

## Spirit of 2012, Carers Music Fund: MyMusic Northamptonshire End of Project Evaluation, June 2021

### Forward



As we close the MyMusic Northamptonshire programme it is an opportune moment to thank the Department for Culture Media and Sport and Spirit of 2012 for making this exciting project possible. From the start of the bidding process, it has been a true partnership, not just between funders and recipients but everyone involved, both nationally and locally. Learning events with other projects and the Jo Cox Foundation have been inspiring and have influenced other pieces of work such as our dementia services; Northamptonshire Music & Performing Arts Trust (NMPAT) and ourselves have worked together as a team to readjust to the coronavirus restrictions; and most importantly of all this programme has been a partnership between female carers and music.

**“I liked being in an environment where everyone knew my situation and they could get me.”**

**– Young Carer Feedback**

Special thanks must go to Rob and Amy at Spirit of 2021 for being supportive throughout. One of the hardest elements of coronavirus and the subsequent restrictions has been its impact on planning for the future. Our end of Cohort 1 event took place at the end of February 2020 and was hugely successful but within weeks we were experimenting with Zoom and posting Ukuleles across Northamptonshire. Their flexibility and patience has been invaluable in allowing us to achieve something that we had not expected to: support women and girls through a global pandemic which saw carers disproportionately effected with both caring roles and social isolation intensifying.

## Our Approach to Evaluation

We have taken a multi-faceted approach to evaluation. Quarterly reporting and Apteligen impact data allows for the various projects across the country to be evaluated however we have taken local insights.

We also approached two external evaluators at the start of our project to provide their expertise: Dr Morgan Davies from a music background and Tracy Morel from a carers support perspective. Both provided an initial evaluation in March 2020 allowing us to learn from Cohort 1. Dr Davies also provided a report in October 2020 which enabled us to adjust how we delivered online music activities which was new experience for both ourselves and carers however is something that we will continue with alongside face-to-face support in the future.

Both external evaluators have produced an end of project evaluation report which follows this Forward. A summary of each from the perspective of a Project Manager can be found below and outlines our next steps as we look to embed music as a method of support for carers into the future.

**“... remembering back on the first day when I was in a group of strangers but today I’ve recorded a whole song with all of them who are now my friends.”**

**- Carer Feedback**

## MyMusic Northamptonshire Final Evaluation Report, Dr Morgan Davies

It is positive to read that the project “succeeded in providing a series of engaging, enriching and highly creative music and social events for a wide range of female Carers across Northamptonshire.” Valid points were made early in the project regarding the balance between needing structure whilst avoiding a prescriptive process which influenced future sessions.

The blend of music activity and peer support for female carers is at the heart of this project; as such online delivery allowed us to split sessions into different components ‘music’ and ‘chat’. This influenced other services such as dementia activities and our COPD Breathing Space project which both moved from longer fortnightly/monthly sessions in a fixed venue to several shorter Zoom sessions across the week with generally favourable feedback that a wider menu of services has benefits for carers in terms of accessibility and having a timetable for themselves enabling more frequent breaks from caring.

Although it is good to read of instances where participant’s musical abilities have increased, song writing has always been at the core of this project. As such it is positive to read that song writing sessions provided a “therapeutic and collaborative

creative outlet". Equally valuable is the sense of camaraderie and peer support which has been illustrated, especially considering coronavirus and resultant stresses on carers.

## **MyMusic Northamptonshire Independent Impact Evaluation Report, Tracy Morel**

Examining our programme through a logic model and the lens of our five original areas of focus plus two additional ones because of coronavirus is useful as it enables us to shape future projects based on our learning from this. This report highlights areas that we can build upon in the future whilst evidencing success in the seven aforementioned areas of focus which are:

- Mental health & wellbeing
- Caring for carers
- Social Isolation, inclusion and loneliness
- Short breaks from the caring role
- Carer resilience
- Coping with a caring role during Covid-19 lockdown (new)
- Online digital (Zoom) groups vs. face-to-face Groups (new)

Telephone interviews indicate largely positive responses, both in terms of music/creativity and peer/emotional support which is encouraging. Responses regarding whether digital or face-to-face delivery was preferred showed a range of response with some people preferring in-person, others appreciating online as a necessary interim and another that the shorter sessions worked better around caring.

Feedback from Young Carers was also positive, with both the creative and social sides of the project appearing beneficial.

Tracy's recommendation of a blended approach is certainly something that we will take forward and mirrors feedback from other projects that we deliver. We have already invested in better IT for our boardroom which would enable us to better broadcast in-person groups to an online audience and have experience of how best to deliver groups to make this feasible.

Tracy noted the technical limitations of Zoom for group performances with lag being an issue however her recommendations are useful. Tracy's comments regarding giving carers time in the studio are valid and the original intention were to do so both in terms of singing but also enabling those who wanted to work behind the scenes to get involved with the recording process. However, the recordings occurred at the height of lockdown restrictions making it impossible to visit a studio and as Jessica states, this first cohort especially was about song-writing as a creative outlet, not necessarily performing.

Comments regarding coordinating music sessions around our other services in a wider menu of support are valid, especially following a diary clash however also illustrate that as an organisation we have put on a wider array of new services such as Dementia Reminiscence which ties in well with Songs from the Shows for example.

Tracy's suggestions for how to incorporate this model in the future alongside funding opportunities are very much appreciated and will be followed up on.

## Summary

Both Morgan and Tracy compliment the delivery team for well-run sessions, blending music and peer-support whilst reacting well to coronavirus. They both also stated how the song writing sessions were positive experiences for participants which is encouraging as this was at the heart of our original proposal.

These mirror the data and feedback that we have collected as part of Apteligen and quarterly reporting which aid to address five identified outcomes:

Outcome 1	Participants' wellbeing has improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The data from the "returners" survey showed an overwhelmingly positive impact on wellbeing from the Resound cohort for Adult Carers. Based on these responses, the sessions have given Carers something to look forward to each week and the opportunity to take time for themselves, as well as a creative outlet for their feelings around their lives/Caring roles. Furthermore, 13 participants agreed or strongly agreed that 'participating in the group activities has supported other areas of my life', showing that the positive impact on wellbeing extends beyond the duration of the sessions themselves and has helped Carers to feel more positive about and/or better manage their Caring roles overall. We also asked these Carers the 4 ONS wellbeing questions and all of them responded (on a scale of 1-10) with between 8-10 for 'Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?', which shows a significant increase in life satisfaction compared to data collected at the beginning of the project.</li> <li>The Young Carers Easter Song writing project also had a really positive impact on the wellbeing of those who came. Data collected for Apteligen shows improved across all 4 of the ONS wellbeing questions – the average baseline score for overall life satisfaction was 6.0, which increased to 6.98 at the end of the week. Similarly, the average score for Young Carers feeling that the things they did in their lives were worthwhile increased from 6.71 to 7.61. Anxiety had also reduced and happiness increased.</li> </ul>	



## Outcome 2

## Participants' feelings of isolation have improved

- In the Resound “returners” survey, 13 out of 14 respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the following statement: ‘I have developed friendships as a result of participating in the group activities’, which in turn has reduced their feelings of isolation. This is particularly significant over lockdown when many Carers could have felt more isolated than ever. This same number also said that they were able to ‘understand and appreciate other people’s thoughts, feelings and emotions through the communal music and song writing activities’. Being able to empathise with other peoples’ experiences and find common ground through shared experiences has also reduced feelings of isolation.
- Furthermore, supporting project participants with technology such as Zoom, MP3 players and smartphones has helped some Carers feel more connected with family and friends outside the project too.

Direct feedback from the Carers supports this data:

- “Friendly faces and conversation have so been appreciated, also the help with technology.”
- “I very much enjoyed the activities provided during the lockdown - I kept myself quite occupied and stimulated meeting others and making new friends. It was really good to know that you're not on your own and we shared common ground being Carers as this can be isolating in itself. It was very much the case that we looked forward to seeing others, even though we were in our own homes, although it's very different from seeing each other face to face.”
- Similarly, the Young Carers benefited from meeting others and working together on a shared project: “I liked meeting new people and working together to make things with people that we didn’t know, and it was really fun.”

Outcome 3	Increased social/support networks for those taking part
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many of the Carers involved over the past period have developed new friendships as a result of taking part in the MyMusic groups. Some have set up their own Whatsapp group to keep in touch with each other outside the sessions, and they frequently check in with one another on there. Following an initial in-person gathering organised by Northamptonshire Carers, this group are also now independently meeting up for walks and coffees with each other. This shows that real friendships and relationships have been formed through the MyMusic sessions that go beyond the confines of these sessions. The Carers have also shared how much they have been looking forward to meeting each other in person after a year of meeting online.</li> <li>Some Carers involved in MyMusic have also go on to join other groups/activities organised by Northamptonshire Carers, such as Poetry &amp; Rhyme, Art groups and Dementia-specific support groups. Getting involved with the music sessions has connected them to a wider support network and many are now more aware of all the different types of support that are on offer. Similarly, many of the Young Carers who attended the Easter song writing project are now part of a weekly music group run by Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust.</li> <li>Being able to make new friends was also a strong theme that came through from the Young Carers' feedback session, as many of them struggle to find time to socialise alongside their Caring roles. It was amazing to see how quickly a room full of young people that didn't know each other connected and built relationships with each other, many of whom exchanged numbers and still keep in touch. They now have a wider support network of people who really understand their situations and what they go through day to day</li> </ul>

Outcome 4	Reduction in anxiety for those taking part
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The wellbeing scores for anxiety (as captured by the Resound survey) showed that some Carers involved in the MyMusic project were still experiencing high levels of anxiety. However, this may be due to the timing of the survey responses which coincided with the first steps being taken towards easing lockdown.</li> <li>When taking part in the music sessions, nearly all Carers who were initially anxious about joining now felt comfortable and relaxed. Almost all participants in the groups were willing to be recorded for virtual performances which required them to play or sing on their own, having initially lacked confidence in their abilities. Some have also found the confidence to join other groups outside MyMusic:</li> <li>"I am involved with other groups which I probably wouldn't have joined before"</li> <li>A reduction in anxiety and improved self-esteem was also observed in the Young Carers, with the MyMusic sessions helping them feel more confident in their musical and social skills.</li> </ul>

- “I’m a lot more confident, singing and knowing that I’m alright at it.”
- “It’s my confidence – when I came here, I was really nervous and I didn’t really think that I’d make a lot of friends here! So I think it’s going to help me with making friends.”
- “I was surprised I was able to be on stage without being nervous.”
- Overcoming initial anxiety to attend the first group session was identified as a risk following our initial meetings with the Behavioural Insight Team which we aimed to address using a supportive and welcoming team which both external evaluator commentated positively on.

