

Report on the Jack Drum Arts' 'Sound Out!' programme for female carers



Gwyneth Lamb

Independent Evaluator

May 2021

Contents

	Page
1 Summary	1
2 Introduction	
2.1 Background and Context	3
2.2 Approach to Learning and Evaluation	4
3 Findings	
3.1 Reach and Access	5
3.2 Impact	
3.2.1 Impact on Wellbeing	7
3.2.2 Impact on Loneliness	9
3.3 Improving practice	
3.3.1 On-line Delivery	11
3.3.2 Role of the Programme Co Ordinator	13
3.3.3 Programme Characteristics and Structure	14
4 Conclusions and Recommendations	16
Appendix	
Methodology	18

1 Summary

'Sound Out!' was one of 10 programmes supported by Spirit of 2012's 'Carers' Music Fund' which ran concurrently across the country September 2019 – June 2021, with a common aim of improving the wellbeing and reducing the loneliness of female carers.

Learning and evaluation across the Fund was led by 'What Works Wellbeing'. All programmes collected data on participants' wellbeing and loneliness at course start and end, using standardised questionnaires. Jack Drum Arts also chose to commission an external evaluation to provide depth and description and to identify changes in practice which could make their wider provision more supportive of female carers.

Sound Out activity was in the form of 12 week courses encompassing a range of musical activities, to take place in community venues in the south of County Durham. Initial courses ran successfully but the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the introduction of a national lockdown in March 2021 necessitated a radical change of plan, and from that point onwards the programme was delivered almost exclusively on-line. Despite this challenge, the original target of 16 courses was met, involving 180 individuals with a range of caring responsibilities. Additional funding provided 'Doorstep Gigs', (small, socially distanced performances) and craft activity packs delivered to homes, which reached a larger and broader audience of carers, including families.

The programme successfully engaged carers at a time of great social disruption and achieved the key outcomes at a time when, nationally, loneliness was increasing and carers were experiencing poorer mental health. *'Being able to do something as part of a group'* was the single factor with most impact on wellbeing, and a high degree of social interaction and personal connection was achieved with participants feeling supported by other group members. Gaining a sense of achievement, having time out of day to day concerns and being able to find and express a personal voice also contributed to improved wellbeing. Tutors' understanding and empathy were an important factor, as was consideration of how session structure could support group interaction. These were underpinned by the expanded role of the Programme Co ordinator who had a critical role in developing relationships with individuals and facilitating social interaction within sessions.

The switch to on-line delivery made courses more accessible. Geographical reach expanded, and some courses were led by tutors from elsewhere in the country. But there were drawbacks in terms of building social relationships and teaching musical skills, and it is likely to have excluded some who lacked either equipment or the confidence to take part. A blended approach, combining in-person and on-line delivery might provide a way forward, combining the best of both approaches. The programme offered a range of musical opportunities and challenges, courses were of sufficient length for participants to gain skills and feel they had a rounded experience, but there was an appetite for more and a 'legacy group' was developed in response. This was successful in that it enabled participants to develop and take ownership and control of group activities, but participants were predominantly from one course, rather than from across the whole programme.

Quality of teaching and facilitation was high and followed a model of good community practice, adapted to the on-line environment. Being situated within Jack Drum Arts' wider offer of activities added value, with links made between Sound Out courses and other aspects of Jack Drum Arts' provision. Tutors' connections with the wider music world raised aspirations and made participants more aware of other possibilities. Links with other music and arts organisations were also a

strength, with some coming to the programme through other agencies, and finding in it an additional dimension and level of support.

Jack Drum Arts has considerably developed its capacity to successfully engage with and support carers through the Sound Out programme and has strengthened its links with a key carers' organisation. This is an area of work the company could develop further, with on line provision offering the possibilities of national, local and blended delivery.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background and Context

'Sound Out!' was one of 10 programmes supported by Spirit of 2012's 'Carers' Music Fund', itself supported by the Tampon Tax, awarded through the DCMS. Funded programmes ran concurrently across the country September 2019 –June 2021 delivered by a range of arts and social care organisations, and with a common aim of improving the wellbeing and reducing the loneliness of female carers.

Jack Drum Arts is based in Crook, County Durham and Sound Out focussed primarily on female carers in the south of the county. The programme had three intended outcomes, shared with other Carers' Music Fund programmes:

- Increase the wellbeing of participants through active music making
- Reduce social isolation and/or loneliness amongst carers
- Increase carers' self esteem or sense of potential

And three bespoke outcomes/intended outputs, defined by Jack Drum Arts

- Formation of a self sustaining 'legacy' group
- Supporting participants into music leadership
- Improving Jack Drum Arts' own practice: implementing learning gained to make all of Jack Drum Arts' activities accessible to, and supportive of, female carers.

It built upon Jack Drum Arts' previous experience of delivering crafts activities in partnership with Durham County Carers Support. Activity was to be in the form of 12 week courses, across a range of musical experiences, delivered by skilled musicians with teaching/facilitation experience. Funding was available to help with individuals' transport or other access requirements, including care for the 'cared for'. The first courses started in November, Community Singing in Newton Aycliffe and World Drumming, building on existing Jack Drum Arts activity. in Durham. These were followed in January by Song Writing in Bishop Auckland and Collective Music Making in Barnard Castle.

But the country was about to enter a time of unprecedented challenge, affecting all aspects of daily life. As coronavirus cases grew, and the enormity of the threat it posed began to be recognised, the first national lockdown was announced on 23 March and the rest, as they say is history. The North East continued to be under restrictions for most of the grant period. Restrictions lifted slightly in late summer, but local restrictions were implemented in September, the region was in 'tier 2' from

mid October, back in lockdown from November, with restrictions only starting to ease again in April 2021.¹

Community arts practice is based on a model of bringing people together to learn and share in a group situation. And, as the Chief Executive of Durham County Carers Support said in an early interview: *'I know that if carers are doing something in a room together, they will make links and support each other'*. This is exactly what could no longer happen, courses had to be halted with only a few completed when lockdown began.

