

# Early Years in Hammersmith

## Reaching Out Project

Tri-Borough Music Hub  
Royal College of Music



## CASE STUDIES

In 2012, Sound Connections mapped non-formal music provision for children and young people in challenging circumstances across London. This research identified a number of 'cold spots' where little was happening but need was great. This project was one of the 'Reaching Out' projects designed to address this need by working in partnership with music hubs, lead authorities and local music providers.

### Overview:

A project based in two early years settings in Wormwood Scrubs area of Hammersmith, with an expert music leader sharing techniques over six sessions with teams of practitioners from the settings and Students from Royal College of Music (RCM). Activity starting with two large open sessions that introduces some of these core elements to practitioners from settings across the borough and students and graduates.

### Aims:

- To offer young children high quality music-making experiences that encourage them to play and develop through building a skilled and confident workforce.
- To develop the skills of early years practitioners to engage in high quality music-making activities with young children.
- To develop the skills of musicians in engaging young children in exploring and enjoying music-making.
- Exploring and extending Tri-Borough Music Hub's work with early years settings.
- Supporting Royal College of Music to develop its offer around early years music-making for students

### Impact on settings staff:

A project like this had never been done before and the staff facilitating this project believed it was a great programme. As a result of this project, all practitioners increased in their confidence to deliver musical activities. One practitioner described her personal journey as a change from 1 to 10 (10 being the highest) in terms of her confidence in leading musical activities. Another described herself as 'not musical' before the project had begun. After the project had finished however, she realised that the children really do appreciate her musical leadership and singing.

***"My confidence to sing has grown so much and now I am singing the songs all the time. It has made me realise how music can help and support children's learning and development. It has given me more confidence to lead the sessions and it cascades down to my colleagues."***

Staff developed ways of using music as a starting point for other conversations, especially with children whose language is not so developed. Music has clearly provided an extremely beneficial form of communication for children who might not otherwise have the confidence to speak to staff or approach situations using speech.

**100% of the teachers or practitioners said that they would not have been able to teach this curriculum using only lesson plans, without the weekly demonstration and support from Caroline.** Project music leader, Caroline Morris, suggested to nursery staff the idea of a 'sharing' experience rather than a concert, to show parents what the children have been involved with. Staff have said that they have more confidence now to run sharing sessions and get parents involved as well.

### **Impact on Children from the Acorn Nursery:**

Before it started, there were reservations about the music project being able to reach Special Educational Needs pupils. However, staff have noticed great results from these pupils. One child in particular, who physically removed himself at the start of the project, was fully engaged by the end. **All of the children were engaged by the end of the six weeks.**

Language and listening skills increased as the project progressed and children were much more focused on what was happening. Staff noted that children understood when to listen and when to repeat through gestures, which was highly valuable in supporting pupils with EAL and language delay. After week two of the project, staff at the Acorn Nursery reviewed which children needed to be referred to specialist language therapy, as they felt so strongly that this project had significantly helped their children with language and communication. Staff hope that using music in this way will continue to aid children in their communication as it has done so far.

***"We have noticed a big difference in the children's speech and language, listening and sharing skills. I will definitely be including it in our planning all the time."***

### **Impact on Children from Old Oak Children's Centre:**

The sessions promoted listening skills and confidence for children to perform in front of adults. These greatly improved as the project progressed and two children who were initially reserved about joining in were fully engaged by the end of the programme. The improvement in the children's vocal quality was also observed by the staff. There was a noticeable impact on children with language delay:

***"One child was mute and he chose to make the sound of the animal that we had made in the music session on his own."***

The practitioners noticed the impact of the sessions on children and their parents, giving parents new skills and confidence to take part. During the project, parents became a lot more relaxed, and were talking less to their children during activities. Over time, there was more alertness around the circle.

### **Impact on Parents:**

Parents said that they have taken songs from the sessions and performed them at home. One parent noted that following this programme, their children became more confident when meeting new people. Another mum said her son would never tidy up and now the 'tidy up song' is helping him to tidy up all the time. This project has clearly led to improvement in links with home. Children and parents also changed the words and made the songs their own, giving them

ownership of the music. Both settings report that since this project began, children are also using the songs in their free and informal play and are following the leadership from the staff in terms of singing.

### **Impact on Royal College of Music Student Practitioners:**

All of the musicians involved in this project were new to working with children of this age and all were excited and challenged by the opportunity. They benefitted from working in both nursery and children's centre settings. Students noted that Caroline's expert leadership gave them responsibility at the right point as practitioners, challenging the students and giving them new music leadership skills.

One student said that:

***"Because we 'did' rather than just spoke about it, we really learnt what to do and got confident in delivering the activities."***

Students acknowledged the challenge of the first session in order to set up success for the following weeks.

***"This project has definitely had a huge impact on my musical skills, first of all by learning to have more confidence and to be clear when delivering activities so that people could follow."***

**100% of the students that have taken part in the project would like to continue gaining experience with early years.** All of the students have said they will use the activities and techniques that they have experienced during the project again in the future.

### **Areas for Development:**

During the delivery of this project, Caroline Morris, noted that:

***"The programme is starting to have significant impact on the children and staff and there have only been six sessions. If there were twelve weekly sessions, there would be more time to challenge all practitioners resulting in a far greater impact on adults and children."***

Caroline observed that following the twelve weeks, one visit per month from the professional development leader to consolidate would embed skills for long term sustainability. Additionally, an initial visit to the settings by the professional development leader before the programme would have given a firmer plan in terms of permissible numbers of practitioners and facilitated some preplanning for progression. For future projects, this initial visit by the professional development leaders might include meeting all practitioners and staff on the programme to set out roles, responsibilities and expectations for greater progression.

The initial session for RCM students was a more general session that reached more than 20 students. Whilst the workshop was very useful, the students then selected to take part in the project could have benefitted from an extra session as a group to prepare them for this specific project. As they were new to working with this age and in these settings, it would have been

helpful for students to have visited the settings and met the practitioners there before the project started. Students could also attend the setting practitioners training in the future.

### **The Legacy of 'Cold Spots' project**

- 100% of staff said they felt they were more confident overall in leading musical activities after taking part in this project.
- 100% of staff said that the project helped to increase their understanding of music in Early Years Foundation Stage and to develop their skills in leading musical activities.
- 100% of the teachers said that they will use the curriculum again in the future.

One nursery practitioner said that:

***“We will keep this up now...It’s something that’s going to be in our planning...and I’m going to train someone up”***

Parents have reported regularly using songs and activities from the sessions at home. All parents have said that they would continue to attend classes if they were available in the future and would recommend them to other parents.

100% of students said that they will use the activities and techniques that they have experienced during the project again in the future. One student said:

***“I have always known that music is important for Early Years, but doing this project has highlighted just how necessary it is. The way in which we have seen the children (and parents) change over the past six weeks has been substantial, and we can only imagine how it will go on to influence them in the future.”***

Lucy Goldsmith, Learning and Participation Coordinator at RCM Sparks, said:

***“We are so pleased that RCM Sparks has been able to be a part of this pilot project in north Hammersmith. The students have gained so much and it has been a joy to see them, and the settings flourish under the leadership of Caroline. We are very grateful for the support of Sound Connections that has made this project possible. We hope to continue projects in the future in partnership that will further develop this model.”***

At time of publishing, discussions between all key project partners and other music providers in the area are being shaped to take lesson forward and examine how best to continue this work.

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