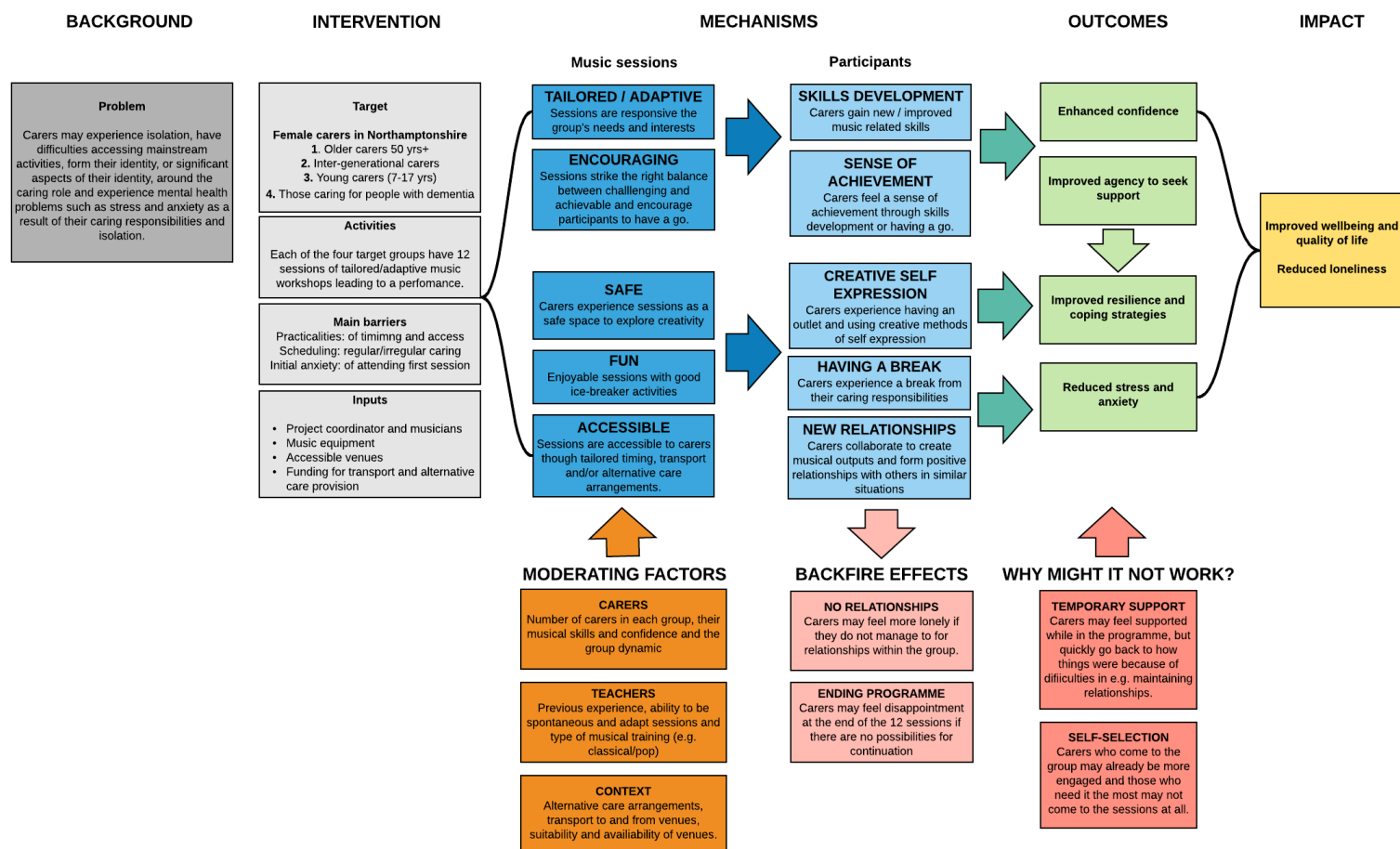
## Outcome 5

## Development of a skill/creative outlet to help manage the Caring role

- Reporting data shows that carers involved in the project predominately felt that they had developed or enhanced a skill through participating in the music groups.
- All respondents in the final quarter agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I was able to improve my current level of musical ability’. They also all expressed a desire to participate in more music-related activities in the future, showing that the skills developed can be carried forward to help carers feel more positive, confident and connected in the future.
- One Carer who has been part of the ukulele group since the project began has now started private ukulele lessons to develop her playing, while another has started singing lessons and two have joined a larger choir outside Northamptonshire Carers.
- Many Carers have also continued their music-making in their free time, with members of the song writing groups sharing poems/lyrics they’ve written at home and others wanting to share specific ukulele pieces that they’ve taught themselves from a book.
- “It took me a long time to even begin to get the hang of playing the ukulele but slowly I am improving which is very satisfying. In creative storytelling I really enjoyed learning how everyday sounds could be used to make rhythm and even music.”
- “The sign and sing and song writing classes have been brilliant & something I really looked forward to. They were challenging at times but I felt I progressed and enjoyed the mental stimulation and the fun we had!”
- Similarly, the number of Young Carers who said they were keen to take part in more music-making in the future was very high. The project enabled them to try out a variety of instruments, as well as giving them insight into recording and filming techniques – experiences that were new to most of them.  
“I enjoyed the planning and the shooting of the music videos. It was very interesting just being filmed, because I’ve never experienced that before.”  
“I enjoyed on the first day when we got to play all the instruments, especially guitar because I was learning right-handed which I’m not used to, so just learning something new.”

Although completed before coronavirus, our time with the Behavioural Insights Team was useful not only in developing a Theory of Change for the project but also for priming us for the need to be flexible and incorporate both social and musical elements. Accordingly, the aim of fostering peer support networks and providing end of cohort celebrations to mark achievements were built into the programme.

## Northamptonshire Carers



## Next Steps & Thanks

Thanks to grant from the Northamptonshire Community Foundation, we can continue the Ukulele group in partnership again with NMPAT, albeit we will be opening it up to all genders. We have recently been successful with a National Lottery Community Fund grant and will incorporate some elements such as the Coffee & Chat groups within that. Tracy's suggestion of working with local music therapy charity Pink Rooster has already been actioned with initial joint dementia workshops and further funding-bids planned.

Tracy's suggestions for future funding sources will be explored as the benefits of a similar approach to MyMusic Northamptonshire are evident. This coordination function in bringing both the music and carer support together so any substantial programmes like this in the future will require dedication coordination resource.

In terms of operational delivery and evaluator feedback, this project would not be possible without the skill, patience and flexibility of the team directly involved in the project. Thanks must go to the team of musicians at NMPAT including Rebecca, John, Chris and Greg, as well as to Louise and Simon for coordinating them. Can I please take this opportunity to place on record praise for our Project Coordinator, Jessica Hollingshurst for her skill, hard-work, dedication, and flexibility in successfully delivering this project, especially in-light of an ever-changing global pandemic.

**Gwyn Roberts**  
**Chief Operating Officer**  
**Northamptonshire Carers**  
Registered Charity No. 1061417.

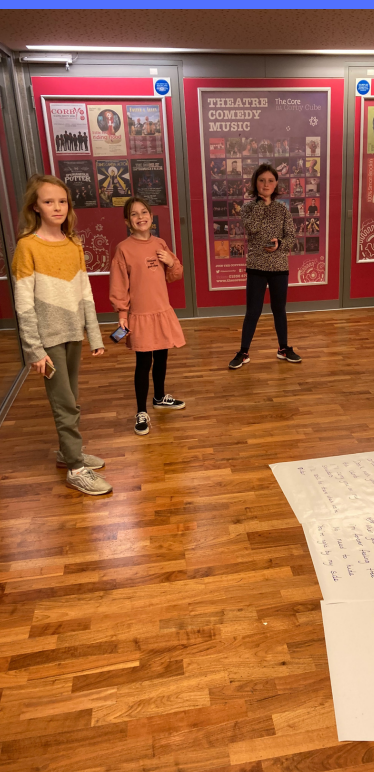
**18<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

The Carers' Music Fund has been made possible by funding Spirit of 2012 has received from the Tampon Tax Fund, awarded through the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Tampon Tax Fund was set up to allocate the money generated from the VAT on sanitary products to projects that improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls. Spirit was awarded £1.5 million from the fund in March 2019.

The Carers' Music Fund puts women and girls with caring responsibilities front and centre, offering them opportunities for fun, creative expression and (re)discovery of self through music-making. Women make up the vast majority of carers in the UK: 72% of those in receipt of carers allowance are women, and parenting duties for infant children are still mostly done by women. 8 in 10 carers say they are socially isolated because of their caring responsibilities, and according to ONS figures carers are 22% more likely to experience mental ill health than the general population. All of the projects we are funding through the Carers' Music Fund are focused on identifying, reaching and engaging women and girls, and addressing the factors that isolate them.

[www.northamptonshire-carers.org](http://www.northamptonshire-carers.org)





**Young Carers  
Action Day 2021  
coincided with a  
return to in-person  
groups for young  
carers in  
Northampton &  
Corby where a  
series of song  
writing workshops  
took place over the  
Easter holidays**





**OUR VOICES  
ARE STRONG,  
BUT NOT  
ALWAYS  
HEARD  
AT TIMES WE  
FEEL BROKEN,  
BUT PLEASE  
HEAR OUR  
WORDS  
THE DAYS CAN  
FEEL SO LONG,  
THE SUN WILL  
RETURN  
BUT PLEASE  
HEAR OUR  
WORDS**



**DAYDREAMING,  
IMAGINING WHAT  
IT'D BE LIKE  
TAKES ME AWAY,  
TO A DIFFERENT  
PLACE  
BUILDING LEGO  
BRICKS WAY UP  
THERE  
ORBITING ROUND  
WITHOUT A CARE  
STARGAZING, THE  
SUN IS BLAZING  
IT'S GETTING  
CRAZY...**





# **MYMUSIC NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

## **CARERS FUND PROJECT**

### **FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

Authored by

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15<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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## **1. Executive Summary**

This report finds that the MyMusic Northamptonshire Carers Fund project has succeeded in providing a series of engaging, enriching and highly creative music and social events for a wide range of female Carers across Northamptonshire. During the course of the project, participants were given sustained opportunities to become involved in convivial and confidence-building communal music activities within safe spaces for a range of online and in-person sessions. The workshops were facilitated by a group of highly skilled and sensitive workshop leaders who were able to adapt to the dynamic changing circumstances presented by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Participants were able to forge and sustain new social relationships within relaxed and supportive group sessions, whilst exploring and developing a number of different modes of creative expression: this has resulted in a collaborative and entertaining series of audio-visual project outputs. Feedback gathered during the course of the project suggests that participants' individual and collective levels of wellbeing have benefitted as a direct result of sustained engagement with the project activities.

## **2. Project Overview**

The first phase of this project, *Resonate*, gave female Carers in Northamptonshire over the age of 50 the opportunity to meet with contemporaries and participate in a range of creatively driven musical activities, via a series of professionally led group sessions. These workshops took place over a 12-week period (25<sup>th</sup> November 2019 to 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020) in four discrete locations across the county: Daventry, Corby, Wellingborough and Northampton. These workshops were conducted as in-person events, with all four groups coming together for a communal 'Celebration' performance event on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

It was originally intended that the following project phases would follow a broadly similar model, in terms of delivery; however, with the rapid development of the COVID-19 global pandemic situation from early 2020 – and in view of the various lockdown restrictions imposed upon UK residents – subsequent phases of the project were necessarily conducted in various adapted formats. In response to the UK entering its first lockdown on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, project leaders developed an interim online cohort phase for female Carers across Northamptonshire of all ages, including some sessions for Young Carers. This phase consisted primarily of interactive workshops and support sessions that were conducted online



via Zoom, alongside various view-only YouTube video outputs. This interim online cohort ran for a ten-week period (20<sup>th</sup> April to 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020).

The second full cohort to run, called *Into The Light*, was the first main project phase to be conducted exclusively online. This phase gave female Carers of all ages across the county a chance to participate in a series of weekly online musical workshops. The *Into The Light* sessions took place over a 12-week period (20<sup>th</sup> June to 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020), with the various groups coming together for a virtual sharing event on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October. All activities for this cohort were conducted via Zoom, due to the COVID-19 situation and related ongoing restrictions with regards to holding social gatherings and public events in the UK.