But Jack Drum Arts moved swiftly to find an alternative method of delivery. The second week of April saw the start of two fully on-line courses, Community Singing and Songwriting, and the rest of the programme was delivered almost exclusively through 'Zoom'.

Despite the challenges faced, the original target of 16 courses was met. In addition, a 'legacy group', open to all who had taken part in a completed course, ran from November. Jack Drum Arts also took up the offer of uplift funding and re purposed some of the access fund to provide additional activities; small scale socially distanced performances taking place in people's gardens, yards or in the street, activity packs delivered directly to homes, two performances at Jack Drum Arts' base and on-line early years performances.

2.2 Approach to programme learning and evaluation

A learning programme was built into the Carers Music Fund, supported by the 'What Works Centre for Wellbeing', the 'Behavioural Insights Team' and 'Apteligen.' All programmes contributed data on participants' wellbeing and loneliness at the start and end of each course, captured through a standard questionnaire using ONS wellbeing and loneliness measures which created a central bank of information. Spirit of 2012 brought programme representatives together to share learning, initially in person, then on-line, and 'What Works Wellbeing' published initial findings in November 2020². Jack Drum Arts also chose to commission an external evaluation to complement quantitative reporting with depth and description, identifying what makes the difference as well as what difference is made, and to help Jack Drum Arts identify changes in organisational and delivery practice that could make its wider, open access provision accessible to and supportive of, female carers.

The effects of the pandemic cannot be separated out from the 'normal' experience of caring over this period, and it was neither possible nor desirable to try to differentiate the impact of the programme in this way. The shift to on-line provision was a fundamental change, and it would also not have been helpful to either discount this or try to separate it out completely from other elements of practice. This became an evaluation of a programme which addressed the experience of being a carer through the pandemic and its associated restrictions.

Evaluation methodology was revised but continued to be formative, as originally planned. The evaluator was involved from the start, sharing insights with Jack Drum Arts throughout so that findings could inform programme planning and delivery. The original plan of session observation and focus group discussion, supplemented by some individual case studies and interviews with partner organisations had to change. The focus group discussion with participants in the first

¹ [Coronavirus: North-east England Covid-19 restrictions start - BBC News](#) [Timeline-lockdown-social \(instituteofgovernment.org.uk\)](#)

² [Carers' music fund Archives - What Works Wellbeing.](#)

Community Singing course proved to be the only one of its kind, as everything moved on-line. 'Zoom' was still a new experience for all concerned and latency makes group discussion difficult. Instead, a greater number of in-depth interviews were held with individual participants, some of whom were revisited at programme end, on-line courses were observed, and key staff and tutors were interviewed, including one tutor who delivered several courses and stepped into the Programme Co ordinator role toward programme end. Partner roles changed as partners were no longer hosting courses, and were themselves dealing with the impact of the pandemic on their own organisations and on the people they supported. Partner organisation's perspectives could not be collected as originally planned, and to some extent an external perspective is therefore somewhat lacking, but the connection with Durham County Carers Support continued and their Chief Executive was interviewed at programme start and end.³

3 Findings

3.1 Reach and Access

Access is key for any activity that seeks to make a difference. The best practice, and the best provision, will have absolutely no effect if the person for whom it has been developed isn't there.

The particular access needs of carers were recognised in the design of the Carers' Fund, and in the original plans for Sound Out. A budget was included to address access needs, including provision for the 'cared for', either through direct payment for care, or for Jack Drum Arts to run parallel activities for the cared for in parallel, allowing carers to take part in the main programme. Whilst courses ran in person this was used to support the transport needs of a small number of participants but had not been used to provide care.

The move to on-line provision completely changed consideration of access, making courses more readily accessible for most. Geographical range expanded, drawing in carers from across County Durham. A participant from Chester le Street commented that she would never have been able to travel to the south of the County to take part. As the programme continued, its reach expanded. Increasingly the programme was accessed by carers from elsewhere in the North East, and, as time went on, a small number from elsewhere in the North who had come to it through their links with the tutors.

Being able to access the course on-line, from home, dissolved barriers. Even those who lived locally and had previously taken part in Jack Drum Arts activities spoke of the difficulties of getting to 'in-person' activities, particularly demanding for those working through the day and wanting to attend early evening sessions. It became clear that leaving the person cared for was more than just a practical consideration. Interviewees spoke of the constant worry if they went out, the 'what if' factor, and a sense of guilt at being away and doing something enjoyable. Being able to take part remotely cut through all this, one described it as being 'outside the home but still under the same roof', another spoke of being able to '*get everyone sorted*' and step away from family life, knowing she could '*jump back in*' in case of emergency. And as the year progressed, people became more comfortable with the on-line experience 'I've spent half my life on-line' said one, with some equipping themselves with headphones and speakers and setting up dedicated areas in their home.

³ See Appendix, Data Collection Methods

Some found entering an on-line environment less intimidating than walking into a physical session and found it a more comfortable space in which to share ideas and personal experiences.

But on-line provision has its draw backs. Participation requires access to devices, connections and knowledge, skill and confidence. Nationally, 10% of carers have limited access to digital technology⁴. The Durham County Carers Support Access to Technology project in Spring 21 had participants in their 30s and 40s, indicating that lack of digital access is not confined to the older age group. It also requires suitable space, one person took part from her garden, as her husband was downstairs, her son upstairs. And it doesn't work for some. Considerable work had been done with local agencies to develop a course for Syrian refugees, but it was not viable to deliver this on-line and it had to be abandoned. A course for new Mums (and babies) started in person whilst restrictions lifted in the Autumn but was put on hold through the second lockdown as participants did not want to continue on-line and Jack Drum Arts felt that this would not offer the level of interaction required to engage such very young children.

