



SPIRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

MUSIC AND WELLBEING

INSIGHTS FROM GRANT FUNDING



More Music

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Rob Kenyon, Gaetano Iannetta,
Amy Heaton-Finch

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Acknowledgements The report was written by Rob Kenyon, Gaetano Iannetta, Amy Heaton-Finch at Spirit of 2012. The authors would like to thank the grantee and partner organisations who have contributed their expertise, in particular More Music who reviewed the draft report. Spirit of 2012 was set up by the National Lottery Community Fund as the London 2012 Games legacy funder. It aims to build sustainable social legacies from the inspiration of events, investing in projects that help people become more active, creative and connected. Over the last ten years, Spirit of 2012 has built up a strong evidence base about the power of events to catalyse social change, drawn from its own and others' research and learning from the projects it has funded. For further information see www.spiritof2012.org.uk.

INTRODUCTION

Spirit of 2012 funds projects that use physical activity, arts and culture, and volunteering to improve wellbeing, inclusion and social connectedness. Since 2013, we have invested £3.05m in 17 participatory music-making projects, with 2,255 taking part in regular activity, and over a million people trying out taster sessions, watching performances, or participating in short-term activities.

Much has been written about the power of music to promote wellbeing, including a systematic review of the relationship between wellbeing and music by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing¹, a suite of resources from the MARCH network², and longitudinal research exploring the link between arts participation and health by the Social Biobehavioural Research Group, UCL.³ In the briefing which accompanies its review, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing lays out a series of areas where the evidence base still needs development:



WHAT TYPE OF MUSIC AND SINGING INTERVENTION IS MOST EFFECTIVE, IN WHICH FORMAT, FOR WHICH GROUP – AND WHY? HOW CAN THESE BE DESIGNED TO HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT? HOW LONG DO THE IMPACTS LAST? HOW DOES A SINGING INTERVENTION COMPARE TO OTHER GROUP ACTIVITIES?

This report is partly a response to the questions posed in that briefing. It brings together findings from 17 funded projects, and explores how they achieved wellbeing outcomes. It concludes with a set of principles for music practitioners for designing their projects, including setting up inclusive spaces and integrating opportunities for social time.

A key focus of our work has been in removing barriers to participation. 10 of our 17 music projects – part of the Carers' Music Fund – focused specifically on music for people with caring responsibilities, others engaged people with poor mental health, people with learning disabilities and people with a dementia. Each project tailored the way they delivered their activity to meet the needs of their groups, allowing us to explore both approaches that worked for specific needs, as well as common features that improve inclusion in general.





BEING INVOLVED IN THIS ENCOURAGED ME TO TRY SOMETHING NEW. AND WHEN YOU ARE DOING MUSIC YOU ARE NOT THINKING ABOUT OTHER THINGS.'

Whilst our funded projects were not designed to assess the relative effectiveness of different types of music making, our grant holders developed and tested theories of change which pinpointed how different mechanisms might correlate to different outcomes.

For example, learning a new instrument and therefore developing new skills was linked to confidence and self-belief, while the communal experience of performing a song was described as particularly helpful for social wellbeing. The report explores these dynamics in more detail.

Many of the projects described in the report commissioned independent research and produced their own evaluations and resources. Links to all of these evaluations and resources are available at www.spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/music-and-wellbeing so you can dig more into the detail.

Of course, it is difficult within the confines of a written report to convey the creativity, solace, camaraderie and joy involved in being part of these projects. For films and audio from the projects that give a snapshot of the experience, visit: www.spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/music-and-wellbeing

KEY MESSAGES:

Participatory music-making projects can improve wellbeing, including in-the-moment changes to mood, increases in feelings of purpose and life satisfaction, ability to manage one's own wellbeing, and confidence and self-belief.

To achieve these outcomes practitioners should:

- Employ high-quality music leaders
- Create a safe, welcoming and inclusive space
- Ensure music-making activities are accessible to people with any levels of musical ability
- Provide opportunities for:
 - Self-expression and creativity
 - Feelings and experiences to be shared
 - Social interaction
 - Rapid development of musical skills
 - Working towards a musical output (e.g. a recording or performance)

What we funded

Between 2013 and 2023, Spirit of 2012 has awarded £3.05m to 17 projects that use participatory music-making to improve wellbeing, reduce social isolation / loneliness, and create connections between individuals. Over a million people sang or made music as part of these projects, across taster sessions, open days and mass performances. Approximately 2,500 people took part in regular, sustained music activities. Most of these regular participants faced significant barriers to participation, with projects taking a test and learn approach to understanding what worked for those groups and why.

In 2018, Spirit of 2012 awarded just over £700k through the Music Challenge Fund to four organisations to provide participants with frequent regular and sustained opportunities to join in music-making in social contexts. Objectives included improved wellbeing, improved sense of achievement and confidence, and reduced loneliness.

The Carers' Music Fund, made possible by funding that Spirit of 2012 received from the Tampon Tax Fund, awarded through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), awarded a total of £1.6m in 2019 to 10 projects across the UK to provide participatory music activities which aimed to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation for female carers. The projects in the fund took a test and learn approach to their activities, supported by a learning

partnership convened by Spirit, with input from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, Carers UK and Apteligen.

Creative Arts East was awarded two three-year grants to a total of £431k for Our Day Out, providing fortnightly dementia-inclusive music, dance and visual arts sessions for older people and their carers across 8 locations in rural and coastal Norfolk.

Rhythm and Respect from Plymouth Music Zone brought socially isolated young people together with a wide range of other vulnerable, disabled and older people to make music, develop skills and showcase performances. The programme ran for one year from June 2016 to September 2017 and was awarded £49k.