Due to necessary changes in the project schedule, the fourth cohort – *Resound* – was conducted next. This phase of the project ran for 16 weeks (9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021) and continued to use an online model for delivery. The Zoom workshops for this project phase were aimed at adult female Carers, with a specific focus on those who were looking after dementia sufferers. New workshops included the addition of a dementia-friendly group ‘Songs From The Shows’, along with a more experimental ‘Creative Storytelling’ group. An online event to celebrate this phase of the project was held on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March, with both live and pre-recorded contributions from each group.

For the fourth and final official project cohort, *Reverberate*, it was possible for activities to be conducted in person, with various necessary guidelines, restrictions and measures in place. This phase consisted of two three-day songwriting workshops for Young Carers that took place in Corby and Northampton during the Easter holidays (29<sup>th</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021). A number of YouTube music videos were produced as the main output for this final phase of the project. Remaining funding has facilitated the extra delivery of various online sessions for all female Carers (from 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021), with one-off in-person sessions being held throughout May and June to complement online delivery.

### **3. Methodology**

Primary data for this report was gathered throughout the project via observation, interaction and discussion with participants, project team members and workshop leaders via email, at project meetings and during session visits (both online and in person). Project Manager Gwyn

Roberts, NMPAT Musical Inclusion Programme and Partnership Manager Simon Steptoe, and Project Coordinator Jessica Hollingshurst have all supplied related secondary data including project outcome/indicator information and survey data; strategic email communications with workshop leaders; and other information concerning related project discussions. Conversations and data exchange with external evaluators Apteligen has also informed the ‘Conclusions’ section of this report. Discussions with the project team and workshop leaders were held at regular intervals throughout the project; and all project participants were given regular opportunities to share feedback for evaluation via questionnaires, group conversations and informal interview sessions.

This final report considers the degree to which activities were delivered successfully and in an appropriate manner during the course of the project in line with the intended project outcomes, and with a particular focus on the musical dimension of the activities. The report also reflects more broadly upon the general levels of interactive engagement and social enrichment evidenced by participants, both within individual cohorts and across the project as a whole. Each cohort is first reviewed briefly in section four, below (Findings); and then the entire project is evaluated in the fifth and final section of the report (Conclusions and Recommendations).

#### **4. Findings**

##### Cohort 1: *Resonate*

Two in-person workshops were evaluated for the first cohort: a ukulele tuition and songwriting session that took place at the Band Hall in Daventry, NN11 0PN, led by musician Richard Leigh, with four female carer participants attending; and a vocal tuition and songwriting session that took place at Swanspool Parade in Wellingborough, NN8 2BZ, led by musicians Greg Coulson and Chris Wilkinson, with eight female carer participants in attendance. Project co-ordinator Jessica Hollingshurst and carer support member Elaine Osborne assisted with the running of both workshops. Feedback was also gathered from participants, workshop leaders and project team members at the Resonate Celebration Event, which was held at the Moulton Community Centre in Northampton, NN3 7AX.

**Daventry workshop** (6<sup>th</sup> January 2020): It was noted that the session format was quite free at this early stage of the project, with participants practicing some basic ukulele chords first before moving on to a lyrical songwriting session. The session acted effectively as a social occasion, giving participants the opportunity to interact with other Carers in a relaxed, non-judgmental and safe space. The project team members present were very attentive to the needs of the participants, with the presence of Project Co-ordinator Jessica Hollingshurst and carer support member Elaine Osborne being particularly valuable in this regard. It was also noted that the session lost some impetus in its early stages due to a lack of firm musical direction, and it was advised that a more structured approach be used in future.

**Wellingborough workshop** (8<sup>th</sup> January 2020): It was noted again that the session acted very effectively in providing an opportunity for social interactions, and it was evident that participants were already forming bonds of friendship with each other. The careful choice of repertoire was appropriate for this age group, and participants clearly enjoyed singing the popular songs with some expert guidance from the highly skilled workshop leaders. It was noted that this session had more shape and focus than the Daventry session, whilst still retaining a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Although the collaborative aspect of the lyrical writing process allowed all participants to become involved, a somewhat less prescriptive approach to the creative process was advised for future sessions.

**General observations:** During the workshops, it was evident that all participants were able to express themselves creatively through the processes of learning how to play a musical instrument, developing their singing voices, engaging in basic songwriting skills, and performing songs as a group. It was noted that participants were given a great deal of freedom and flexibility to define the direction of the creative processes and their level of participation, with the workshops providing safe, supportive and non-judgmental spaces for musical engagement and fruitful social interactions. The workshop leaders conducted the sessions in a professional yet relaxed manner, creating an enjoyable, interactive and productive atmosphere. The end-of-cohort event was a great success, with participants gaining increased confidence from performing live with contemporaries. It was noted that working towards tangible, achievable outputs would be important to incentivise participants in future sessions; it was also noted that the sessions lacked diversity and were less well attended in the Corby and Daventry areas.

### Interim Online Cohort

With the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic in early March 2020, and the resultant UK lockdown, MyMusic Northamptonshire took the challenging but necessary decision to move all workshop activities online. During this transition period, a series of interim sessions were provided for Carers over a 10-week period, from mid-April to the end of June 2020. Two online workshop sessions were evaluated for this cohort: a ukulele workshop led by musician Jon Kendall, with eight female carer participants present; and a ukulele workshop led by musician Rebecca Price, with eleven female carer participants present.

**Ukulele Workshop (19<sup>th</sup> June 2020):** It was evident that all participants had quickly grown comfortable with using Zoom as a platform for the ukulele sessions, with screen sharing, muting facilities and breakout rooms proving to be useful tools for online instrument pedagogy. The acquisition of songwriting skills was cleverly woven into the instrument playing process, allowing for a rich and multi-layered learning experience. It was noted that a number of returning participants had already progressed considerably from the Cohort 1 ukulele sessions, both in terms of musical skill levels and with regards to having increased confidence when participating in the group activities.

**Ukulele Workshop (24<sup>th</sup> June 2020):** It was noted that the workshop leader's sensitivity towards participants created a safe space for creative development, lending the session a notably relaxed and enjoyable ambiance. Combining renditions of simple songs with learning a more challenging piece worked well in terms of providing participants with an opportunity to push themselves during the session, whilst at the same time building confidence through playing familiar established pieces. Participants were given the opportunity to submit requests for songs to learn, giving them creative input and some autonomy over the process.

**General observations:** It was noted that in both cases the workshop leaders had become quickly adept at using Zoom to deliver engaging and participatory online workshops. Whilst Zoom worked well for the teaching-based workshop sessions, it was noted that Zoom would have considerable drawbacks as a vehicle for live musical performance. In addition to facilitating the online workshops, the project team also provided regular Zoom "socials" for participants, with carer support members in attendance; these sessions gave participants a regular opportunity to maintain and develop social interactions within a safe online space. A

series of music videos, delivered by workshop leaders and posted on YouTube, proved to be popular with participants, most notably for instrument teaching purposes. An analysis of viewing figures suggested that participants favoured more interactive performance-based video outputs. Whilst it was evident that the transition to online modes of delivery had been challenging for all concerned, it was noted that both workshop leaders and participants had adapted to the novel use of technologies surprisingly quickly. The project team were given special credit for ensuring that ukulele instruments were sent out to participants in the early stages of lockdown, thereby encouraging and facilitating continued participation.

### Cohort 2: *Into The Light*

Three online workshop sessions were evaluated for this cohort: a ukulele workshop, led by Jon Kendall and Rebecca Price, with eight female Carer participants in attendance; a Sign and Sing workshop, led by choir leader Gareth Fuller and sign specialist Sheila Sclater, with six female Carer participants attending; and a Songwriting workshop, led by Chris Wilkinson and Greg Coulson, and with eight female carer participants. Project co-ordinator Jessica Hollingshurst assisted with the running of all workshops. Feedback from participants and workshop leaders was also gathered at the end-of-cohort online celebration.

**Ukulele workshop** (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020): it was noted that the combination of audio and visual reference information supplied via Zoom worked very well from a pedagogical standpoint, and that songs with more complex voicings and advanced techniques were being introduced into the repertoire. It was noted that the project team were very attentive to the needs of the participants, and that the workshop leaders had adapted to using Zoom as an online instrument teaching delivery mode extremely well. There was a relaxed, informal atmosphere, with excellent communication between workshop leaders and participants throughout the session.

**Sign and Sing workshop** (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020): it was noted that the choice of repertoire was excellently planned in terms of musical accessibility and lyrical positivity. Participants were tasked with making video recordings of themselves performing the songs, which would be edited into a collaborative rendition to be premiered at the end-of-cohort online sharing event: this gave the session a clear goal-oriented focus. Participants were encouraged to run through the performance both with and without being led by the sign specialist, which



provided an effective means of increasing performance confidence and also allowing the workshop leaders to monitor progress more objectively. It was evident that the workshop leaders challenged all participants in a fun and engaging manner, demonstrating various aspects of performance with great skill and humour. This created a wonderfully productive atmosphere that left all participants visibly energised by the conclusion of the session.

**Songwriting workshop** (25<sup>th</sup> September 2020): it was noted that the songwriting group sessions provided a safe and collaborative online space within which participants could express a wide range of emotions and experiences, some of which were clearly personal in nature. All participants actively contributed to both lyrical content and the overall aesthetic of the songs that were produced, with the standard of lyrical outputs being notably rich. It was evident that the group had gelled as a social unit; and the workshop leaders were praised by participants for facilitating a relaxed and informal creative space within which participants could share their experiences. Whilst it was evident that the workshop leaders were still responsible for the majority of creative musical decisions (a more autonomous approach was suggested for future sessions), it was also noted that there was a clear development in participants' technical understanding of how a pop song can be constructed and performed.

**General observations:** The standard of both teaching and performance renditions delivered by all workshop leaders across the workshops visited was consistently high, lending the sessions a sense of entertaining professionalism whilst facilitating general progress in musical ability. It was notable that all participants were fully engaged throughout the sessions; and there was a marked improvement in general levels of vocal competence, songwriting skills and musicianship when compared to previously visited sessions. These developments in technical and performance skills were accompanied by raised levels of confidence, indicating the participants' growth and development as songwriters, musicians and performers. Having participants' audio streams muted during the majority of rehearsal time meant that teaching was largely uninterrupted: this meant that participants could practice and perform to themselves without feeling "put on the spot", which allowed for a more relaxed and autonomous approach to musical development. It was noted that time delays in the Zoom feed was an intermittent issue for one or two participants; although it was also noted that this is generally unavoidable for such group sessions, given the variability in Internet streaming speeds for different end users.

#### Cohort 4: *Resound*

Four online workshops were evaluated for this cohort: a Creative Storytelling session, led by Richard Leigh and Rebecca Price, with four female carer participants attending; a Sign and Sing workshop, led by Gareth Fuller and Sheila Sclater, with nine female Carer participants attending; a ukulele workshop, led by Rebecca Price and musician Luke Palmer, with seventeen female Carer participants in attendance; and a Songs From The Shows session, led by Greg Coulson, and with eight female carer participants in attendance. Project co-ordinator Jessica Hollingshurst assisted with the running of all workshops, and NMPAT Musical Inclusion Programme and Partnership Manager Simon Steptoe assisted with the running of the Creative Storytelling session. Feedback was also gathered from participants, workshop leaders and project team members in conversations after the online sessions and via email.