Overall, 180 individuals took part in the Sound Out programme, people with vastly different caring responsibilities, from those who 'looked out for' a neighbour, to parents caring for children with autism, a retiree who had uprooted and moved across the country to care for her own elderly parents, sisters who supported their sibling, and new mums facing the challenges of early parenthood, all dealing with the additional challenges brought by the pandemic. The definition of 'carer' in course publicity was intentionally broad, but even so some with significant caring responsibilities had been unsure of their eligibility. Two thirds of participants had some degree of previous musical experience. Some were currently involved with Jack Drum Arts or other local music activity but for others previous experience could be characterised as being too little, too long ago. For them, the courses were an opportunity to fulfil long held ambitions and, with that, presented the possibility of entry into musical social situations such as folk clubs where they would be able to hold their own.

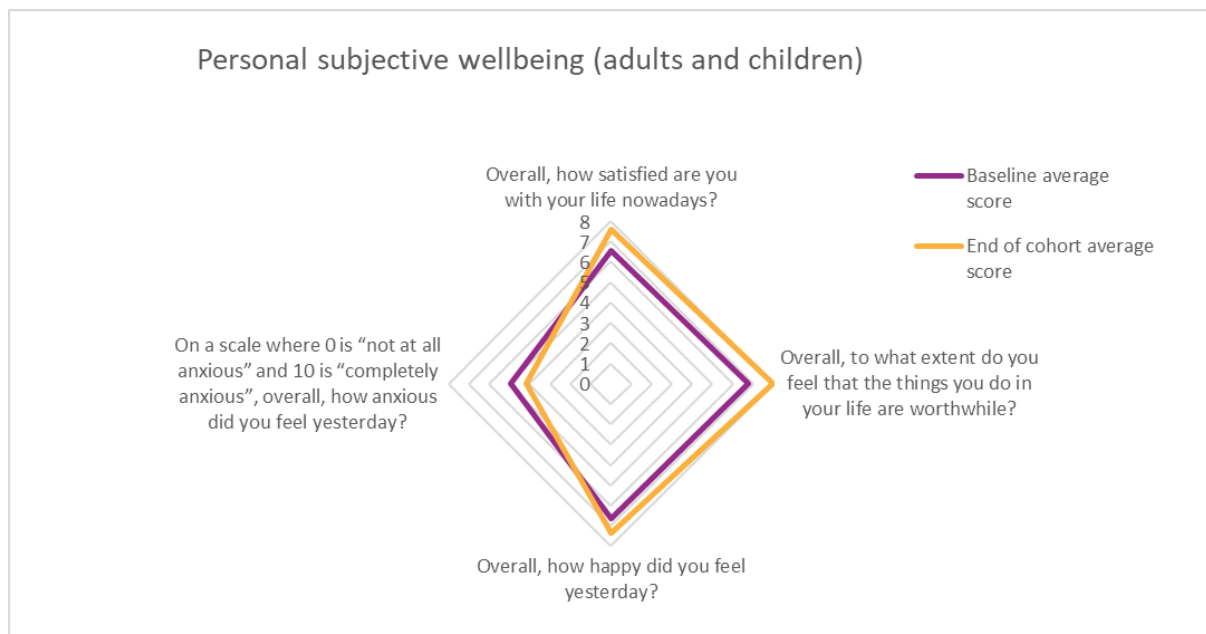
Participants came to Sound Out through a variety of routes. Partner roles changed as agencies were no longer hosting activities, and so the programme could not draw on their existing networks. Word of mouth was the predominant means by which participants found their way to the programme in the early days of on-line activity, but social media increasingly became the main information route. A renewed emphasis on marketing in the Autumn resulted in later courses having a larger proportion of people with no previous connection with Jack Drum Arts, and a slightly higher proportion of new participants with no previous experience of music making.

⁴ [Caring Behind Closed Doors: six months on - Carers UK](#)

3.2 Impact

3.2.1 Impact on Wellbeing

Data collected through the end of course questionnaires shows significant increases in all aspects of participants' wellbeing which is particularly significant in the context of the pandemic. Carers UK reported that by October 2020 74% of carers felt exhausted and worn out and 64% felt that their mental health had worsened⁵:



These results should be treated with some caution, given the comparatively low returns for end of course questionnaires⁶ but accords with 'What Works Wellbeing's' findings from all Carers Music Fund programmes at an early point, which showed improvement in wellbeing across all measures, and particularly for life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile and happiness⁷. It also accords with interview findings, where participants were consistently positive about their experience, saying it had made them *'feel good'* *'feel uplifted'*, that it *'lifted your mood'*, was *'good for the soul'*, with one saying simply: *'It's made me immensely happier'*

The positive impact lasted beyond the time spent in the sessions themselves: *'You hang on to that feeling for quite a while, that pleasurable feel, the memory of the rhythm in your body, it gives you pleasure remembering that. For the next day, and now that I'm thinking and talking about it, it, brings that feeling back.'*

Across all courses those with the greatest caring responsibilities and most in need of emotional support seem to have gained most benefit, experiencing the courses as caring, nurturing and supportive. Those with less demanding caring roles, and with a less obvious need for such emotional

⁵ [Caring Behind Closed Doors: six months on - Carers UK](#)

⁶ See Appendix, Limitations of the data

⁷ [When we sing it sounds like there are more of us: Findings from the first cohort of the Carer's Music Fund](#)

support recognised and respected the supportive element but for them the main motivation and outcome was the development of musical skills. The balance of groups was such that this does not seem to have detracted from the supportive elements. On-line delivery helped to some extent as it was easier for people to sit out of or skip elements that did not appeal to them.