In 2013, Glasgow Life received a grant of £368k for the Big Big Sing, planned by Glasgow UNESCO City of Music, to bring the community together and improve wellbeing. The project was a part of the Glasgow 2014 legacy and saw almost a million people participated in mass singing events around the city, many linked to the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

A full list of these projects is presented in Appendix 1.



WHO PARTICIPATED?

ONE MILLION+

TOTAL REACH

2,255

REGULAR PARTICIPANTS⁵

AGED OVER 65
(N=1,960)

35%

UNDER 25
(N=1,960)

35%

FROM RACIALLY MINORITISED
COMMUNITIES (N=1,540)

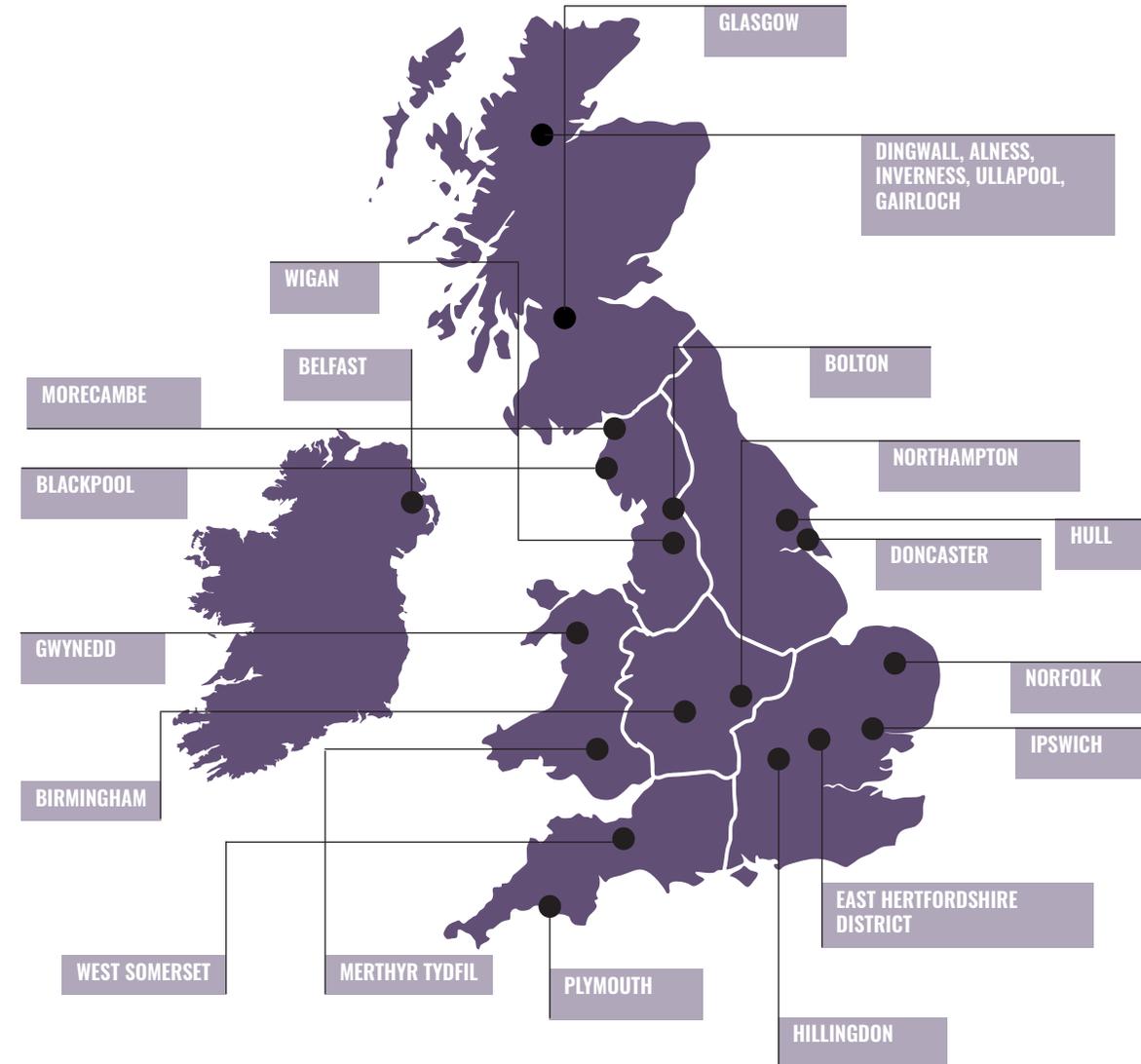
15%

IDENTIFIED AS DISABLED
(N=1,226)

31%

OF FUNDING WAS DELIVERED
IN RURAL AREAS⁶

39%



KEY FINDINGS

- Participants started off with lower levels of wellbeing than the national average.⁷ Between the start and end of the projects, average wellbeing improved across the ONS Wellbeing domains, or other wellbeing indicators.
- Other wellbeing benefits reported by participants included increases in feelings of purpose, ability to manage one's own wellbeing, and confidence and self-belief.
- Music-making and creative activities led to significant improvements in 'in-the-moment' wellbeing for people with a dementia.
- Projects successfully reached participants with higher levels of loneliness than the national average. However, the overall proportion of participants saying they were 'never' or 'hardly ever' lonely did not reduce, perhaps indicating that more needs to be done to support participants to build connections outside of the sessions themselves.
- The pandemic was a major confounding factor for interpreting quantitative data – but interviews with participants suggest music making helped support and maintain their wellbeing through a challenging time.

All the music projects except one measured the impact on regular participants' wellbeing using the ONS4 personal subjective wellbeing measures.⁸ National average, baseline and endline mean scores against each of the ONS4 wellbeing domains are presented in Figure 1 (on page 8). This demonstrates that participants surveyed at or around the beginning of their involvement with the project (baseline), had significantly lower wellbeing than the national average, suggesting that Spirit of 2012 funded projects were reaching those who would benefit the most. Participants surveyed at the end of involvement (endline), had improved wellbeing comparatively, which was closer to the national average, suggesting Spirit of 2012 projects were successful in increasing the wellbeing of participants.