**Creative Storytelling workshop** (2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021): For this new series of workshops, it was immediately notable that participants had been given a greater degree of creative freedom to develop their own ideas. Responding to this more open format, participants reported that they had chosen a core theme – food – and then had decided to produce a radio show based around this theme. It was noted that participants had generated a diverse body of engaging material, with a range of creative processes – poetry, songwriting, music performance, comedy, visual arts, script writing – being utilised. The workshop leaders facilitated these processes expertly without imposing their own creative vision onto the outputs, resulting in a more autonomous experience for workshop participants. All participants appeared to be invested in the process of developing the work, and there was a clear goal for everyone to work towards.

**Sign and Sing workshop** (3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021): It was noted that the number of participants had increased in this group since the previous cohort, and that more complex and challenging vocal and signing materials had been introduced. The workshop was well structured and expertly led, with the sessions continuing to work very well in an online format. Some participants had taken leading roles in vocal and signing performance; and all participants had clearly gained much enjoyment from taking part in the sessions. When participants voiced questions about singing techniques and learning Makaton signs, workshop leaders were able to guide participants expertly, directing them to further resources and performance opportunities when appropriate. It was notable that one participant had joined a Gospel choir as a result of taking part in the sessions.

**Ukulele workshop** (17<sup>th</sup> March 2021): The number of participants had more than doubled for this group, demonstrating both its popularity and the suitability of this particular format for online modes of delivery. It was evident that the session was also providing a valuable opportunity for social interactions, with all participants being actively involved in discussions. The Zoom ‘breakout rooms’ facility provided a useful way of dividing the larger group into two smaller groups – one for more experienced players, one for new participants – and the more advanced group clearly enjoyed the opportunity to learn some challenging chord voicings and more elaborate rhythmic strumming patterns. It was notable that the workshop leaders were very observant of participants’ needs and were able to offer patient advice whenever participants flagged up any issues with learning the songs.

**Songs For The Shows workshop** (18<sup>th</sup> March 2021): This session functioned effectively as a vocal workshop and singalong group. The song repertoire was carefully selected to cater to the tastes of the participants, who had active input into which songs were worked upon. It was evident that returning participants’ vocal performance levels had greatly improved as a result of regular vocal exercise. This in turn had led to participants reporting increased vocal range, better breath control and significantly increased confidence in their vocal abilities. The workshop leader ran the session professionally and with great skill, always taking the time to give suggestions for vocal improvement after song run-throughs and to ask participants for feedback on their own performance.

**General observations:** The standard of both teaching and performance renditions delivered by all workshop leaders across the visited sessions was again consistently high. It was notable that there was a continued general improvement in participants’ levels of musicianship and confidence. Participants were given greater expressive autonomy within the new Creative Storytelling and Songs For The Shows workshops, resulting in richer and more varied outputs that participants had increased ownership of. It was noted that both workshop leaders and project participants were becoming increasingly adept at using the Zoom platform for online modes of delivery, and there were no significant technical issues in any of the workshops visited. An end-of-cohort questionnaire showed that the vast majority of participants had enjoyed the sessions and made new friends as a result, with all participants feeling that they had improved their level of musical ability to some degree. All but one (“neither agree nor disagree”) reported a strong desire to participate in more music-related activities in the future.

### Cohort 3: Reverberate

Due to ongoing restrictions, it was not possible to attend and evaluate the in-person 'Reverberate' workshops directly. The observations below comment briefly upon feedback gathered from participants following both sessions, supplied by Project Coordinator Jessica Hollingshurst, and review of the audio-visual outputs from this project phase.

**General observations:** Feedback from the Corby and Northampton sessions suggest that both workshops were successful in engaging the Young Carers in creative, challenging and rewarding musical activities. A number of participants reported increased confidence and notable improvements in general musical abilities as a direct result of participating in the sessions. The process of writing, recording and filming videos for the songs was evidently novel and informative for many participants, with the YouTube video outputs demonstrating some impressively developed songwriting skills and an exciting array of creative modes of expression – in particular musical arrangement, choreography, lyrical composition, singing, group dancing, and performance on musical instruments. It was evident from feedback that the Young Carers particularly enjoyed the social aspect of the workshops and valued being able to spend time in a group with contemporaries who understood their situation.

## **5. Conclusions**

Overall, the MyMusic Northamptonshire Carers Fund project has been highly successful in meeting its intended outcomes, particularly in view of the many adjustments that have necessarily been made during the course of the project as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite considerable disruptions and uncertainties, the standards of event organisation, workshop leadership and skills transmission have remained consistently high throughout the project. The project team reacted to the unpredictable and dynamic conditions of lockdown swiftly, with due diligence and positivity; as a result, participants adapted quickly to online modes of delivery, despite some occasional and largely unavoidable technical issues. Moreover, the online modes of delivery allowed some Carers to participate in the project who would otherwise have struggled to attend in-person sessions. The welcome return to physical sessions has been rigorously organised, with project team members ensuring that all necessary safeguarding measures have been put in place and followed.

Feedback gathered from participants throughout the project highlights that both the in-person and online workshops have consistently provided informative, enjoyable and sociable regular group activities for all participants, giving Carers a welcome respite from domestic routines and other life pressures. Participants reported that the group sessions were relaxing, cathartic and supportive; and interview data gathered by Apteligen further confirms that the online sessions provided structure and much-needed social contact with the outside world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Carers have acquired a range of new musical skills which were developed during the course of the project, and it is evident that this process has been both challenging and rewarding for all involved. Participants were able to express themselves creatively and to develop new skills through learning how to play musical instruments; to sing and use sign language; to write and perform poetry and songs; to design and co-produce performance outputs; and to make audio and video recordings of their own performances.

The range of activities offered during the course of this project has been particularly impressive, with each workshop series offering its own range of opportunities for creative and communicative development. Apteligen interview data suggests that the workshops have made music learning more accessible for the participants, and the qualities of workshop leaders have been consistently praised in all feedback. The Ukulele workshops have provided a popular and accessible form of basic musical instrument pedagogy, lending themselves especially well to the online format; the Sign and Sing workshops have been particularly successful in terms of delivering an innovative, energising and challenging performance programme; and the Songwriting workshops have consistently given participants a particularly therapeutic and collaborative creative outlet, with valuable lyrical and musical outputs that the Carers can enjoy, reflect upon, and be proud of for years to come.

New and innovative workshop formats have also been developed during the course of the project, and these have been particularly successful in giving participants the opportunity for greater freedom and autonomy over creative processes: the Songs From The Shows workshops from Cohort 4 provided a nostalgic and interactive series of singalong sessions that were clearly moving for a number of participants; and the Creative Storytelling sessions (also from Cohort 4) allowed participants to challenge themselves to be creative in a collaborative, original and engaging way. It was notable that the Carers' collective range of life experiences gives them a vast creative reservoir of emotional material to draw from, and



this has resulted in particularly rich, meaningful and entertaining creative outputs from the experimental and rewarding Creative Storytelling sessions.

Rounding off each major project phase, the end-of-cohort celebration events have been consistently positive and rewarding performative experiences for all participants, including participants' relatives and the workshop leaders. In addition to the socially beneficial nature of these gatherings, the end-of-cohort events have also given participants the opportunity to perform live at in-person events, for pre-recorded outputs, and via online platforms: this has led to increased confidence and personal growth, whilst also giving a series of focal points for participants to work towards in all workshop activities. Because all participants were able to actively contribute to the end-of-cohort performances and recordings, this has resulted in a sense of pride and shared ownership over the valuable series of collaborative audio-visual outputs, as evidenced in participant feedback given following the end-of-cohort sessions. Moreover, family members have been encouraged to attend the end-of-cohort events, allowing for loved ones to share in these activities, to enjoy and appreciate outputs, and to take pride in participants' achievements.

One of the most notable aspects to come out of feedback for this project was that participants have particularly valued the social aspects of the group sessions, with there being a strong sense of camaraderie between Carers as a result of their shared personal experiences. Participants repeatedly commented that the online Zoom sessions were socially supportive during lockdowns; and these online sessions evidently became especially important for a number of the more socially isolated participants, in terms of providing interactions outside of their domestic bubbles. Apteligen interview data further supports this feedback, highlighting participants' overall enjoyment of the communal experiences and identifying the strong group bonds that have been formed as a result. In some cases, the social bonds formed between participants have extended beyond the scope of the group workshops; these additionally supportive and connective networks seem likely to continue beyond the ending of the project. The cognitive and emotional benefits of actively engaging with music-based modes of social interaction are increasingly well documented in scientific literature; and this project supplies further evidence to suggest that carefully curated and expertly led group musical activities can provide a particularly fertile context for such interactions, which can evidently lead to significant increases in participants' wellbeing.

Finally, it is notable that this project has provided team members with valuable opportunities for personal and professional growth. In addition to finding the experiences of running the workshops personally rewarding, workshop leaders were able to reflect upon and develop their own creative and professional skills during the course of the project. The newly acquired practical skills relating to online modes of delivery may be particularly useful to both project organisers and workshop leaders in the future, as organisations move towards more blended modes of event delivery. The project team have welcomed evaluative feedback and input from participants at all stages of the process; and acting upon this feedback has resulted in a number of positive developments being made during the course of this project. Feedback gathered throughout the project has highlighted the esteem in which participants hold the workshop leaders; and it is also notable that the workshop leaders have consistently evidenced pride and satisfaction in the quality of the participants' musical efforts and creative outputs. It seems evident that all participants and project team members have gained considerable benefit – as musicians, as performers, and as creative, social beings – as a direct result of participating in this project.



## ~ MyMusic Northamptonshire ~

### Independent Impact Evaluation Report - 2020 | 2021



**Tracy Morel**

**Independent Evaluator**

**17<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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# 1. Introduction:

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The **MyMusic Northamptonshire Project** became a digital offer to Female Carers from April 2020 owing to the lockdown restrictions caused by the Covid-19 global pandemic.

The previous **Cohort 1: 'Resonate'** for female carers over 50 years old; a song-writing project, was reported on in March 2020 before the pandemic lockdown and covers the locality-based sessions within a physical space.

Following lockdown from the end of March, a new approach needed to be taken which resulted in:

- **Interim Online Cohort** - for female Carers of all ages, including some sessions for Young Carers. Sessions included YouTube "style file" series, as well as ukulele and song-writing groups on Zoom. This session ran for 10 weeks from w/c 20.04.20 to w/c 22.06.20 and was attended by 15 continuing Carers from the Resonate cohort, 6 new participants (21 total) and 2 one-off attendees.

Further adjustments in sequence were then made for the subsequent Cohorts as follows:

- **Cohort 2 - "Into the Light"** - Online programme for female Carers of all ages, including some sessions for Young Carers. Sessions run on Zoom included Ukuleles, Song-writing and Sign & Sing.
- **Cohort 4 - "Resound"** - Online programme for adult female Carers, with a particular focus on Dementia Carers. Continuation of Ukulele, Song-writing and Sign & Sing group, with the addition of the "Dementia friendly" group Songs from the Shows and a more experimental storytelling group.
- **Cohort 3 - "Reverberate"** - Young Carers Easter 2021 Song-writing Project
- **Extra delivery with remaining funding** - continuation of Ukulele, Sign & Sing and Songs from the Shows groups online. One off in-person sessions in May/June to complement online delivery.

The direct focus of this Impact evaluation report covers the period from October 2020 to June 2021, as I was unable to participate directly from the April sessions for six months until that point. However, the co-evaluator, Morgan Davies, continued to monitor and evaluate all the Spring and Summer sessions, produce reports and captured feedback. I have reviewed all documentation, in order to assess the longer-term impacts for the project with insights described within this separate final evaluation report.