Participants experienced a growth in self worth and confidence linked to the development of musical skills, achievement both as individuals and as a group, and becoming more confident to speak and share within the group and welcomed being pushed '*out of my comfort zone*' to achieve. Anxieties reduced, as illustrated in the diagram above. Several participants, independently, identified how the particular characteristics of music making contributed to this, as an activity that requires total mental and physical focus and is time critical, requiring such focus to be maintained and sustained moment to moment. This, they felt, makes it impossible, to think of anything else for that period of time, thus allowing them to temporarily escape from their ongoing concerns and worries:

'We've learnt lots of quite complicated melodies, songs, rounds, where you've really got to focus on it, you absolutely can't be thinking about anything else...and that for me is lovely'

'If you're not thinking about drumming you're going wrong, you can't be thinking about the fact that your son needs to be somewhere, or what you're going to have for dinner, or that you've left loads of stuff in the washing machine'

It was important that experiences and concerns could be shared and understood, but that these were not the main focus of activity:

'If you've gone somewhere for a break from it you don't want to talk about it the whole time'

'Here we're singing and talking. Get that out, then we're back to singing again. So you're expressing yourself but you forget it again when you're singing and that's what you need sometimes, clear that out of your head'

Many spoke of the course giving them time out from their concerns and their caring roles, one described it as '*a little holiday*' another that it gave her:

'...something else to focus on other than repairs around the house, cooking, cleaning, trying not to worry about family and friends... a bit of escapism for a couple of hours.'

Some found this enabled them to cope better with their caring role:

'It's like you get something lifted off you, go out, feel you can do it all again now.'

Participants spoke of the importance of the sessions being in 'real time', that they were committed to engaging at a certain point in the week and found it hard to commit regular time to continue independently once the course ended:

'Sometimes you just need somebody to hold that space for you, to say 'this is the time we are going to do this'

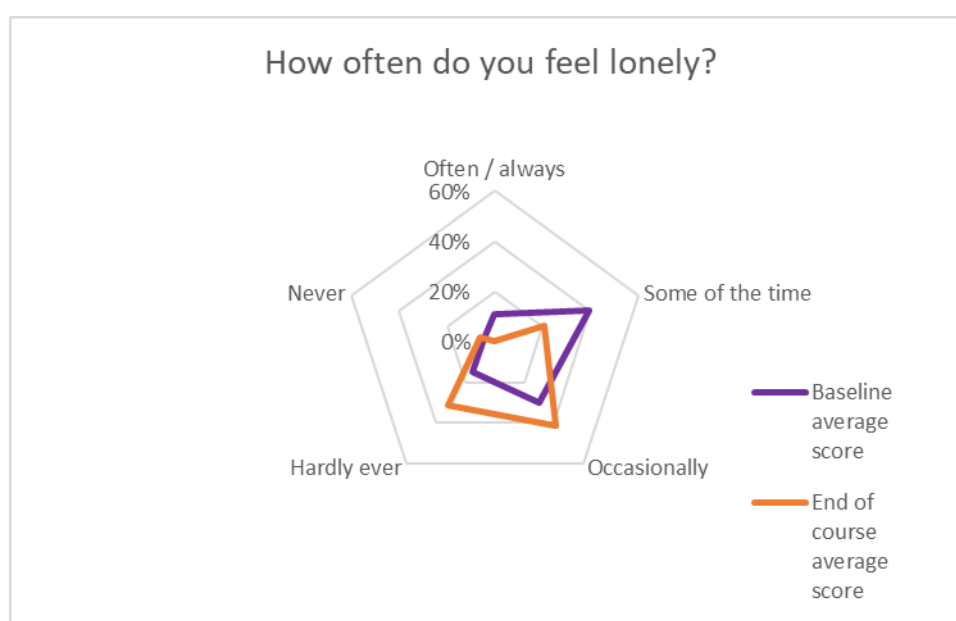
Courses provided something to look forward to, giving a structure to the week and differentiating the days which, under lockdown had started to become indistinguishable: '*Every day's beginning to bleed into one, every day is becoming the same.*' This was particularly the case for the new mums who were greatly affected by the impact of lockdown. For most participants, the value of the

musical and social aspects were balanced, but for them, the chance to meet others and gain contact and reassurance about their parenting skills was paramount:

'It's just something to look forward to in the week, it's a very long week and that one hour was our only social outing. We haven't seen wider family or anybody during this time, just my Mam and Dad, so it's been a lonely time'

3.2.2 Impact on Loneliness

Loneliness rose across the UK population over the period of the programme, as a result of lockdowns and social restrictions,⁸ but in contrast questionnaire data shows a positive change in participants' experience of loneliness:



Respondents identified 'being able to do something as part of a group' as the factor with most impact on wellbeing⁹. Participants greatly valued being able to meet and interact with others with similar interests and found the groups to be inclusive and friendly with people willing to share and support each other. Being with other carers people felt understood, and that they would not be judged if they had to miss a session, or were feeling low. One commented on other participants' acceptance of her father, whom she cared for, being present and sometimes participating. Some felt that an all-female group created a more supportive and less competitive atmosphere. Young carers enjoyed being with a mixed age group, feeling they benefitted from the different perspectives and skills this brought. All enjoyed meeting new people and having new things to talk about, particularly as reach expanded and people started to join from other areas. One new mum summed up the nation's experience at the time:

⁸ [How has Covid-19 affected loneliness? - What Works Wellbeing](#)

⁹ See Appendix: Sound Out participants' responses to Question 6

'Mentally it made a difference to myself. If you're only seeing the same people over and over again you get a bit bored of the conversation, you only have so much to say 'cause you're not allowed to do anything so we've got no new conversation.'

Being able to meet with others in the same situation was particularly important for the new mums, who had missed out on critical social interaction and support at a key point of change in their lives. The course also provided their children with opportunities to meet and socialise with others, something which had not happened at all during lockdown and went some way to allaying their anxieties over how this might have impacted on their child's development.