Figure 2 (on page 8) shows the proportion of participants with 'high' or 'very high' wellbeing at baseline and endline of their participation in the project. This demonstrates that more people reported high wellbeing after participating in a Spirit of 2012 funded participatory music-making project, though the percentage at endline remains below the national average.

This data provides insights into the impact of participatory music-making projects, but does not prove that participating in the sessions caused the increases in wellbeing. Evaluations of participatory projects consistently highlight the presence of numerous contributing factors and contextual elements that can influence outcomes, including but not limited to community engagement levels, external socio-economic conditions, and other life events. Many Spirit of 2012 funded projects worked with people who face complex challenges that can influence their wellbeing, such as carers and people living with a dementia.



IT WAS 100% AN OUTLET FOR THE STRESS. MY RETREAT IS OFTEN MY GARDEN, BUT I CAN'T DO THAT SO MUCH IN THE WINTER, SO I REALLY VALUED THESE SESSIONS. IT GAVE ME A LOT MORE TO WHAT I WAS AS A PERSON.'

Qualitative evidence of wellbeing outcomes

All of the projects collected qualitative data which was reviewed for this report, including case studies, participant testimony, and observations from practitioners, project managers and evaluators. This data strongly supports the quantitative evidence of improved wellbeing described above, and helps us to understand the various ways in which the projects helped improve participants' wellbeing.

- Evaluations of the projects provided evidence that participatory music-making projects led to increased feelings of purpose and life satisfaction among participants, supporting survey results on the ONS measure for Life Satisfaction. Many participants reported feeling more positive about their lives, and spoke of a newfound sense of purpose, belonging, and anticipation for the future. Some told evaluators how the sessions provided them with a meaningful daily anchor or fostered a sense of purpose as they increased their musical skills or worked towards a musical output (e.g., performance or recording.)
- Some participants reported that music projects became an integral part of their long-term wellbeing management,

equipping them with resources to cope with life challenges, improve self-identities, and enhance quality of life. For carers and individuals dealing with long-term health challenges, music sessions provided vital opportunities for self-focus and healing, with some projects becoming part of individuals' care packages.

- Many participants reported improvements to their confidence, self-esteem, and feelings of self-efficacy. Evaluators and project managers highlighted a common progression: participants who initially joined with low confidence and through skill development, collaboration, and public performances, experienced a significant boost in their feelings of self-assurance. This newfound confidence often extended beyond music sessions, enabling participants to engage in other activities and groups, positively impacting their overall wellbeing and social lives.

Music-making and creative activities led to significant improvements in 'in-the-moment' wellbeing for people living with a dementia.

Creative Arts East (CAE) Our Day Out (ODO) project worked with people living with a dementia and their carers providing various participatory creative activities, including

FIGURE 1: MEAN WELLBEING



Figure 1: Baseline and endline mean responses to ONS4 wellbeing questions of participants in Spirit of 2012 funded participatory music-making projects. Note that for the Anxiety domain, a lower score represents lower anxiety (better wellbeing).

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS WITH HIGH WELLBEING

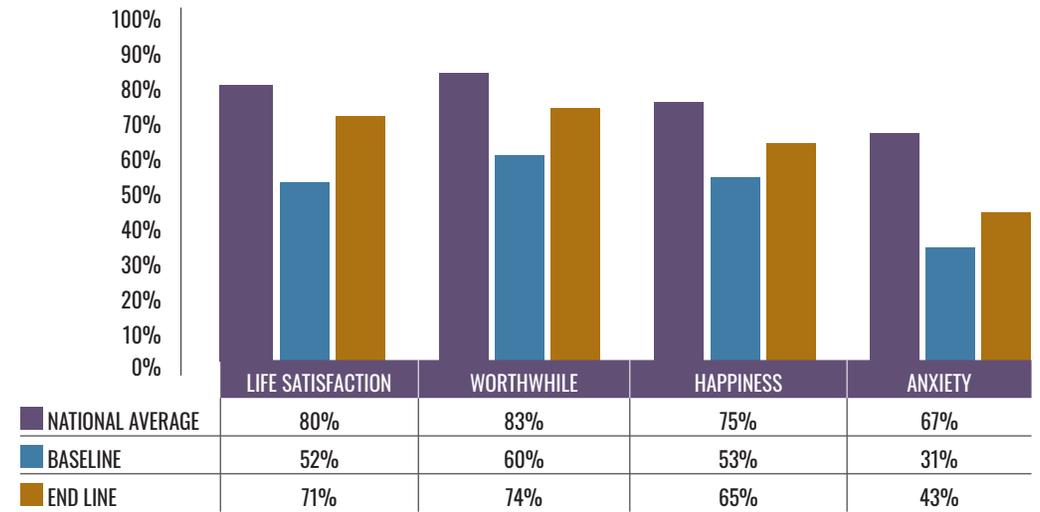


Figure 2: Baseline and endline percentages of participants in Spirit of 2012 funded participatory music-making projects reporting high or very high wellbeing (responding 7-10 in Life Satisfaction, Worthwhile and Happiness ONS personal wellbeing questions) and low or very low anxiety (responding 0-3 to the Anxiety ONS personal wellbeing question) set against the national average

See Appendix 2 for full data set.

music-making. Here, evaluators took an innovative approach to measuring ‘in-the-moment’ wellbeing, using the Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (CWS) every three months at the beginning and end of sessions.⁹ Results were then analysed by Professor Paul Camic and Sarah Strohmaier to assess the effectiveness of ODO sessions in improving wellbeing during the sessions. They found, “The results of this evaluation provide important evidence that even within a progressive disease, such as any type of dementia is, wellbeing can be enhanced after relatively short-term activities such as offered by Creative Arts East for the participants in this evaluation. Across 7 sessions, wellbeing increased at a statistically significant level (comparing pre and post scores) for each session.”¹⁰ This quantitative evidence

was supported by qualitative evidence of improvements to wellbeing gathered by researchers Dr Hannah Zeilig and Millie van der Byl Williams. The impact of the ODO project was recognised at the Royal Society for Public Health’s (RSPH) annual Health and Wellbeing Awards in 2019, taking home the Arts and Health Award.