When determining outcomes and impacts I continued to use the original following 5 main focusses, for drawing conclusions, and to complete the longer-term snapshot under section **2. Logic Model**.

These are:

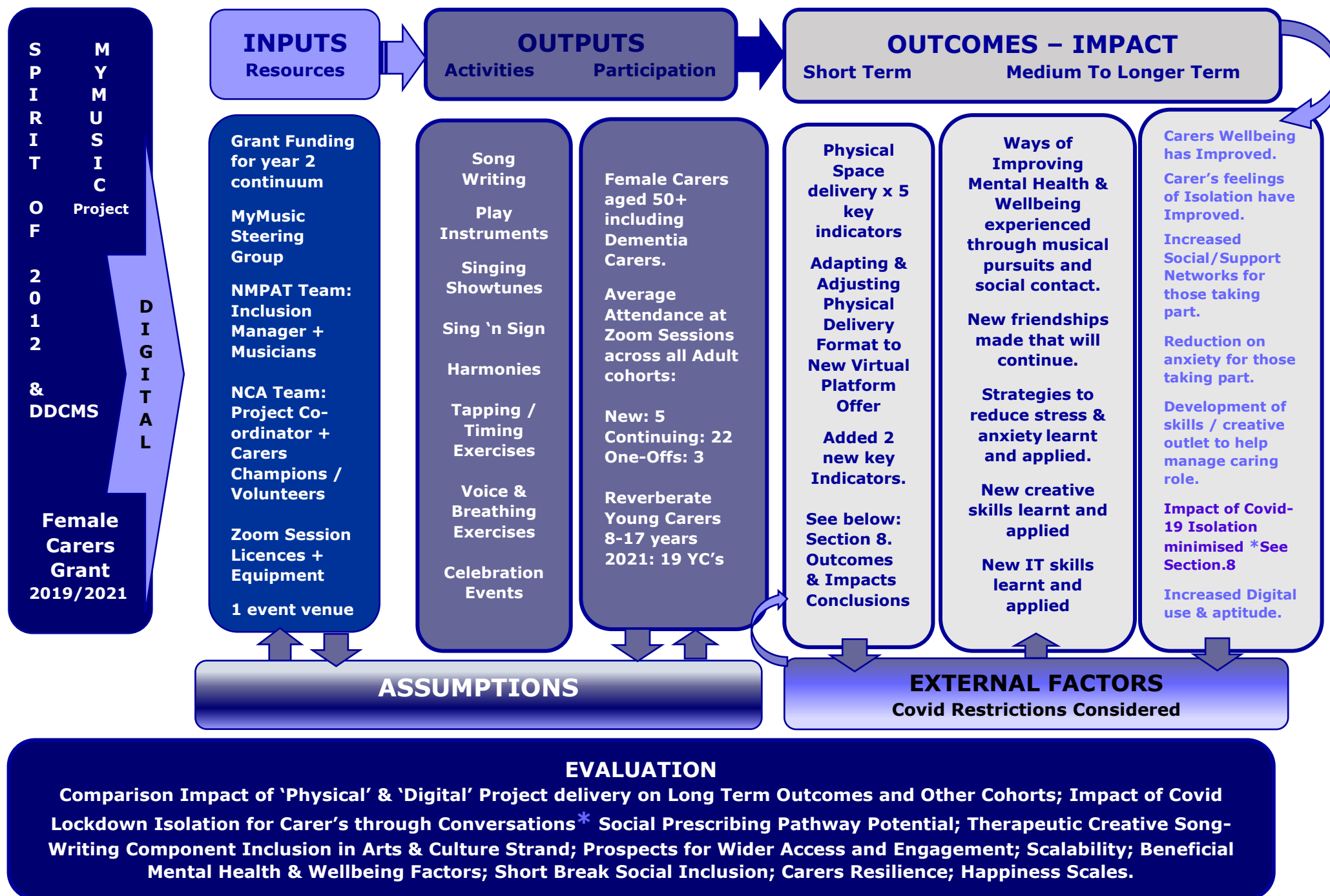
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing**
- **Caring for Carers**
- **Social Isolation and Loneliness | Social Inclusion**
- **Short Breaks from Caring Role**
- **Carer Resilience**

I also added 2 new indicators, to consider the impacts of:

- **Coping with Caring Role during Covid-19 lockdown**
- **Online Digital (Zoom) Groups v Face 2 Face Groups – Survey Feedback**

These latter 2 factors have had a significant impact on delivery and Carer outcomes but with the considerate, sensitive and enabling approaches taken by the facilitators the transitions have continued to be largely positive and longer-term impacts achieved and sustained.

## 2. Northamptonshire Carers Logic Model in respect of MyMusic Project:



### 3. Impact Evaluation Approaches

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#### Methods used for evaluating the Digital programmes:

- Formulated some key Q's relative to digital delivery with the NCA Quality Impact Manager to circulate to all Carer Groups, including the MyMusic Northamptonshire participants.
- Reviewed all documentation and feedback produced between April 2020 and September 2020
- Attended different Zoom sessions between October 2020 and March 2021
- Attended Zoom Celebration Events in December 2020 and March 2021
- Contributed to discussions with Apteligen relative to structuring interviews with Carers and considered the feedback provided from those sessions through a Coding Summary.
- Compared Delivery within Physical Spaces and Digital Zoom Sessions with pro's and con's for each.
- Reviewed recorded sessions and feedback from the 'Reverberate' Young Carers Easter Half Term 2021 song-writing workshops
- Contributed to the 'Resound Cohort Questionnaire' and considered the feedback
- Observations and insights to draw conclusions for short, medium and longer-term outcomes and Impacts/Differences the project has made to the lives of these Carers.
- Observational issues and proposed solutions for future delivery.
- Telephone interviews with **5** Carers who started with the Resonate programme during 2019-2020 and continued as participants in most of the digital zoom sessions throughout 2020-2021.
- Telephone interview with **1** volunteer on the project, who subsequently became a participating member of some of the groups.

**1. Irene S – part of the project since the beginning, currently in the ukulele and sign & sing group**

**2. Linda L – part of the project since it moved online last March, ukulele group**

**3. Sue H – part of the project since the beginning, currently in all the online groups**

**4. Nadia J – part of the project since the beginning, song-writing group**

**5. Bev H – part of the project since the beginning, currently in the ukulele and sign & sing group**

**+**

**➤ Deidre D – initially a volunteer on the project, became a member of sign and sing group, song-writing group and the Coffee Mornings.**

## 4. Zoom Session Observations

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My attendance at some of the Zoom sessions for planning meetings and direct observations in the group sessions and Celebration events, occurred during the periods from October 2020 through to March 2021.

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, I attended a song-writing session where the theme was to write a Christmas song in an hour, which was achieved. The resulting song lyrics were of a high standard and with the composed musical accompaniment created a lovely seasonal song.

During February 2021 I attended:

- Creative writing session (23<sup>rd</sup>)
- Songs and showtunes session (25<sup>th</sup>)

I had several direct perceptions:

1. They were all well facilitated and ran smoothly.
2. All Carers had a chance to be heard in terms of suggestions to content and progression.
3. The Carers who participated in the song writing workshops had become very confident in the process.
4. Facilitated group efforts were structured with contributions welcomed at every level.
5. Everyone was high energy and enthusiastic.
6. There were limitations with the Zoom platform e.g. echo's and time lag's etc., that had been solved by muting all participants during sing back sessions....

To me this seemed very isolating, seeing everyone singing away on their own in their own homes and only being able to hear the musician singing?

So, I subsequently sought background context on this and any other limiting factors inhibiting progress, by having a conversation with Jessica Hollingshurst, the co-ordinator of the project, to seek clarity and possibly find future solutions.

### **Jessica perspective emailed to me after our chat:**

*"Just following on from your concerns about the Carers being muted on Zoom – I agree that there are limitations when making music online compared to face to face, but the idea of having to mute participants has been a universal limitation that all musicians/groups of musicians and choirs have had to deal with this year. My choir that I attend weekly on Zoom is the same and we are all muted for the duration of the session. I think it would be good to include in the evaluation how we tried to overcome this on the project, with 1:1 sessions on Zoom to record individual Carers' voices that fed into collaborative virtual performances, as well as regularly unmuting participants for feedback and conversation before, during and after the sessions themselves".*

A reasonable and informed view and worthy of further exploration.

**Recommendation:** That Northamptonshire Carers investigates better platforms to facilitate these sessions moving forwards. E.g. Demio (already hold the licence) and others that maybe better than Zoom to correct these issues and improve the 'live' experience for both Carers and facilitators.



## 5. Celebration Event Observations:

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The first live Celebration Event which took place at Moulton Community Centre on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020 was marvellous! The outcomes were reported in the March 200 Impact Evaluation Report.

It had been decided after this event that a compilation CD be produced of the Carers singing their songs. These had all been professionally recorded at the event and could be re-recorded at the local venues, if some were required, then mixed and 'polished' in the studio at a later date.

The subsequent Celebration Events that were facilitated via Zoom and which I attended, were held on October 7<sup>th</sup> (Into the Light) and March 27<sup>th</sup> (Resound).

My direct impressions were as follows:

1. Varied, creative and engaging content.
2. A mixture of live content and pre-recorded videos previously performed in the group sessions, and then edited with special effects by NMPAT, such as a Radio Show with different skits narrated by the Carers.
3. The Carers were all very enthusiastic and it was evident that they had thoroughly enjoyed these sessions.

I received a copy of the double CD pack in April and was initially surprised that, although the 2<sup>nd</sup> CD contained the Carers singing their song tracks 'Live', the 1<sup>st</sup> CD studio version of these songs were purely sung by the musicians, co-ordinator and a backing vocalist? Following another conversation with Jessica, to discuss and seek clarity over a few concerns relating to the CD production, she provided the following direct recollection on the decisions to produce this way and explained the process undertaken.

### **Jessica's Perspective:**

*"In terms of the CDs, I also agree that it would have been nice to have more of the ladies on the "studio" versions of the songs. Again, we were limited due to the timing of it all and having to suddenly stop face to face gatherings. However, a real positive to the tracks being recorded in this way was that the Carers taking part really felt that their songs had been taken seriously and valued the opportunity for those songs to be professionally recorded and mixed by the musicians. They loved working with professional musicians and the look on their faces when they heard the studio versions of their songs was wonderful to see, as they really made their songs come alive. It's also worth noting that the initial cohort was a song-writing course rather than a singing/performance group, so many of the ladies weren't confident/strong singers themselves or weren't that keen to sing anyway. They had full ownership over the melodies and lyrics of the songs, however, which was the key aim of that particular cohort."*

**From an evaluation perspective:** I accept all this rationale and appreciate the process presented restrictions with Covid, although, feel it is a shame that the Carers did not get to have the experience of 'Studio Time'.

**Recommendation:** This is something NCA may want to consider factoring into plans for any future song-writing workshops.

## 6. Adult Carer Feedback

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There have been various surveys and interviews with Carers undertaken over the past 18 months. I have reviewed all the feedback from each of these and there are consistencies through key threads and trends that demonstrate the achievement of the target outcomes and impacts pre-determined to accomplish through this project. These are:

- **Carers Wellbeing has Improved.**
- **Carer's feelings of Isolation have Improved.**
- **Increased Social/Support Networks for those taking part.**
- **Reduction on anxiety for those taking part.**
- **Development of skills / creative outlet to help manage caring role.**
- **Impact of Covid- 19 Isolation minimised**
- **Increased Digital use & aptitude.**

**See Section 9: Conclusions**

### **June 2021 Carer Telephone Interviews: Conversational approach**

The direct conversations I recently had with Carers and Volunteers were based on 10 questions asked back during February/March 2020 following the 'Resonate' sessions delivered in the physical space. I slightly re-phrased some of these to consider the digital format of delivery of each, specific to the music project and added 1 extra about access to other NCA services. There were several common threads within their respective responses that mirror the survey feedback from the wider participant groups. During the conversations, several additional insights and suggestions also came forwards.