Interaction was not limited to social chat. Many activities involved group work, and in several courses participants created a shared piece, giving a different level of interaction. But in general this did not lead to the development of deep or long lasting relationships. Few of those interviewed had remained in contact with others beyond course end, other than through the legacy group, despite the introduction of course-specific Facebook groups. These were relationships of a time and for a purpose, one described it as:

'Company with strangers, nice to be friendly on the surface',

or, as another put it :

'Perhaps I don't want to know more about these people, it's a particular relationship through music...let's not spoil it by getting to know each other properly'

Both participants and tutors were surprised at how well social bonding could be achieved on-line, but without exception, all wanted to be able to get together in person, feeling that despite its strengths, and the insights it gave into others people's lives as they saw each other in their own homes, something was missing. Time was built in for tea breaks and chat, but the informal conversations that would have taken place on arrival and departure and over a break were still missed. Whilst some were, or became, comfortable with the technology, it continued to be a barrier for others. Some found it difficult to make personal connections, and related this either directly to the on-line experience, or to feeling that they were trying to enter an existing group, where most already knew each other. And one described how, having shared something quite personal, she was met with silence and apparent indifference, possibly due simply to a poor connection and consequent delay, which affected her and her willingness to engage for several weeks.

Some activities more naturally lent themselves to social interaction. Community singing is inherently social, even on-line and whilst songwriting is intensely personal, sharing this with others creates a bond. But learning instrumental skills requires more of an internal focus, those learning ukulele spent much of the time visually focussed on their own hands and fingers rather than on the other faces on the screen and electronic music making required a similar focus on individuals' 'Band Lab' window. The sense of personal achievement gained contributed to wellbeing but satisfaction with the level and quality of social interaction on these courses was lower.

Loneliness is not just about being alone, but is 'a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship... a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want'¹⁰ But as Mark Twain said: 'The worst loneliness is not to be comfortable

¹⁰ Perlman, D & Peplau L.A. (1981) Toward a Social Psychology of Loneliness. Quoted in the [Brief Guide to Measuring Loneliness - What Works Wellbeing](#)

with yourself'.¹¹ The programme enabled participants to achieve a better balance in their social relationships and to develop their sense of self.

Many spoke of it as time for themselves, *'a part of the week that's just for me', 'a chance to do something for myself'* with one saying *'it reminded me of how I can be confident and enjoy myself and I can have fun... it brought me back to who I am I think.'*

For some, it provided a chance to achieve long held ambitions. One vividly described an unfulfilled childhood desire to play an instrument which had remained throughout her life, another how she had, at various times, and with varied success, picked up and tried to teach herself guitar. Finding and expressing an individual voice and creating something that was reflective of themselves was particularly important to those on the Songwriting course. For all, it was important to be seen as a person, with musical ambitions and interests, not just as a carer needing support:

'It's valuing you as an individual, it's not looking at you as the carer, wife, nurse, mother, whatever. It's looking at you and at your needs and abilities, your happiness. For carers to feel they are individuals in their own right, not just part of this package of care they're trapped in.... there's a feeling that you can't be yourself because you're part of somebody else's needs. I think it's good to have that turned over and you are you for this hour or two'

3.3 Improving Practice - Making Jack Drum Arts' practice accessible to, and supportive of, female Carers

Good practice is good practice and benefits all. Jack Drum Arts has considerable experience of delivering high quality arts and music activities for vulnerable groups. The intention of this report is not to highlight all aspects of good practice observed but to identify aspects of particular benefit to female carers, which may not be part of Jack Drum Arts usual approach and which could be developed and taken forward.

3.3.1 On-line Delivery

The move to on-line delivery represented a major change in Jack Drum Arts' practice. This was made possible by Jack Drum Arts having a technically skilled member of staff on the team who could readily facilitate the switch, and by recruiting tutors who were able and willing to engage with the very real challenges this presented. Chief amongst these was the effect of latency, the delay between 'broadcast' and 'reception', which makes it impossible to sing or play together as a group. To deal with this, participants were muted, able to hear and play with the tutor, but unable to hear each other. Making music together is key to the ethos and practice of community music but although the experience was different, participants still experienced this as a group music making activity, speaking of it as having *'a lovely community feel'*. There were unexpected benefits too, community music practice seeks to put everyone at ease and make no judgements but people can still feel exposed. For some, singing alone, at home, not being overheard, was a safer way of taking part and building ability and confidence

'I stopped going to my choir ... because I'd become really conscious of my voice cracking it affected my confidence in my voice and so actually to be just singing on your own and not

¹¹ [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com)

publicly, it was quite reassuring for me that I could still hold a note I could still sing and it didn't matter because no one could hear you anyway'

And whilst harmony singing was limited, it was still possible for participants to learn a line and sing this against the tutor's voice. One found this particularly effective:

'I've never been able to sing a harmony easily before, though I've really wanted to. I've never sung on my own with one other person and have it sound nice.'

But latency created particular problems in terms of teaching and supporting musical skills development. A skilled music tutor can hear an individual voice or instrument within a group, but tutors were unable to hear what participants were singing or playing. The constant feedback loop which allows a tutor to check understanding and continually readjust their delivery was disrupted. Visual feedback gave some clues through facial expression and body language and could show, for example whether someone had mastered a chord shape, but even this depended on the equipment people had at home, and how it was positioned, and latency made it difficult to judge whether they were playing in time, or changing chords at the right point. Both tutors and participants found this frustrating. One Ukulele course participant described feeling constantly unsure, reluctant to practice in case she had got it wrong and was reinforcing her mistakes, and was unable to accept or believe the positive feedback she was getting.

Some courses made use of the 'breakout rooms' afforded by Zoom, to give small group or one to one tuition. This addressed some of the latency issues, within a small group it becomes more practical for people to unmute, play and get direct feedback, although this can expose individuals and had to be carefully handled. And it required the additional support of another tutor, or the Co ordinator, or other course members working independently whilst breakout sessions took place.

Tutors became more fluent and confident with on-line delivery as the programme progressed, making better use of options such as screen share, integrating other aspects of music technology and becoming more skilled in assessing level of skill, setting and adjusting pace, and able to better use visual signals to check understanding. The purchase of a multi-camera set up, supported by the technician, improved teaching in the second ukulele course, enabling close focus on the tutor's chord and strumming hands respectively, as needed. The overall result of these improvements is evident in the much lower dropout rate for the second ukulele course.