Evidence from other projects suggests a clear link between music sessions and immediate changes to mood. For some, the lift persisted between sessions reinforced by continued playing at home, whereas others reported a briefer – but important – lift in mood facilitated by the session.

Impacts on loneliness

Many of the Spirit of 2012 funded participatory music-making projects

explicitly aimed to tackle participants’ feelings of loneliness through facilitated group music-making, and some adapted recruitment and approach (or both) to reach lonely people. Approaches included: fostering a group identity, collaborative composition designed to encourage participants to work together, encouraging participants to share their lived experience to build bonds between people with shared characteristics, and providing opportunities for socialising within or around sessions.

The ONS direct measure of loneliness was applied in 13 of the 17 projects, and a smaller set of 3 projects measured loneliness by combining two of the questions on the three-item UCLA Loneliness scale.¹¹ These show that more than two thirds of the group (69%) were lonely at least occasionally (in comparison

to 49% of the population at large), and half (49%) felt they at least sometimes lacked companionship or felt isolated from others (compared to 45% of general population). These proportions did not change significantly throughout the projects.

The overall proportion of participants reporting they were lonely ‘Some of the time’ or ‘Often’ did not change. It is important to be realistic about the impact that a single intervention can have, and it is likely that making a significant difference to an individual’s feelings of loneliness would require interventions over a longer time period.

Other survey data revealed that these projects did foster positive friendships and connections, especially benefiting

individuals with low social connections. Participants in projects with shared characteristics, such as those that targeted people living with a dementia or carers, found common ground that facilitated connections and reduced isolation. Our Day Out’s evaluators reported that 94% of participants had formed new social connections, and other data from the project suggests there emerged a strong sense of togetherness within groups. In some projects these connections sometimes evolved into a sense of belonging, with 93% of participants in Canfod y Gân and Our Day Out reporting that they felt they belonged to their respective projects.

Participants in 10 Carers Music Fund projects were also asked to respond to three Likert-scaled questions about the strength of their social connections – an important determinant of loneliness. Responses revealed a general trend towards more participants feeling that they had people to help them and to socialise with, and that they had someone to really count on to listen to them.¹²

Some of the projects used music to explore shared identities, for example, place-based identities were explored through folk songs in Creative Directions and traditional Gaelic lullabies in Tàlaidhean. Others explored shared personal characteristics, for example My Pockets’ Monster Extraction project explored personal experiences of caring for a loved one. Participant feedback and practitioner reflections suggest that doing so in a group with others who shared these characteristics created points of connection that proved important in developing bonds between participants. For example, some participants at Monster Extraction reported feeling they could be open about their

experiences for the first time, because it felt like a safe space.

Project managers and evaluators also reported that informal social groups emerged from some of the projects, online (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook groups) and in-person. In some cases, these provided important social connections, particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns.

The impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns

Many of the projects collected either baseline or endline data, or both, during the national lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. We estimate that around 40% of baseline surveys and 50% of endline surveys were completed by participants during or around the time of a national lockdown. National wellbeing declined significantly during the pandemic, and loneliness increased. Women and younger adults experienced lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness than men and older adults during this period.¹³ In some cases, the impact of lockdown on participants in these projects was greater than for most people, because of additional challenges they faced such as being disabled or caring for a loved one. The pandemic is therefore a major confounding factor for interpreting the wellbeing data for these projects. However, both surveys and interviews with participants suggest that they themselves feel taking part made a positive difference, sometimes specifically as a coping mechanism to help with challenges caused or exacerbated by the pandemic.

The role of music in achieving these outcomes

Evaluations of Spirit of 2012 funded participatory music-making projects contribute to the strong evidence base for



THE CREATIVITY WAS THE THING FOR ME. IT OPENED A NEW DIMENSION. THE MUSICIANS WERE GREAT AT HELPING US ALONG. IN ONE SESSION THEY SHOWED US LOVELY VIDEOS OF LAKES AND RIVERS, AND INVITED US TO TELL THEM WHAT SORT OF MUSIC TO PLAY TO THE PICTURES.’

the benefits of music in improving wellbeing for individuals. Over its lifetime, Spirit has funded a broad range of activities that have been successful in improving wellbeing, from surfing to singing, from performing at an opening ceremony to building a COVID memorial garden. Part of the purpose of this review was to understand what music specifically can do differently or in addition to other types of interventions.

Some individuals have a natural connection with or talent for music. Evidence from Spirit-funded projects suggests that music can be particularly effective in reaching some individuals, and encouraging them to engage. For example, Barnardo’s Cymru engaged with a young carer who declined multiple invitations to different activities but agreed to come to Project Alaw because of her passion for music. Although initially reticent to become involved, through shared music-making she became a core part of the group and commented on its importance in her life.

Some of the organisations who delivered these projects were using music as an intervention for the first time, and found it was useful in reaching new people. For example, because of the success of their Bang the Drum project in engaging new carers – and the positive experience these participants

reported – Blackpool Carers Centre continued music provision after their Carers’ Music Fund grant ended.

Others highlighted the positive ‘natural’ effects of participatory music-making and some concluded that musical up-skilling and creative self-expression were the driver of improvements to wellbeing. The project manager at Oh Yeah Music Centre said, “After a drum or guitar session, the chat and laughter rises as the session progresses, the feeling of striking a chord or a drum has an amazing effect on a person and that increases in a group environment.”

