent communication skills, being highly organised, the ability to foster and sustain working relationships and to work unsupervised.
- Music leaders need to be highly adaptable in order to work effectively across a variety of settings. Overall they need to take an 'approach', or 'way of working', that allows them to do this – this includes confidence, flexibility, adaptableness, reliability and being highly motivated in their work.

## 2. Pathways and Challenges

- There is no singular specific pathway or route into working in the CCC sector. The route into this work is likely to be comprised of a variety of turning points, rather than a linear progression. It is these 'twists and turns' that provide the broad base of skills, as well as develop the skills and qualities to work in the sector.
- Musicians' creative and personal back-story is likely to inform their development.
- The lack of a definite pathway has positive and negative aspects:
  - Positive: does not rely on qualifications; allows for non-traditional work structure and timetable; rewards creativity and motivation
  - Negative: confusing; inaccessible; lack of clear information and knowledge
- Pathways aside, there are steps music leaders can take to further their career development:
  - The majority of music leaders do undertake some form of relevant training falling into four main areas: music degree; music therapy; practical and vocational music skills training; teacher training
  - It is widely agreed that the fundamentals of music leading are learnt by direct 'on the job' experience
  - Establishing and maintaining a career in the sector is a skill within itself. The process relies heavily on the application of generic skills and 'social capital' in the form of networking, establishing contacts and 'plugs ins', promoting oneself, maximising opportunities and having a creative and strong musical product to offer
- The key challenges established music leaders reported focus on logistical issues including poor pay and lack of organisational and institutional support, and personal ones such as isolation, self-esteem and exhaustion.
- The key challenges reported by music leaders in the process of establishing themselves are gaining practical experience, learning about how to be a freelancer, surviving financially during the initial low/non paid stages, feeling that they lack professional authenticity and maintaining confidence and motivation.

## 3. Sharing Skills and Best Practice

- Practitioners report work-shadowing and partnership projects with other music leaders as the most effective method of sharing experience and best practice.
- The survey respondents report a number of other beneficial methods of sharing experience: mentoring and supervision relationships, actively volunteering on projects (rather than work-shadowing), observation and feedback sessions with a consultant, and masterclasses.
- Reported gaps in provision focus on cross-sector opportunities with other professions who are not music providers, as well as training specific to young refugees, children with autism and young people with challenging behaviour.
- The case studies highlight the need for hands-on experiential opportunities and training for music leaders in the process of establishing themselves within the sector.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOUND CONNECTIONS**

### **1. Developing CCC Network**

The CCC Network offers an excellent forum to support the sector. However, involvement of individual and organisational members needs to be maintained:

- Consider broadening the membership to include non-music CCC professionals and appropriate multi-arts organisations
- Invite a number of developing music leaders to join the network
- Encourage member organisations to send representatives to CCC Network meetings – these could include junior or volunteer members of staff

### **2. Advising and signposting new music leaders**

Establishing a career as a music leader in the sector clearly takes motivation, confidence and requires a pro-active approach in order to make connections and generate opportunities:

- Continue the DNA (Development Needs Analysis) programme, Start Up, workforce training and workshops
- Produce a brief information and advice document for new music leaders
- Continue to programme regular networking events and look into ways of making these occasions more interactive.
- Continue to develop a robust and accessible information network encompassing relevant organisations in the sector, training, volunteering and non-musical opportunities offering transferable experience.

### **3. Sharing Skills and Best Practice**

The research indicates that there is a need for practice-based training opportunities for new music leaders. Equally, established practitioners have a clear preference for interactive and experiential training, especially if it exposes them to working within new fields in the sector and with non-music professionals. Sound Connections should look towards developing initiatives that marry the needs of both groups of practitioners:

- Explore opportunities for establishing a mentoring/apprenticeship scheme pairing new and established music leaders
- Support work-shadowing/partnership projects between music leaders
- Support cross sector volunteering opportunities and skill swap opportunities
- Monitor developments with the Localism Bill and related funding and policy changes
- Explore ways to document an evidence base of reflexive practice within the sector
- Support and inform the sector of the move towards monitoring and mapping impacts