Initially, on-line courses were delivered from tutors' own homes or studios. As restrictions eased, some were delivered from Jack Drum Arts' premises in Crook. This enabled closer working between tutor and Co ordinator and use of Jack Drum Arts' equipment, but illustrates another aspect of the digital divide, the difficulty of getting a good, high speed, reliable connection in rural areas. The signal was poor, resulting in participants' screens freezing, loss of visuals, and 'stuttering' sound which compromised the quality of the experience and was frustrating for the tutor and participants alike.

3.3.2 Role of the Programme Co ordinator

The continued challenge of the pandemic required of the Co ordinator constant vigilance, tenacity, resilience and a willingness to adapt, re plan and make considerable changes to the programme, often at short notice, in the light of changing circumstances.

The role developed considerably, beyond the usual logistical remit, with greater and more personal contact with individuals. The Co ordinator supported sessions and facilitated social interaction once activities moved on-line. Far more information had to be sent by e mail than would have been the case had courses run as originally planned. She was aware that the amount of information people were receiving could be overwhelming and described her approach as 'drip feeding' it as required, keeping track of who had been sent what via a spreadsheet. Participants and tutors recognised the value of this attention to detail, commenting that the Co ordinator was '*absolutely on it*'. She would let the tutor know if someone was going to be late or would be unable to attend that week, and would record and send out sections of the session to absentees.

'She made sure everyone was up to speed and happy...I didn't have to do any of the admin at all, just turn up and teach each week'

Tutor, Electronic Music Making Course

Thought was given as to how to overcome lockdown limitations. Participants in the 'Katumba' drumming course received materials to make a simple drum, delivered to their door. Resources such as chord charts for the ukelele course, were e mailed out though some would have preferred to receive this by post as they had no access to a printer. The Co ordinator linked participants to other aspects of the programme, with some taking up the offer of the craft activity packs, which were particularly appreciated by the new Mums:

'We got some little packs through the post and activities to do as well which was lovely, it was a lovely little surprise, and just another idea to get involved with'

The Co ordinator was present in all on-line sessions and dealt with technical requirements, admitting, muting, un muting people, and helping participants find their way through and become familiar with 'Zoom' controls and conventions, enabling the tutor to maintain a focus on teaching. As a skilled music facilitator herself, she also supported delivery, working closely with the tutor, particularly important in the first on-line courses when all was unfamiliar. Sessions were jointly planned, with time scheduled in for a debrief after each. This represented a considerable investment of her time in individual sessions, over and above what was originally intended but was crucial to success. Her presence was vital to the development of social bonds, she put people at their ease and facilitated conversation, ensuring that all were included. Several interviewees commented on the value of her remaining on screen during the tea break, ready to chat once people returned and avoiding what one termed the 'tumble weed effect' of re entering an empty space. Knowledge of individuals' circumstances and emotional state was key. One tutor, who had delivered several courses, stepped into the Co ordinator role towards programme end and found that the increased knowledge and understanding this gave him greatly affected his practice. He became more aware of the value of scheduling time for social interaction, used this to ascertain the mood of the group, and thus knew when to provide more stimulating and challenging activities and when to step back.

3.3.3 Programme Characteristics and Structure

Being specifically for female carers was not a determining factor in people's decision to get involved but was generally welcomed. It was seen as positive, creating a caring, understanding and less competitive environment in which people were more willing to open up and share, personally and musically. Young carers had enjoyed being in a mixed age group, feeling that the all female environment created a bond, and a new mum in the on-line Singing course had particularly appreciated the support she received from older women in the group. Some courses had a mix of carers and those with no (or relatively light), caring responsibilities, but being clearly marketed as being for carers, and their needs being paramount, validated and supported the carers involved.

The length of each course was pre-determined by the Carers Music Fund. Participants felt that 12 weeks was a good stretch of time, enabling skills development and social connection. All were sorry when their course ended, wishing it could continue, but all those interviewed had plans to continue their music making in some way. The Carers Music Fund model was based on their being an entirely new intake to each course, but Spirit of 2012 later agreed that participants could progress to other courses, provided places were available. The 'Legacy group' was designed to further accommodate this need but though open to all most participants were from one course and interviewees from other courses did not seem to be aware of the option. Within these parameters, the legacy group was successful, participants increasingly took a lead in determining session content and repertoire, recorded themselves to create a music video and trialled a 'blended' session when restrictions eased in November, with some taking part in person at Jack Drum Arts' premises and some on-line via Zoom, projected onto a large screen within the room. Unfortunately the return of lockdown meant that this could not be continued on a regular basis, as intended.

Session structure was important in achieving social interaction. As the programme progressed, the value of an initial 'check in' at the beginning was realised. This gave all participants space and time to speak, allowed them to establish their presence in the group and say something of how their week had been or how they were feeling, enabling the tutor to gauge overall mood. This was a particular feature of the 'Katumba' Music and Mindfulness course, which also had a clearly defined 'wind down' section to mark the end of the session. Endings of some the earlier on-line sessions, could be slightly awkward and abrupt, devoid of the usual conventions of finding coats and bags etc, that usually help transition from sessional activity to normal life. Some participants seemed to find it difficult to hit 'leave' and stayed on for some time, straying into the tutor/Co ordinator de brief time. Facebook groups were set up for some courses, but several interviewees felt these would have been more successful if they had been introduced earlier so that they were well established by the time the course ended

Having an end goal, something to work towards, was seen as important by both participants and tutors, providing motivation and a sense of achievement. This was most successful where participants were working on both group and individual projects. Group work further facilitated social interaction as well as providing peer support in skills development. Participants appreciated having opportunities to contribute and to shape content of sessions as courses progressed, creating greater reciprocity and a more in depth and varied experience. One to one support proved effective in addressing individuals' needs and particular blocks in learning. But some felt held back by a lack of tangible resources which would allow them to retain, use and develop the skills gained, or which would enable them to catch up if they had missed a session.

Pitching skills-based courses at an appropriate level proved challenging, particularly in the early on - line courses, where it became apparent that the term 'beginner' meant different things to different

people. Participants in the first ukulele course had vastly different starting points, and on-line delivery made it more difficult for the tutor to pick up on where people were struggling, and to differentiate teaching appropriately. This improved, and was reflected in much lower dropout rates for the later course.