Based on this evidence, we encourage organisations that have not worked with music before to explore its potential in reaching new people, bringing others ‘out of their shell’, and improving people’s wellbeing.



JANINE*, 15

PROJECT ALAW, BARNARDO'S

When Janine joined the Alaw project she was a carer for her non-verbal brother with ASD, and faced challenges due to her family's lack of access to transport and her own school-related issues, including bullying and health problems. After being introduced to the Alaw music project, Janine's passion for music helped her overcome social anxiety and build supportive relationships with fellow young carers. She excelled in playing

the ukulele, taught herself numerous songs, and became a mentor for other members. This journey significantly boosted her confidence, leading her to join the young carers choir and perform a solo in front of the First Minister of Wales. Janine credited the Alaw project with opening doors, fostering new friendships, providing a safe escape from daily pressures, and ultimately enhancing her overall well-being.



BRIAN*

CREATIVE DIRECTIONS, DARTS

Brian, who faced significant challenges due to a brain injury, found a transformative experience at **Creative Directions**, a folk music project that offered opportunities to devise songs to celebrate Doncaster's rural communities. Brian swiftly integrated into the group, attending regularly and forging connections with fellow members. His passion for keyboard music, supported by artists, peer volunteers, and participation coordinators, allowed him to contribute profoundly to the

group's musical endeavours, maintaining the rhythm and tune while others play various instruments. Brian's humorous song suggestions became a valuable creative resource within the group and he expanded his involvement by participating in theatre workshops through a partnership project with CAST Theatre and The National Theatre, showcasing the significant impact the project has had on his life.



FIONA*, 15

WOMEN'S WORK, OH YEAH MUSIC CENTRE

When Fiona arrived at Newington Day Centre to participate in **Women's Work** she had just given up a 51 year career to care for her husband, Bernard. Fiona, who is the primary caregiver, had limited respite due to her husband's health needs. However, her involvement in a choir as part of the **Women's Work** project provided her with a sense of purpose and rejuvenation. She found

solace and rejuvenation in singing while her husband took part in a singing session nearby, and the group became a source of respite and self-esteem for her. 'The lovely thing is when I go down to the club I get my youth back. I feel I am somebody again. When you come out of work you can feel like a nobody sometimes.'



OWEN*, 22

MY POCKETS MUSIC, MY POCKETS

Owen lives in Hull, in a community historically linked to the city's dockworker families. Like many post-industrial areas, the estate he grew up on reflects the economic changes in the area, with high levels of unemployment. Owen's pursuit of a motor vehicle level 1 qualification was cut short due to financial constraints, and he took on caregiving responsibilities at home while navigating his path forward. Encountering the My Pockets team at Bransholme Astra Youth Club, Owen demonstrated remarkable musical talent, swiftly demonstrating his drumming proficiency, and recording his first song effortlessly. Despite an irregular daily routine and sleep pattern, Owen consistently prioritised his music sessions, revealing a profound commitment to both the project and his personal growth. Observers noted a significant transformation in Owen, as he rapidly developed his musical skills, sparking immense pride in those around him. Owen aspires to further enhance his drumming abilities and dreams of joining a band.

DANIEL*, 25

CANFOD Y GÂN (DISCOVER THE SONG), CANOLFAN GERDD WILLIAM MATHIAS

Daniel was an active participant in the **Canfod y Gân** project in Gwynedd that brought disabled and non-disabled people together to take part in fortnightly music sessions. Introduced to the project by his social worker, Daniel seamlessly integrated his volunteering at a local cafe with his newfound passion for music, a testament to his work ethic and commitment. In the face of the pandemic's challenges, Daniel, like the group, persevered. The project's aim was to foster a sense of unity and improve mental wellbeing through music creation. Daniel beautifully encapsulated this mission: 'I liked to rap and had been writing my own stuff for a long time... I wrote about things that were going on in my life, about family issues and things like that.' His lyrical contribution to a video project poignantly captured the collective struggle and the importance of kinship during the pandemic. Through Canfod y Gân, Daniel not only discovered a creative outlet but also became a source of inspiration for those around him.

WHAT WORKS



This chapter explores some of the characteristics that helped achieve the outcomes detailed in the previous chapter, identified through analysis of the monitoring reports and evaluations of the 17 projects.

Some of this analysis was done as part of an evaluation of 10 Carers' Music Fund projects commissioned by Spirit of 2012 and carried out by Apteligen. In this, evaluators sought to understand how and why music-making improved the lives of female carers, and proposed a 'pathway to wellbeing' defining what needs to be in place for music-making activities to drive enhanced wellbeing. Apteligen noted that the pathway to wellbeing through participatory music-making is intricate and varies among individuals and circumstances. The model below adapts this to draw out common themes in the diverse ways in which participatory music-making projects funded by Spirit of 2012 increased wellbeing for participants.

Prerequisites

The following core foundations for good participatory music-making were common across many of the projects reviewed:

- **High-quality music leaders:** this includes not only being excellent

music teachers but also demonstrating passion for the artform, adaptability to diverse needs, and the ability to foster an environment conducive to self-expression and bonding among participants. Many of the professional artists who led music projects possessed unique skills that can open pathways to communication, making their expertise invaluable in achieving positive outcomes.

- **Safe, welcoming, inclusive space:** Participants in the reviewed projects consistently highlighted the significance of non-judgmental and welcoming spaces that adapted to their needs, fostering an atmosphere where they felt comfortable expressing themselves and enhancing their musical skills. This safe and supportive environment was crucial to striking the balance between accommodating individuals of varying musical abilities and providing the necessary challenge for personal growth.