A composite of their answers are below:

#### **1. After the first 'Resonate' music groups in physical spaces; what motivated you to carry on participating in the subsequent sessions online?**

- Loved all the different ways to arrange music.
- Did a Radio Show theme and I was involved in the Supermarket skit which was fun.
- Good variety of different things to join, I've been in the Ukulele group, and the Sign and Sing groups.

- Really good to see the other carers as we have bonded as a group.
- Good focus for the day
- Twofold as a Carer and as a Volunteer, being able to call some of the other carers and check they were alright and offer/provide support with whatever was needed.
- Connection with the group
- Enjoyed it so much.
- Learning to write songs was motivating.
- Wanted to learn the Ukulele, as had inherited my husbands old one and already played the guitar. I was a complete beginner on the Ukulele - but was surprised how quickly I picked it up and progressed.
- I really enjoyed it and the sessions were very well taught.
- To keep in touch with everyone.
- 3 Carers in the group lost their mums too and 1 lost her dad.
- Had a lot of emotional support when mum was ill.
- Something to look forward to
- Creative expression
- Friendships
- Safe space to express what you're feeling or going through with people who have similar experiences.
- Kindness
- Empathy
- It's been precious really!
- Wanted to carry on as enjoyed the 'Resonate' song-writing sessions immensely.
- Was part of a WhatsApp group with the friends I made in the music group and we all joined the online sessions together.

## **2. Have you enjoyed all the sessions?**

- Very much so, it's been a great way of meeting people, having some time for myself and learning new things.
- Yes, very much so – I really look forward to the Coffee Mornings on Tuesday's which have been very successful and grown in numbers of those attending. So good to see everyone and apart from socialising, we were able to help each other with problems practically and provide emotional support too.
- I particularly loved the Sign and Sing sessions, they were wonderful! I learnt such a lot and can only describe it as 'Brain-stretching' – so good for the brain!

- Song-writing was wonderful as well
- Yes, very much so.
- Yes, I have.
- Enjoyed the face 2 face sessions better than Zoom.
- Zoom was good but given the choice preferred the sessions at the Pavilion.
- Yes, I have always loved music – anything musical – enjoyed all.
- Loved the warm-ups and breathing exercises which I practice every day.

### **3. What aspects have you liked best?**

- Learning to play the Ukulele. At first the group was overwhelmed with popularity and so very big. There were complete beginners through to those who had either played a bit before or could play guitar and picked it up quicker than others. Needed 3 teachers really. Split into 2 groups eventually and that was better. One group had the beginners and the new people who joined. The other group had those who were making a lot of progress.
- I also joined the recent Corby face2face group. I enjoyed that a lot but, it was 1 hour to travel there and 1 hour back so I wouldn't be able to do that again unless it was held in Daventry, as I couldn't afford the time away from my caring responsibilities.
- Sign and Sing was brilliant!
- Song-writing has been the most challenging but rewarding experience for me – when we started at the Northampton group, I felt overwhelmed and couldn't really contribute much as splitting into 2 groups was distracting in the same room. Now though, I have found the sessions on Zoom enable me to think and write with feeling and I absolutely love it – so enjoyable and I look forward to it every week.
- As I said the Sign and Sing was so good for my concentration and focus and I learnt so much as well.
- The socialising was also lovely and I've made lots of new friends who I'll stay in touch with.
- Showtunes was really good
- Found being muted you only hear yourself which felt odd
- Learning a new skill
- Talking with other people
- Nice thing to be doing during lockdown as everything else had stopped.

- Having something to look forward to.
- Song-writing and the creative processes of that aspect
- Making new friends
- I loved the Showtunes ones best – felt like I'd been to the West End afterwards and that feeling stayed with me for days.
- Well, I do like writing poetry and am part of the Poetry and Rhyme group (NCA facilitate) so the song-writing sessions allowed me to use my imagination and write prose which contributed to becoming lyrics
- I did like the Sign and Sing sessions but they overlapped with another group I was part of with my husband (NCA Reminiscence) - so I had to choose that and didn't continue.
- I joined the Ukulele group when it was online. At first I don't know why I said yes and was going to give it up – but, I stuck with it and now really enjoy it as it sounds like music and not just chords. Want to carry that on if there's an opportunity.

#### **4. Is there anything else you would like to have seen added or done differently?**

- None, not really
- Not really, no
- Except, when we can all meet up again as a group in a building, that there are some break-out rooms available so that one group isn't practising their songs whilst the other group is trying to write.
- No, I don't think so – Zoom kept it all going and was better than nothing
- Preferred Face 2 face and human contact and we were able to get together in a small group at Delapre Abbey, outside the Café, for a sing song recently which was lovely.
- No, we were asked for suggestions but I was just happy to go along with everyone else's ideas.
- Rebecca was really good and I learnt so much from her.
- At the beginning Ukulele was mixed ability – but we split into 2 groups in breakout rooms which was good so that each group could go at their own pace.
- NCA were brilliant at adapting to online when the first lockdown happened,
- They also helped on the telephone to learn how to access Zoom until we got used to it.
- Very efficient.
- No other than maybe to coordinate the sessions around other activities that NCA put on so there aren't any clashes with timing?

#### **5. What have been the 3 main benefits of attending for you personally?**

- Being able to get time for myself to escape from worry and stress by being able to relax and recharge.

- Social contact as I had been very isolated during the lockdown and it's helped me to sustain.
- Learning new things. I got on well with the Ukulele in the group sessions and wanted to do better so I am now having private lessons with Richard through NMPAT weekly for 10 weeks.
- It's been very beneficial to avoid social isolation during the lockdowns.
- Learning new things
- Confidence building, certainly.
- Connect with others.
- Enjoyment of music – I find it very good for relieving stress.
- Good to have something to do and a routine - something nice to look forward to.
- For managing stress and having some 'Me Time'
- For my mental health mostly – would have been very bleak without the friendships and positivity of the sessions
- A creative outlet
- Social contact
- Keeping social contact – making new friends
- Learning and exercising my brain – improving my poetry skills
- The Coffee and Chat group on a Tuesday is wonderful as we all share knowledge, information about where to go to get things done and are very supportive of one another – so emotional and practical support. Plus we laugh a lot too.

## **6. Has attending the group made a difference to you as a Carer?**

- Yes, I would say so – I'm a bit more relaxed and don't get so het up over the small things.
- Don't feel so alone now
- Yes, the social contact with other Carers was helpful so you didn't feel so alone – it was very reassuring.
- We had a face2 face session in Northampton at Broadmead Church and I really enjoyed that immensely.
- Very much so, such a lot of support & genuine kindness
- Mutual support
- It's been an invaluable experience and I do hope it can continue in the future.

- It's been an absolute lifeline during lockdown which otherwise would have been the worst time in my life – have had a lovely time.
- Feel less isolated now as have made so many new friends.
- Wake up in the morning and there's an hour for me to be involved in something stimulating and be able to talk to others with shared experiences – communication with my husband is not easy.

## **7. How have you felt about these sessions being open to women only?**

- Haven't really thought about it?
- Think it would be good for male carers and don't have any qualms about having a mixed group.
- Not bothered either way
- Liked the fact that it's a women's group because whenever someone is upset, it's a safe space and isn't embarrassing for anyone.
- Also its women of a similar age and life experiences which is lovely.
- Wouldn't mind men being involved though
- Well the musicians are mainly men. I have no problem with a mixed group and as I mentioned, my husband attended many of the online music sessions with me.

## **8. What were the advantages of attending Zoom sessions for you?**

- Learnt new skills such as accessing Zoom.
- Easier to concentrate on Zoom with composing, creative-writing – better as less distracting.
- Only way of keeping going.
- We all learnt how to operate Zoom and get the best out of it.
- Don't need to leave an hour beforehand to drive to Northampton and can use that time for other things.
- Stay connected.
- Being able to participate
- Was already attending my Church Choir on Zoom so knew how to use it.
- During Lockdown could keep in touch
- Being able to join a lot of groups – could do more, fit more in and not travel to get there. My husband is not a good passenger.
- Song-writing is easier as split into groups/'rooms' so can concentrate more
- Ukulele has 2 levels as well and break out into 2 online rooms
- Also, the music groups are all recorded so if I can't attend one I can catch up later.

## **9. What were the disadvantages of attending Zoom sessions for you?**

- Internet issues.

- Slow broadband and older devices, which I had to upgrade.
- Sometimes, when one of the teachers played another instrument to accompany the ukuleles, like piano and clarinet, the pitch was too high and not interacting with the internet to hear it.
- None really.
- Better in fact as no need to drive and park and all the pre-organising to attend.
- At first I needed to upgrade my broadband and did have technical difficulties with trying to log on a few times – but, have sorted that now.
- On Zoom it was only me and Rebecca who were heard, don't know what the other Carers felt about that?
- At my Choir Zoom sessions it's the same as only the Choirmaster and a soloist can be heard and we are all muted. They did use another choirs backing track at one session but that was out of step with our singing timings and a bit weird really.
- Another downside of the Zoom Ukulele group was that some Carers couldn't print off their music and so a lot of time was spent with Rebecca having to screen-share it, which took away from playing time.
- Prefer face2 face – miss the personal contact.
- Miss the refreshments.
- Can't really read peoples expressions on Zoom to make sure they're alright if they're quiet.
- Technical problems mainly, such as not having my laptop and having to access via my phone wasn't easy. But that's sorted now.

**10. Did you feel you had a Short Break from Caring role by still being at home and attending virtually?**

- Yes, I did, with some planning as I speak to my mum around 5 or 6 times a day and am on call to go do tasks for her.
- My sister doesn't live with me but calls me several times a day and I do everything for her.
- It was my moment to turn the phone off and do something just for myself.
- Yes, I worked it around my son's planned activities and my husband's schedule.
- When I was caring, it was time just for me to enjoy lively talks.
- Yes, I did – my husband joined me for many of the online sessions and he enjoyed them too, singing along.

**11. Did you access any of the other support, groups and/or activities that NCA provide?**



- No, not before joining this group.
- Only as a Volunteer for the Carers Café
- Yes, I've used the support line for getting information and advice when I've had problems with meeting my sister's needs or needing to engage with social services.
- Yes, I've done lots of things arranged by NCA:
  - I was already a member of the Carers Choir and I've also attended the Dementia Singing sessions, plus since lockdown I joined the Bird Watching group on Zoom and we've also been out for walks with our binoculars; Coffee and Chat, Keep Fit and also Art Therapy which I really loved doing.
  - Coffee and Chat is particularly good opportunity to share information and find solutions to the problems we're all dealing with as someone has either gone through a similar experience or knows of a good resource that helps.
- Not recently, although, I do get a copy of the Nene Valley activities and always look through to see if there's something I fancy doing.
- Yes, I have been supported by NCA for a few years and used the support line when I was having problems with my son not wanting to go to school. They helped me a lot at the time.
- I also have used the Gym membership and that was a great resource when we were allowed to go. I used the swimming pool mainly.
- No, just the Music Groups
- Yes, I received a lot of support when mum was in KGH from the Carer Support Worker based there.
- Yes I have – as I said the Reminiscence group on a Friday, the Dementia Choir, Poetry and Rhymes, and a Bird watching group too.
- I also enrolled my husband and me on an Art course through NCA with Pink Rooster. They sent us wonderful materials and as my husband was a painter before his illness, I was pleased that he has gone back to that as the course inspired him so much.
- The Dementia support groups are helpful and activities like keep fit are welcomed.
- I also attended the 'An Audience with Peter Middleton' which was very interesting and inspiring.
  - He suggested weekend getaways where the Carers can do some activities as a group and the people with dementia can also do activities as a group. I think this would be good for the music group carers to do at some point.