Participants wanted to be challenged, and to succeed. The challenge for tutors was to do this appropriately:

'You're always walking that line between in being challenging and it being too much, but there's a really great place in the middle of that where people feel really, really satisfied at the end of sessions where they've been challenged. You have to find that point in each group and in each session. But the more you do it, the more you can predict what that challenging point will be'

Tutor, Community Singing Course, Ukulele Courses, Legacy Group

And the type and level of challenge needed to take into account the reality of carers' lives:

'I just made it really clear that they weren't expected to do anything outwith those sessions, they didn't need to put aside extra time. There wasn't like a long list of homework that had to be done, it was like, 'if you've got time you can mess around with this if you don't, don't bother...a lot of people don't have time, even when they've got less on their plate'

Tutor, Electronic Music Making Course

Tutors brought a range of skills and experiences to the programme. All had an existing connection with Jack Drum Arts and understood the ethos and practice of community music. On-line delivery made it possible for some courses to be led by tutors elsewhere in the country, providing a greater range of musical experiences than would otherwise have been possible. The quality of delivery and tutors' status as successful professional musicians was important in terms both of musical skills and wellbeing and was recognised and appreciated:

'A lot of the time you might get fobbed off, especially a free course for carers, it's easy to end up in a room with someone's nephew who once looked at a guitar, and that high quality delivery from Jack Drum Arts helped everybody feel valued and worthy.'

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

'Sound Out' successfully engaged carers at a time of great social disruption and personal stress. It achieved the key outcomes of improving participants' wellbeing and reducing loneliness at a time when, nationally, loneliness was increasing and carers were experiencing poorer mental health.

The positive outcomes were not simply a by-product of musical activity but were consciously addressed in session structure and in many other aspects of delivery, which were sensitive to carers' needs. Key to this was tutors' understanding and empathy, and the Co ordinator's expanded role, which involved facilitating social interaction within sessions, dealing with the technical and administrative requirements of on-line activity and having greater and more in depth communication with individual participants. *'Being able to do something as part of a group'* was the single factor with the most impact on wellbeing, and a high degree of social interaction and personal connection was achieved with participants feeling supported by other group members. Gaining a sense of achievement, having time out of day to day concerns and being able to find and express a personal voice were also key to improved wellbeing.

The switch to on-line delivery made more courses more accessible to more people but had some draw backs in terms of building social relationships and the practicality of teaching musical skills. A blended approach could offer a way forward, mixing regular on-line access with occasional 'in person' sessions. On-line delivery increased geographical reach, a positive in this context but which could present a challenge to an organisation whose identity and practice is rooted in a particular place and in a relationship to a particular community. A blended approach could allow broader access whilst also reaffirming local identity.

The digital divide means that on-line delivery could exclude some, particularly those in financial need. Durham County Carers Support and other agencies are seeking to address this through access to technology projects, and Jack Drum Arts could explore how they could signpost potential participants to such provision. Offering a 1:1 introduction to the platform to be used could also help those lacking skills or confidence.

Course length was sufficient for participants to gain skills and feel they had received a rounded experience. But there was demonstrably a want and need for learning to continue, in the same context and with the same people. The legacy group was intended to address this and could offer a model for future programmes, but participants were largely from one course only and this warrants further consideration. Overall, the mix of courses provided a variety of musical opportunities and levels of challenge with some, such as the Electronic Music Making course, providing opportunities less likely to be found elsewhere, and less likely to be taken up by women in a more open context.

The quality of teaching and facilitation was high, and followed the model of good community music practice, adapting this to the on-line environment. Aspects which particularly contributed to success and were valued by participants included:

- Having an end goal to work towards
- Being given opportunities to contribute and to shape content of sessions as courses progressed
- Opportunities for 1:1 support/tuition
- The professional status of the tutors as gigging musicians
- Recognition of and respect for their role of carers
- Being given the right level of challenge, which recognised the other demands on their time.
- Being respected and treated as individuals, with valid musical ambitions

Aspects which could have improved participants' experience included:

- Better assessment of participants' starting points, particularly in the early on-line courses.
- Taking more account of the end phase of on-line sessions in planning, and developing conventions for leaving on-line sessions
- Ensuring that the benefits of the legacy group were equally accessible to all
- Prioritising fast connection when considering delivery location
- Providing more reference material, particularly for courses focussed on skills development
- Providing an option for participants to receive printed resources by post
- Introducing Facebook groups or other social media options at an earlier point in the course

Sound Out was situated within Jack Drum Arts' wider offer of activities. Courses could have been swamped by those already connected with Jack Drum Arts, eager to access on-line activity through lockdown, but a good balance seems to have been struck. Many of the Sound Out participants with an existing connection to Jack Drum Arts also had considerable caring responsibilities. Whilst they had successfully engaged with Jack Drum Arts' open access provision previously, they valued the closer focus of the Sound Out programme, particularly the supportive and social elements. Sound Out courses benefitted from other aspects of Jack Drum Arts' provision which added value to the programme. Tracks and music videos were showcased on the company's website and The Legacy group's version of 'I want a Hippopotamus for Christmas' featured as part of Jack Drum Arts' 'Light Fantastic' on-line Winter Festival. Repertoire for the on-line Community Singing course was taken from Jack Drum Arts' large scale 'Nordestinos' project, with some participants attending the live launch event in the summer. The additional elements of activity packs and door step performances were also supported by other funders, achieving economy of scale and enabling the company to reach a much larger and broader audience of carers, including families. This recognised the additional caring pressures on parents due to the pandemic, without compromising commitment to those with more demanding caring responsibilities. Links with other arts and music organisations were also a strength. Some participants came to the programme through other music/arts agencies, finding in Sound Out an additional dimension and level of support. Tutors' connections with the wider music and arts world raised aspirations and made participants more aware of possibilities. One new Mum had signed up for the tutor's own mums and babies music group as a direct result.