PREREQUISITES

- High-quality music leaders
- Safe, welcoming, inclusive space
- Making music accessible

ACTIVITIES

- Self-expression and creativity
- A space to articulate feelings and experiences together
- Social interaction
- Develop participants' skills (quickly)
- Work towards an output (e.g. recording, performance)

RESULTS

- Fun, enjoyment and laughter
- People feel valued and appreciated
- Group bonding, feelings of commonality
- Making friends and connections
- Increase in musical aptitude
- Feelings of achievement

OUTCOMES

- Increased wellbeing
- Reduction in loneliness, increase in connectedness
- Increase in confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy

- **Making music (and learning music) accessible:** Breaking down the barriers surrounding musical abilities and learning music was crucial in dispelling prior misconceptions and boosting confidence among participants. This was accomplished through clear expectations, an emphasis on enjoyment and creativity, and opportunities for participant input. This was supported by straightforward and comprehensible instruction, diverse session materials, online resources, and incorporating relevant pre-recorded audio and video content.

Activities

The following activities were found to be important in achieving outcomes.

- **Self-expression and creativity:** Evaluations of these projects reveal that songwriting and music-making processes empower participants with a sense of control and authorship, leading to increased well-being and a connection with the joy and therapeutic properties of music.
- **A safe space to articulate feelings and experiences together:** Through group lyric-writing and shared musical expression, many participants found a sense of connection and catharsis, allowing them to discuss and process personal challenges and joys. This was particularly the case when in a group with shared characteristics where music helped participants to express their experiences and a shared creative space fostered open communication and a sense of belonging.
- **Social interaction:** Many projects recognised the significance of incorporating social interaction within their sessions which fostered camaraderie and a sense of comfort among participants. Evaluator-observed sessions in the Carers' Music Fund programme, for

example, highlighted the importance of these social moments in building group cohesion, encouraging mutual support, and enhancing participants' ease in playing and performing together.

- **Developing participants' skills (quickly),** including teaching basic chords within the first half-hour, was crucial in boosting confidence, particularly for those with low initial confidence or doubts about their musical abilities. Ongoing skill development throughout the project played a vital role in increasing confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, with sessions focused on continuous learning and sharing of musical knowledge, creating an enjoyable and engaging experience for participants.
- **Working towards an output,** whether it was recording a CD, preparing for a live performance, or showcasing their musical progress to the group, emerged as a significant driver of positive outcomes. This shared goal provided participants with a sense of purpose and motivation for honing their musical abilities. In many cases, the final musical accomplishment marked a challenging yet rewarding endpoint in their journeys, fostering personal pride and contributing to heightened confidence and self-efficacy.

Tailoring participatory music-making to different audiences

Although many of the projects shared some of the characteristics explored in the model above, they catered to a wide array of audiences, with diverse needs and aspirations. Many adapted their approaches to foster meaningful engagement and wellbeing, and some of these are presented below.

- For **unpaid carers**, participatory music-making often served as a respite during which participants could set aside their caring role and take time out for themselves, connect with others, and (re)discover their own identity. Projects reviewed highlighted the importance of ensuring that carers could take a break, often by providing separate activities for the 'cared-for' individual, such as a singing group.¹⁴ Besides this, important approaches included flexible scheduling and structured sessions that explored the experience of caring for a loved one, creating safe spaces to share feelings and thoughts that might be difficult to express elsewhere.
- Individuals with **mental health problems** often found solace in the expressive nature of music. Projects that worked with this audience highlighted the need to create non-judgmental spaces – for example by setting ground-rules that emphasised respect – where participants can articulate their experiences through music, often in a way that built bonds with others.
- For some participants with a **learning disability**, participatory music-making became a pathway to self-expression and skill development. Practitioners found that providing a safe space to explore and achieve personal goals, and valuing each individual's contributions to the group was key to working with these individuals.¹⁵
- Projects that worked with **people living with dementias** noted the importance of creative expression to deal with their challenges. Effective approaches here were those that avoided being prescriptive and empowered participants to create and be artistic in a way that suited them best. For example, Creative Arts East's **Our Day Out** (ODO) project provided a range of activities, including dance, poetry, music, and visual arts, and participants were given 'creative wellbeing packs'¹⁶ which were designed to inspire participants to embrace their creativity within and outside of the sessions.
- For **young people facing socio-economic disadvantage**, projects found that participatory music-making offered a valuable avenue for personal growth and community bonding. Projects benefited from a 'drop-in' type setup in existing community hubs, encouraging self-expression and providing direct 1-to-1 support, and structuring activities that catered to diverse skill levels.



CONCLUSION



The projects reviewed evidenced positive impacts on participants' subjective wellbeing, suggesting that participatory music-making projects that are well-planned and outcomes-focused have the potential to increase feelings of happiness, purpose, life satisfaction and confidence.

Whilst this review found no conclusive quantitative evidence of their impact on loneliness, qualitative evidence suggests that participatory music-making projects can be successful in increasing feelings of connection with others.

Participatory music-making appears to be an effective way to reach and engage some individuals who would otherwise not be involved, and was seen by some as the main drivers of wellbeing increases.

An analysis of the approach of these projects has identified some best practice for practitioners and funders of participatory music-making, including prerequisites for success, effective activities, and some ways to tailor the approach to different audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Practitioners of participatory music-making should:

- Employ high-quality music leaders
- Create a safe, welcoming and inclusive space
- Ensure music-making activities are accessible to people with any levels of musical ability
- Provide opportunities for:
 - Self-expression and creativity
 - Feelings and experiences to be shared
 - Social interaction
 - Rapid development of musical skills
 - Working towards a musical output (e.g. a recording or performance)
- Tailor approaches for specific audiences.