**Evaluation:** Throughout the conversations with each of the 6 participants, the one aspect that struck me most was the fact that they were all confident and happy! The music sessions had impacted positively on them all in different ways and some aspects were similar experiences. Despite quite challenging caring roles, each was enthusiastic, willing to try new things, not concerned / or resigned to having a future where Covid and the like would be in our lives for a long time but confident that they could cope with whatever was thrown at them.

## 7. Young Carers Song-Writing & Performance Sessions ~ Easter 2021

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These workshops were facilitated in physical spaces, observing Covid distancing rules, in two localities – Northampton and Corby – with 19 young carers aged between 8 – 17 years. The sessions were considered to be very successful based on feedback from the young carers themselves as described below:

### Northampton

#### **What was the part of the week you enjoyed the most?**

- 'I like that we recorded it. That was cool.'
- 'I liked being in an environment where everyone knew my situation and they could get me.'
- 'I like that we all wrote the song together and just had lots of fun...and came up with this hilarious story about a dress from Next!'
- 'I enjoyed the social side of it because I don't really have many friends outside.'
- 'I liked writing new songs, recording and singing together.'
- 'I liked filming the song with the headphones on.'
- 'I also liked putting the voices over [our song] and laughing in between.'
- 'I liked recording...we sounded like a bunch of farm animals!'
- 'My favourite part was when we were dancing.'
- 'My favourite thing was probably the dancing part.'

#### **What is something you've done this week that you've never done before?**

- 'When we filmed the video.'
- 'Probably the recording...I've not really done that, I've just done it on my iPad before.'
- 'I've never really worked in a group to write a song...it was really cool to work in a group.'
- 'Recording and the guitar.'
- 'I've never danced to a song that I've made.'
- 'I've never pretended to be a bee!'
- 'I've never recorded myself being a guitar before...and also I haven't really recorded with a small number of people before.'
- 'I've never played the ukulele...and I've never pretended to be a goat!'
- 'I've never written a song!'
- 'I've done lots of things! I've been on stage, singing, dancing...lots of stuff.'

#### **What is something new you've learnt about yourself this week?/What have you learnt about yourself that has surprised you?**

- 'I'm a lot more confident, singing and knowing that I'm alright at it.'
- 'It's my confidence – when I came here, I was really nervous and I didn't really think that I'd make a lot of friends here! So I think it's going to help me with making friends.'
- 'I think I've learnt that I'm a pretty decent singer. It's helped my confidence, I think I'm not really good at things so now there's at least something. It's nice.'
- 'I have a better sense of humour than I thought!'
- 'That I can make up a dance routine in 30 minutes.'

- 'Two things, but the main one is that I like pretending to be a bee! And also that I like filming things.'
- 'I'm good at singing harmonies with higher notes, and that I can hold my laughter back when I need to!'
- 'You did a three part harmony in less than 40 seconds!'
- 'I've realized that I'm not as awkward around people as I thought I was'
- 'I've never played the ukulele or guitar and I can now play both'

## Corby

### What was your favourite part of this week?

- 'I liked making new friends, and also on the first day I remember when we did the vocal things and then the first one I did was with Sophie, thinking how crazy she is – in the nicest way!'
- 'I liked meeting new people and working together to make things with people that we didn't know, and it was really fun.'
- 'I enjoyed the planning and the shooting of the music videos. It was very interesting just being filmed because I've never experienced that before.'
- 'Friends and the making of props.'
- 'I enjoyed on the first day when we got to play all the instruments, especially guitar because I was learning right handed which I'm not used to, so just learning something new.'
- 'Working together with strangers, because remembering back on the first day when I was in a group of strangers but today I've recorded a whole song with all of them who are now my friends.'
- 'I was surprised I was able to be on stage without being nervous.'
- 'The filming day.'

### What is something new you've discovered this week?

#### And a word to describe the week...

- 'I learned how to play the guitar' – Excited
- 'That Amelia and Sophie are to another level crazy!' – Crazy
- 'You can do what you want and people don't give you weird looks.' – Weird
- 'I would say I've learnt how to talk to people better, because I'm not really that good at talking to people, you know with people I don't know.'
- 'I feel refreshed – it's something new to do instead of being inside all day.' – Refreshed
- 'I don't usually write songs...I generally think I'll be bad at it if I try it, but I wasn't really bad at it.' – Happy
- 'I'm happy that I did this. I don't regret it, I'll never regret it.'
- 'I've learnt that many things can mean different things, like loss can mean so many different things. And it's been really fun, I've liked working as a team with everyone and it's been very interesting. And crazy!' – Crazy
- 'I've learnt how quickly I can make friends.'
- 'We made two songs in three days and recorded them all and put drama to it, so it's when you work as a team, how much you can get done!' – Fun

**N.B. Performances of the Young Carers' songs were recorded and uploaded on YouTube and were all excellent.**

## 8. Outcomes & Impacts:

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### Short-Term Snapshot from March 2020 Report:

#### Mental Health and Wellbeing

- The song-writing component has had a tangible therapeutic benefit on the psyche and emotional health of Carers.
- Being with other female Carers, peer to peer, was considered to be really supportive and of value.
- The musicians brought humour into the equation which helped with learning and encouraged open dialogue, which was liberating for the Carers.
- The Carers gained confidence by being challenged to do new things; learnt together.
- They became more aware of their strengths relative to their own goals, rather than their deficiencies relative to problems they faced.

#### Caring for Carers

- All the Carers loved having lunch prepared for them.
- They expressed feelings of being 'pampered' and cared-for themselves.
- The Project Co-ordinator was the 'go to' person to get things done and nothing was sensitively unsolvable with her at the helm!
- The volunteer 'Carers Champions' who supported the groups were particularly helpful and supportive.
- Creating a 'friendly' and 'pleasant' environment where the Carers felt 'welcomed', 'safe' and 'included'.

#### Social Isolation and Loneliness | Social Inclusion

- Being in a group of only women was found to be beneficial to the Carers.
- They expressed being able to speak freely with other female Carers.
- They acknowledged that knowing others were in the same position as them, helped considerably.
- New friendships are being made with trust and relationships building within the groups of Carers.
- There is a difference between solitude and loneliness; many of the Carers craved some solitude [away from the person they cared-for] but also needed time with others to not feel lonely.

**Short Breaks from Caring Role** [Short breaks from the caring role is the number 1 need that Carers report in terms of their ability to continue caring].

- Having this time out from their caring role, doing something they enjoyed and that challenged them also helped them to feel stronger to cope better when they returned home.
- Expressed as being a 'Lifeline' / 'Lifesaver' by several Carers [c.7 across groups]

#### Carer Resilience

- A couple of Carers, in particular, were convinced that if they had not attended these sessions they don't know what they would have done as they were at breaking point and not coping at all.

- New perspectives were gained and solutions found with support received that have contributed to Carers feeling more able to continue caring for a loved one.
- A few Carers couldn't attend all of the sessions, which meant when they did come along, the group had moved forward considerably from when they last attended and they felt 'out of their comfort zone' to re-engage without worrying.

## Medium-Term Transition to Digital Delivery

### Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Ways of Improving Mental Health & Wellbeing experienced through musical pursuits and continued social contact.
- Strategies to reduce stress & anxiety learnt and applied

### Caring for Carers

- Trust and relationship built
- Kindness and empathy within the groups
- Safe space to express emotions
- Refreshments and lunch very much missed!

### Social Isolation and Loneliness | Social Inclusion

- Consistent social contact
- Bonding within the groups
- New friendships made that will continue.
- Social networks broadened

### Short Breaks from Caring Role

- Valued as something to look forward to daily and weekly
- New creative skills learnt and applied
- Social contact
- Time to recharge

### Carer Resilience

- Support within the music groups and through the wider Northamptonshire Carers offer has contributed to helping Carers continue to provide care.

## + 2 new indictors:

### Coping with Caring Role during Covid-19 lockdown

- The music sessions helped Carers by having something to look forward to and a network of new friends to engage and share experiences with for mutual support.

### Online Digital (Zoom) Groups v Face 2 Face Groups – Survey Feedback 2020

This survey was discussed in October 2020, with around 30 Carers within the MyMusic Project across 5 zoom sessions each week

1. Sign & Sing
2. Ukuleles
3. Ukulele Jam Session
4. Songwriting
5. Coffee & Chat

The questions asked and feedback received was as follows:

**1. How have you found virtual groups during the pandemic? – please write down what Carers say**

- *They've been really helpful to stay connected to other people*
- *It's given me something to focus on and an escape for a few hours each week*
- *They give me something to structure my day around during lockdown*
- *It's been a really good chance to learn something new, particularly the ukuleles*
- *They've worked really well over Zoom because you can still see everyone's faces!*

**2. How is it different to meeting face to face? – please write down what Carers say**

- *In some ways, it's given me more confidence to have a go at playing and singing because no one can hear me when I'm on mute!*
- *It can be hard to have a chat with a large group on Zoom but breakout rooms can work well for smaller group chats*
- *You can't play music together in the same way but it's still good fun*

**3. Now that you are attending a group via zoom would you in the post pandemic future...**

- a) Prefer to meet face to face
- b) *Prefer a mixture of online groups and face to face*
- c) Prefer to meet via zoom
- *Obviously face to face groups would be good, but at the moment I wouldn't feel safe coming to a group in person and this is a good substitute*
- *I'd like to meet face to face again and hear what we sound like playing together when it's safe*
- *I've only been able to join in because they're online as I wouldn't normally be able to leave my daughter and come to a physical group*
- *When the groups are online it doesn't matter where you live, so you don't have to travel to get there*
- *I miss seeing people in person so would like to as soon as we can*

**4. How would you rate your IT skills?**

- a) Excellent
- b) Very good
- c) Good
- d) *OK*
- e) Poor
- f) Very poor
- *I've learnt a lot through taking part in these online sessions – before I didn't even know what Zoom was*
- *We've had a go at recording ourselves singing or playing and sending videos/photos to Jess on emails which I hadn't done before*
- *I do feel more confident with IT now but there's lots more to learn!*

**5. Would you like improve your IT skills?**

- a) Yes

b) No

**6. How might you go about this? – please write down what Carers say**

- *It would be really helpful if there was a technology helpline/specific person you could contact or book a slot with when having issues with your phone or computer*
- *A patient and friendly person to guide you through any issues you're having*

**7. Would you access online courses/workshops to help you cope with your caring role?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

**8. Would you access Self-help and Guided Tool Kits online?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
  - *I like the group sessions on Zoom because you get to do them with other people, I don't know if I would use a self-help guide on my own*

**9. Has attending the zoom group helped to...?**

- a) Improve your wellbeing
- b) Maintain your wellbeing
- c) Hasn't helped with wellbeing
  - *I don't know how Carers who haven't been part of something like this have managed through lockdown, it's felt like a lifeline to me*
  - *Obviously it's not the same but you still feel like you're part of something bigger*
  - *It's made me feel less alone*

**10. Any other comments/ideas in relation to online groups from Carers - please write down what Carers say.**

- *It's been really good for Carers who can't leave the house as all of the groups are online*
- *The Zoom groups where there are specific activities are good because then you can be really engaged and focused, and have fun with what you're doing – they work better than the chatty sessions on Zoom which can be harder with too many people.*
- *I like the ukuleles and Sign & Sing groups as they're really interactive*
- *I think there's a lot of Carers out there who would love to do this if they could be encouraged to use Zoom/taught how to use it – lots of people seem to be really anti-technology or afraid of it. It would be good if there was a way to make it seem less scary – it's just talking to people!*

**Analysis:** The Music group Carer participants were the most positive about having to transition to Zoom and other digital platforms compared to other groups surveyed across Northamptonshire Carers service offers. Carers would be receptive to a blended approach of both physical and virtual access to future music initiatives.