The success of the later marketing strategy shows that carer engagement is not necessarily reliant on partner organisations. Carers have agency, and individuals can find their way and engage through other means. A personalised approach is key, which means dedicating considerable time to this aspect of programme management, allowing for capacity to respond to individual queries and help people work through concerns and barriers to participation

Jack Drum Arts has considerably developed its capacity to successfully engage with and support carers through the Sound Out programme. In Spring 21 the company was asked to deliver on-line singing activity as part of Carers UK's national 'Share and Learn' on-line programme and was also commissioned by Durham County Carers Support to deliver workshops as part of the NHS Carers Breaks Scheme. Durham County Carers Support wishes to continue this established partnership and to include music making in any future offer of activities. This is an area of work the company could develop further, with on-line provision offering the possibilities of national, local and blended delivery.

Appendix

Methodology

Data collection

Data was gathered through:

- 11 observations of 8 courses (6 online, two in person courses) across the programme
- 18 individual interviews with participants from 6 courses across the programme*
- Follow up interviews with 2 participants at programme end, and consideration of film footage of interviews with a further 2 of the original interviewees carried out by a film maker
- 1 in-person focus group discussion in the early stages of the programme. (Jan 2020)
- 2 interviews with tutors towards programme end plus informal discussion with tutors at the end of observed sessions
- On going discussion with the Programme Co ordinator, plus 1 in depth, reflective interview in November 2020
- 2 Interviews with the CEO of Durham County Carers Support, held in the early stages of the programme (Jan 20) and towards programme end
- Observation of two performances, and their audiences, held at Jack Drum Arts Aug and Dec 2020
- Consideration of data collected through base line and end of course questionnaires

**Two young participants were interviewed together.*

Limitations of the data:

Interviews took place towards the end of each course. Interviewees were suggested by Jack Drum Arts, and participation was voluntary. These factors may have resulted in some positive bias. Jack Drum were likely to suggest participants who they felt had particularly benefitted, and those who felt most positive were most likely to respond. Most took up the invitation, but one course had a particularly low response rate with only 1 of the suggested 4 volunteering to be interviewed.

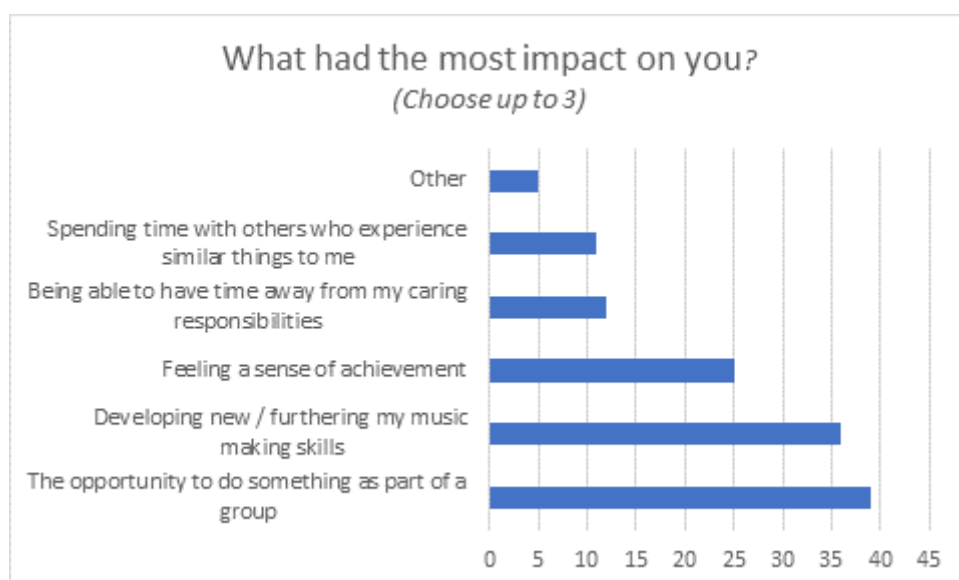
Virtually all participants completed the base line questionnaire, as this was part of the registration process but far fewer (approx 1/3) completed questionnaire at the end of the course. The original intention was that this would be completed the final session of the (in-person) courses, with paper copies handed out and collected in, which would probably have resulted in a higher percentage of responses. As all provision moved on line, participants were instead asked to complete a 'Survey Monkey' questionnaire after the final session. This may, again, have resulted in positive bias as those for whom the course was most positive are likely to be the most motivated to respond

Impact of the Coronavirus pandemic

All programmes funded through the Carers Music Fund used the same system to collect data on loneliness and wellbeing, with participants completing standardised questionnaires at the start and end of the first course they attended. This model assumes no other substantial influences on participants' wellbeing, and that any change can be attributed to the specific intervention being considered. The large numbers involved across all programmes would have accommodated fluctuations in individuals' wellbeing due to other factors, with positive and negative influences broadly cancelling each other out. However, the impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions had a widespread, negative influence on the population as a whole and on carers in particular. The

‘What Works Wellbeing’ briefing on Covid 19 and loneliness, (August 2020) reported that those who felt most lonely prior to Covid now had even higher levels of loneliness and that the proportion of people who felt they were ‘often or always lonely’ had risen from a pre-pandemic level of 8.5% to 18.5% by May 2020.¹² Carers were particularly badly affected by the pandemic with a substantial majority providing a greater amount of care and unable to take a break from their caring role. By October 2020, 74% of carers felt exhausted and worn out, 64% felt that their mental health had deteriorated.¹³ These background factors should be taken into account when considering the quantitative finding on loneliness and wellbeing

Sound Out participants’ responses to Question 6 in the end of course questionnaire: *‘Thinking about your involvement in this activity, which of the following do you think had the biggest impact on you? Tick up to a maximum of 3.’*



¹² [How has Covid-19 affected loneliness? - What Works Wellbeing](#)

¹³ [Caring Behind Closed Doors: six months on - Carers UK](#)