FUNDERS SHOULD:

- Identify, fund, and learn from projects that align with the principles above
- Apply a 'wellbeing' lens to the funding of participatory music-making projects, going beyond measuring outputs to focus on specific measures of wellbeing such as the ONS measures for Personal Wellbeing (ONS4).
- Encourage grantees to tailor their activities to specific audiences using some of the examples in this report.
- Theory of Change workshops can help organisations align their approach with desired outcomes for their audience.
- Putting aside funding for access costs – such as transportation and equipment – can help individuals overcome barriers to participation.



APPENDIX 1

LIST OF FUNDED PROJECTS

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
Plymouth Music Zone Limited	Rhythm and Respect	Plymouth; South West of England	£49,430	Jun 2016 - Sep 2017	Over the course of a year, Plymouth Music Zone's Rhythm and Respect project brought together isolated individuals of all ages in Plymouth through music-making, skill development, and performance showcases, fostering community cohesion and creativity.
Glasgow Life	Big Big Sing	Glasgow; Scotland	£367,855	Feb 2014 - Dec 2015	Glasgow UNESCO City of Music united the community and promoted well-being through a city-wide rendition of Big Big Sing, emphasizing the universal joy of singing, and encouraging participation in choirs, song-learning, and cultural diversity, underlining the positive impact of every note on happiness and health.
Creative Arts East	Our Day Out	Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, North Norfolk, Breckland; East of England	£431,014	Sep 2016 - Aug 2022	Creative Arts East's "Our Day Out" in rural Norfolk seamlessly integrated dance, music, poetry and visual arts to enhance well-being and reduce social isolation among older individuals and carers, reinvigorating their connection with high-quality artistic expressions through a unique and engaging creative arts experiences.

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
darts	Creative Directions	Doncaster; Yorkshire and the Humber	£184,952	Dec 2018 - Mar 2022	Creative Directions collaborated with professional folk musicians to bring uplifting folk music to Doncaster's rural communities, offering a platform for individuals, regardless of their mental health or social background, to explore vocal and instrumental techniques.
My Pockets People	My Pockets Music	East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull; Yorkshire and the Humber	£149,525	Dec 2018 - Apr 2022	The song-writing project in Hull and East Riding aimed to assist disadvantaged young individuals and those grappling with poor mental health in composing, recording, and performing songs reflective of their own lives and experiences.
Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias	Canfod y Gân (Discover the Song)	Gwynedd; Wales	£198,189	Dec 2018 - Aug 2022	Led by Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias (CGWM) in partnership with Gwynedd Council's Learning Disability Team, the 'Canfod y Gân' (Discover the Song) project in North Wales provided a fun and supportive environment for individuals with learning disabilities to create music and socialise with their non-disabled peers during fortnightly music sessions.

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
More Music	Music for Health in Morecambe's West End	West Lancashire; North West of England	£169,949	Mar 2019 - Sep 2022	Music for Health in Morecambe established groups offering social singing sessions for diverse groups of people referred through local health services, to enhance physical and mental well-being for both young and older individuals.
UK Youth	Sound Creators	Wigan, Bolton; North West of England East Hertfordshire; East of England Hillingdon; London West Somerset; South West of England	£234,996	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	The Sound Creators program provided young female carers in the UK with opportunities for creative expression and self-discovery through music-making, aiming to foster social engagement and enhance their well-being.
Jack Drum Arts	Sound Out	County Durham; North East of England	£149,251	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	Jack Drum Arts provided a diverse music project for female carers, focusing on enriching musicianship, confidence, and a sense of connection, as participants collaborated with professional musicians to explore genres like Rock, Folk, World, and Choral music in various venues around the region.

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
My Pockets People	Monster Extraction	East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull; Yorkshire and the Humber	£156,651	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	Monster Extraction was a creative music project tailored for female carers, built around the concept that conflict in our lives gives birth to inner monsters, which inhabit the objects and structures around us, awaiting resolution and release through artistic expression.
Midlands Arts Centre	Hidden Voices	Birmingham; West Midlands	£219,999	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	In Birmingham, the Hidden Voices programme led by the Midlands Arts Centre provided creative, inclusive, person-centred music-making opportunities for female carers within diverse communities across the city
Northamptonshire Carers	MyMusic Northamptonshire	Northampton, Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Daventry; East Midlands	£239,005	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	MyMusic extended the achievements of the Northamptonshire Carers Choir by incorporating percussion, music technology, and songwriting into a music project designed for female carers.

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
Barnardo's	Project Alaw	Merthyr Tydfil; Wales	£55,618	Sep 2019 - Jun 2021	The Alaw Project, based in Merthyr Tydfil, aimed to alleviate social, educational, and emotional impacts faced by young female carers with caregiving responsibilities for family members, through the medium of music in a comprehensive workshop programme.
Oh Yeah Music Centre	Women's Work	Belfast; Northern Ireland	£59,800	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	Outreach project for female carers as part of Women's Work, an annual festival organized by the Oh Yeah Music Centre in Belfast, which serves as a platform to honor the contributions of women to music and society at large working by dismantling barriers, boosting confidence, and celebrating diversity. Four groups took part in the project, including female carers of older people in Newington, female carers of people with disabilities, Syrian mothers, and female carers who had previously stopped making music due to caring responsibilities.
Fèis Rois	Tàlaidhean (the Lullaby Project)	Highland; Scotland	£59,998	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	An innovative project working with new mothers to write and record traditional folk lullabies for their child.

Organisation	Project	Locations	Grant amount	Project dates	Description
Blackpool Carers Centre	Bang the Drum	Blackpool; North West of England	£239,581	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	"Bang the Drum" was a project that harnessed the creative power of music to enhance the respite experience for female carers of all ages, offering a unique dimension to their support. The project operated in collaboration with the esteemed Grand Theatre in Blackpool.
Noise Solution	Beat Syndicate	Mid Suffolk; East of England	£233,441	Aug 2019 - Jun 2021	Noise Solution, a music mentoring initiative for individuals confronting difficult circumstances, delivered group music-mentoring workshops for female carers.



APPENDIX 2

QUANTITATIVE DATA ON WELLBEING

All the music projects measured the impact on regular participants' wellbeing using the ONS4 personal subjective wellbeing measures: Life satisfaction, feeling things done in life are Worthwhile, Happiness, and Anxiety. Around 1,000 participants

completed surveys at the beginning (baseline) of their involvement in the project, rating their wellbeing on an 11 point scale (0-10). Approximately 500 participants then went on to answer these questions again after regular participation

in the project for a period of time (endline.) Because this data is gathered nationally by the Office for National Statistics as part of the Annual Population Survey (the UK's largest household survey) we are able to compare participants' wellbeing against

the national average. Gathering data at the beginning and end of participation allows us to understand the impact of the project on participants' wellbeing.

Measure	Question	National ¹⁷		Baseline			Endline			Mean change	%High change ¹⁸
		Mean	%High ¹⁹	n	Mean	%High	n	Mean	%High		
ONS4 - Life satisfaction	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life? (0-10 scale, where 0 is not satisfied at all and 10 is completely satisfied)	7.54	80%	1009	6.39	52%	565	7.33	71%	0.9	19%
ONS4 - Worthwhile	Overall, how much do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (0-10 scale, where 0 is not at all worthwhile and 10 is completely worthwhile)	7.77	83%	1002	6.84	60%	564	7.67	74%	0.8	13%
ONS4 - Happiness	Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (0-10 scale, where 0 is not at all happy and 10 is completely happy)	7.45	75%	997	6.22	53%	566	6.97	65%	0.7	12%
ONS4 - Anxiety	Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (0-10 scale, where 0 is not anxious and 10 is completely anxious)	3.12	67%	778	4.91	31%	439	4.50	43%	-0.4	12%

ENDNOTES

1. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/projects/music-singing-and-wellbeing/>
2. MARCH ran between 2018-2021: <https://marchlegacy.org/>
3. The Impact of Arts and Cultural Engagement on Population Health: Findings from Major Cohort Studies in the UK and USA 2017 – 2022, the Social Biobehavioural Research Group, UCL, 2023
4. Over one million people sang or made music as part of these projects, across taster sessions, open days and mass performances (the majority of these through mass participation Big, Big, Sing in Glasgow).
5. Roughly defined as at least six sessions over 6-12 weeks, though some projects worked with participants for longer than this.
6. Based on a simplified Rural/Urban classification adapted from DEFRA Rural Urban Classification (England), NISRA Urban - Rural Classification (Northern Ireland), Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification (Scotland), and Welsh Government Rural-Urban Classification for LSOAs (Wales).
7. Average wellbeing across the ONS measures 'Life satisfaction', 'Worthwhile', and 'Happiness' was 6.48 at baseline (n=3,008), and 7.32 at endline (n=1,696). The national average by comparison is 7.56. The 'Anxiety' measure (where lower scores represent lower anxiety) saw an improvement from 4.91 at baseline (n=778) to 4.50 at endline (n=439), compared to a national average of 3.12. See Appendix 2 for more information.
8. The Office for National Statistics personal subjective wellbeing measures (often referred to as the ONS4) are used in many surveys across the UK, including the Annual Population Survey. They measure life satisfaction, feeling the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurveyuserguide>
9. The Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (CWS) were developed in 2014-15 to assess subjective wellbeing in people with mild to moderate dementias, family caregivers, and professional caregivers who care for this population. <https://repository.canterbury.ac.uk/item/8x650/canterbury-wellbeing-scales>
10. The evaluation of ODO, from which this quote is taken, is available here: spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/creative-arts-east-our-day-out/. See Appendix 5 for the full CWS data.
11. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) direct measure of loneliness and the three-item UCLA Loneliness scale are survey questions recommended by the ONS for measuring loneliness. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/measuringlonelinessguidanceforuseofthenationalindicatorsonsurveys>
12. At baseline and endline of the project, participants over 16 were asked: a) 'If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me' (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree) b) 'If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on, If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on' (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree) c) 'Is there anyone who you can really count on to listen to you when you need to talk?' (Yes, one person, Yes, more than one person, No one) Surveys revealed a 15-percentage point increase in participants who 'strongly agreed' that they had people who would be there for them, a six-percentage point increase in participants who 'strongly agreed' they had people to socialise with, and an 11-percentage point increase in participants who said they had more than one person they could count on to listen to them. See the Carers' Music Fund evaluation, p.46-48 at <https://spiritof2012.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-06-23-Carers-Music-Fund-evaluation-1.pdf>
13. ONS: Coronavirus (COVID-19) latest insights: Well-being: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/wellbeing#well-being>
14. The Carers' Music Fund provided funding for alternative provision for the 'cared-for' individual, the use of which is reviewed in the evaluation of the fund at spiritof2012.org.uk/insights/carers-music-fund-summer/
15. CGWM's Canford y Gan and Plymouth Music Zone's Rhythm and Respect projects worked closely with people with learning disabilities, and uncovered effective approaches. The evaluations for these projects can be found here: [add links]
16. During the pandemic, CAE provided free postal Creative Wellbeing Packs to maintain a social connection with participants. Image and audio-based packs were created and instructions were presented clearly and simply to ensure they were accessible to the new and existing audiences. Reach of the project grew, as did the number of referrals through from social prescribers and other older peoples services.
17. National Averages taken from the Annual Population Survey 2021-22 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 31 October 2022, ONS website, statistical bulletin, Personal well-being in the UK: April 2021 to March 2022)
18. The change in percentage of people who reported high wellbeing between baseline and endline.
19. %High is the percentage of participants who reported high wellbeing, i.e. those who responded 7-10 to questions on satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness (high wellbeing), and 0-4 on anxiety (low anxiety). For example



Johnny Bean (Bean Photo)