## Long-Term Differences/Impacts (Enduring Positive Factors)

### Mental Health & Wellbeing

- It is evident that Carers attending the MyMusic sessions have experienced better mental health and wellbeing as a result, from all the evidence gathered.
- Strategies for maintaining good mental health and wellbeing have been learnt and applied, such as using the breathing exercises, learning new skills and engaging in stimulating activities.
- Peer to peer support has played a vital role in ensuring carers do not feel alone with their problems that could have become overwhelming
- Strategies to reduce stress and anxiety learnt and continued to be applied

### Caring for Carers

- Mutual care and emotional support
- Kindness and empathy amongst the Carers, facilitators, staff and volunteers
- Humour used as an uplifter
- Safe and comfortable space to speak openly
- Realisation that the 'world' cares about Carers

### Social Isolation and Loneliness | Social Inclusion

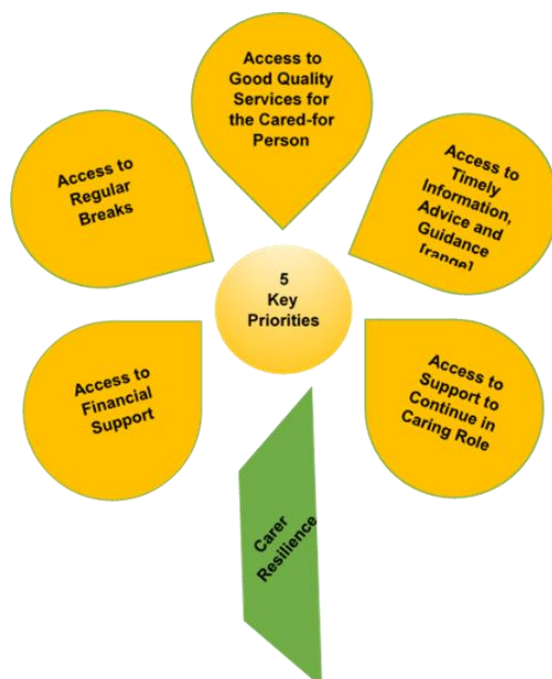
- New friendships and networks of Carers has endured and will continue beyond the life of the project
- Established connections and enduring social networks
- Other activity groups explored to join

### Short Breaks from Caring Role

- Despite lockdowns and many, many additional pressures resulting from this; Carers in the music groups felt they could still get a short break which was valued.

### \*Carer Resilience (For Context)

There are a number of factors that contribute to Carers Resilience depending on individual circumstances and the type of caring role. The top five priorities being:





Participation in MyMusic Northamptonshire sessions provided support towards 3 of these priorities to differing degrees;

### **1. Access to regular short breaks**

There was consensus that the MyMusic Project enabled those participating Carers the opportunity to have a break and have something to look forward to daily and weekly.

### **2. Access to timely Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) – full range as required**

The weekly Coffee and Chat group became a conduit for peer to peer support, referrals and access to quality IAG resources.

### **3. Access to support to continue in caring role**

As the project progressed over the course of the year, many of the participants accessed additional support through Northamptonshire Carers and others; which enabled them to minimise wherever possible the negative impacts of Covid and the lockdowns. The emotional and practical support that Carers in the music project gained was either through a peer to peer approach or through the excellent volunteers who supported the programme and made referrals.

### **Coping with Caring Role during Covid-19 lockdown**

As above. However, both Access to good quality services for the person(s) they care for and Access to Financial Support were severely restricted during Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown periods over the past 18 months.

Care options were greatly reduced through the pandemic, particularly during lockdown periods. Day-care centres have been closed and care packages have been changed, reduced and even cancelled, often without prior consultation or discussion. This has universally had an adverse effect on both Carers and the people they care for, in particular limiting the opportunity for Carers to take a break from their responsibilities and increasing the sense of isolation that both experience. Additionally, access to increased Carers Allowance and other financial benefits has not been in line with the increase in care at home, placing a further burden on Carer and their families. As one Carer explained through a telephone conversation and several of the other Carer participants have echoed *"It has been an absolute lifeline, as everything stopped! Had I not had these music sessions to look forward to - I would have gone barking mad!"*

### **Online Digital (Zoom) Groups v Face 2 Face Groups = Blended Approaches**

- Based on the previous survey feedback and subsequent conversations directly with Carers, they all stated that new IT skills had been learnt and applied. Carers also felt more equipped with the know-how to continue accessing online activities.
- Some Carers actually preferred the online Zoom sessions as they had more time to join in with more activities, which travelling to venues prevented them from doing. Whereas others preferred to meet face2face in groups in the physical space. When asked several Carers suggested they'd like to do either/or possibly both on occasions, according to the time they had available. Many wanted to have access closer to where they lived so they didn't need to travel far and so localities need to be considered when planning physical sessions. A blended approach would satisfy the flexibility and choices of Carers moving forwards.

## 9. Conclusions:

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Overall, the whole MyMusic Northamptonshire project has been incredibly successful despite the restrictions precipitated by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown periods.

The co-ordinator, facilitators and volunteers have all been flexible, adapting and adjusting and applying proactive solutions to the restrictions faced.

For Northamptonshire Carers in particular, this project has enabled a test and learn model in real-time to positively inform future planning and development prospects.

With a substantial evidence base gathered through the wide and varied evaluation framework for this project, it can be determined which elements can be incorporated into 'business as usual' within current resourced delivery, versus which aspects will need further funding and partnerships to enable continuity.

### **Around Specified Impact Target Achievement:**

#### **Carers Wellbeing has Improved.**

- Ways of Improving Mental Health & Wellbeing experienced through musical pursuits and continued social contact.

#### **Carer's feelings of Isolation have Improved.**

- New friendships made amongst the Carers have endured and will continue beyond the life of the project

#### **Increased Social/Support Networks for those taking part.**

- Established connections and enduring social networks

#### **Reduction on anxiety for those taking part.**

- Strategies to reduce stress and anxiety learnt and applied

#### **Development of skills / creative outlet to help manage caring role.**

- New creative skills learnt and applied; such as song-writing, playing musical instruments, signing and singing, making video skits and much more.

#### **Impact of Covid- 19 Isolation minimised**

- The music sessions helped Carers by having something to look forward to and a network of new friends to engage and share experiences with for mutual support.

#### **Increased Digital use & aptitude.**

- New IT skills were learnt and applied, which has enabled the Carers to gain more confidence with getting the best out of Zoom and trying new apps, such as TikTok, WhatsApp and others.

## 10. Recommendations & Opportunities for Future

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To continue the popular elements of this project beyond the life of the Spirit of 2012/Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) grant; the programme would sit well within a few current NCA projects and support service delivery through the following:

- 'Care Together' National Lottery Reaching Communities project
- Social Prescribing
- Short Breaks Offers
- Adult Carer Activity Groups
- Young Carer's group activities
- 'Breathing Space' COPD groups – particularly Voice and Breathing Exercises

Incorporating:

- Song-Writing
- Sign and Sing
- Playing an Instrument:
  - Ukulele
  - Drums
  - Percussion
  - Guitar
  - Piano

Performing and Recording for CD's and for YouTube links through Website and Social Media Promotion.

### **Potential Resources:**

New funding has been identified to investigate further, in addition to those described in Addendum below, such as:

#### **The Golsoncott Foundation**

<http://www.golsoncott.org.uk/>

Grants up to £3,000 for VCSE that aim to bring musical projects to their local communities

#### **Music For All**

<https://www.musicforall.org.uk/apply-for-funding/community-project-funding/>

The funding can be put towards musical instrument costs, workshops/training, using music to break down barriers, providing a variety of educational opportunities as well as helping to find ways to integrate many diverse and minority groups positively into society.

Grants of up to £2,500 are available.

#### **Youth Music**

<https://youthmusic.org.uk/funding>

Young Carers would qualify for either:

Fund A – awards grants of between £2,000 and £30,000 to organisations.

Fund B – awards grants of between £30,001 to £200,000 to organisations.

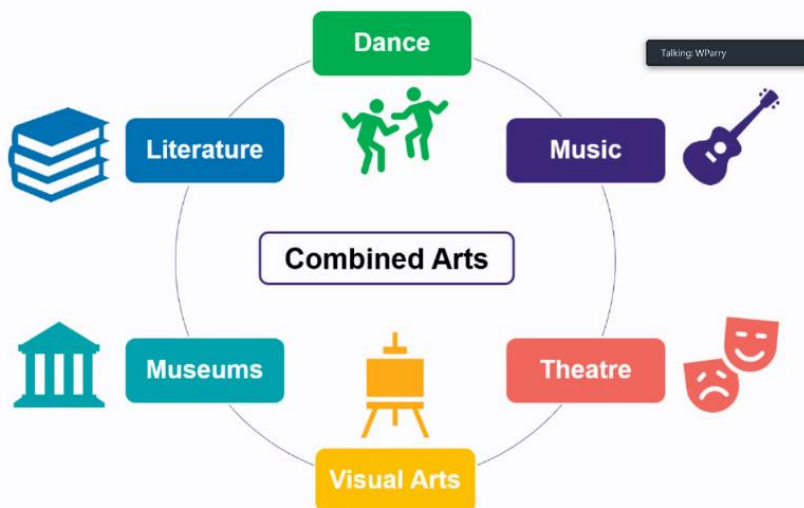
- Music-making and music-making related activities for children and young people (aged 0-25) facing barriers

<https://network.youthmusic.org.uk/i-need-funding>

### Arts Council – Project Grants under 'Let's Create' Strategy 2020-2030

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-lottery-project-grants/applying-national-lottery-project-grants-three-steps>

What can you  
apply for?



£1,000 to £100,000 minimum to maximum grants.

Under £15,000 is a quick access fund. Usually 6 weeks decision turnaround but with Covid delays now extended to 12 weeks. (Match funding for up to £15k is 10% through Cash or In-Kind.)

Over £15,000 usually 12 weeks decision turnaround but with Covid delays now extended to 16 weeks.

Platform for applications is called '**Grantium**' and it's advisable to register in advance of developing a bid, as there is at least a 10 days verification period.

### The Fidelio Trust

<http://www.fideliocharitabletrust.org.uk/index.php>

Grants for those over 21 years towards, for example:

- To be supported for a specially arranged performance
- To receive support for a special publication, musical composition, or work of art

### Further Partnership Potential:

- Northamptonshire Music & Performing Arts Team (NMPAT)
- Pink rooster
- General Practice Alliance (GPA) – Health & Wellbeing Aspects
- ICAN community resilience pillar fit

# ADDENDUM: Recommendations for Continuum [of scalable / fundable] Projects:

