



Oh Yeah Music Centre  
Carers' Music Fund – Final Evaluation Report  
October 2021

Oh Yeah would like to thank Spirit and Apteligen for the advice and support in compiling and shaping this evaluation report.

This report has been brought together by the Oh Yeah team and external support through Shannon O'Neill.

Team: Charlotte Dryden, Caoimhe O'Connell, Paul Kane, Anne McCambridge, Lisa Schofield, Shannon Neill, Charlene Hegarty.

#### Contents:

1. Foreword
2. Introduction
3. Women's Work Project Overview
4. Key Findings and Outcomes
5. Learnings
6. Data evidence
7. Case Studies
8. Recommendations & Feedback from Facilitators

1.

### **Foreword**

The Oh Yeah Music Centre was set up in the belief that music can be a catalyst for change. Our approach is that music can be utilised as a positive force for good. Everything from providing everyone with access, to encouraging participation in music, through to dedicated talent development and skills programmes to celebrating our world-class talent.

As an organisation we have grown so much since we first opened the doors in May 2007. Our outreach programme has been growing in strength, the team has gone from two to ten, we have a trusted and wide pool of musicians, industry and community partners. We have developed many great programmes of inclusion and been developing our skills in delivering projects that can support the work of residential homes for older people, statutory youth organisations, education sector and health.

When we were awarded the Carers Music Fund we were so excited about the opportunity it gave us because it aligned so well with our ambitions to do more work with women and girls through music. The plan was to build it around our Women's Work festival, dedicated to the contribution that women make to music and wider society. This programme really allowed us to build in an outreach element to our work and to ensure that key beneficiaries were carers.

For the project we decided to work with four different cohorts of women and in February 2020 we had just completed our first Cohort in a care home. It had been a great success; the carers formed a choir and recorded a song in the studio. Their loved ones were secure and felt safe in the next room being entertained by musicians. It's a model of delivery we have since been awarded another grant for as we emerge from the pandemic. We have Spirit to thank for helping these people and our organisation to carry on the format beyond this grant.

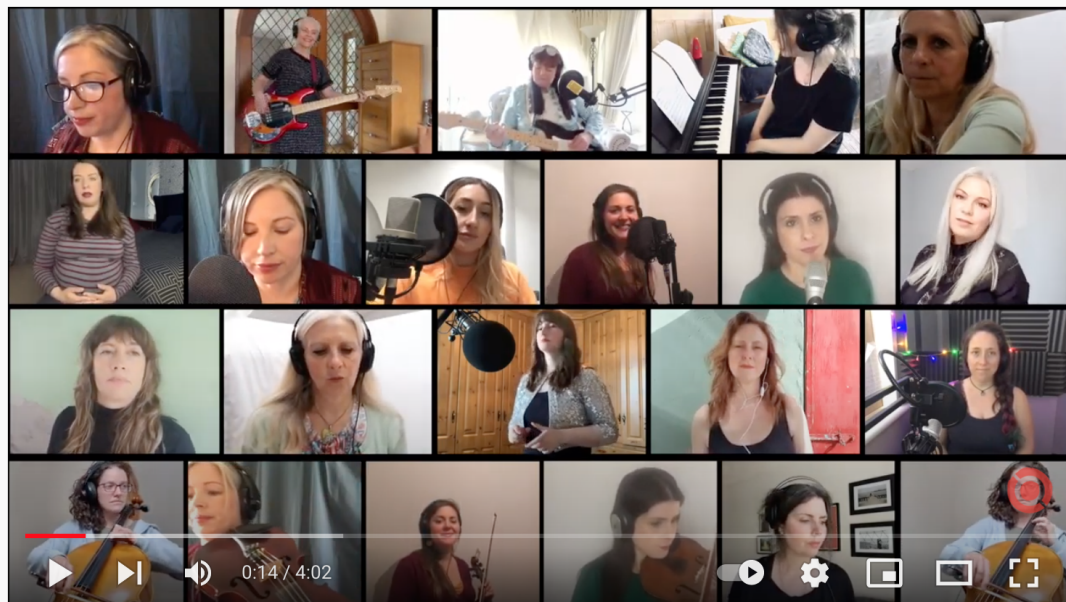
Then the pandemic changed everything. We had to reset and adapt. It wasn't easy. We went online and it worked well, but all the while people were struggling, some dropped out, others were now juggling more caring responsibilities and some just couldn't deal with it all. One of our own staff involved in this project became a carer of a relative with long Covid. So much heartache and stress for all. But in spite of these challenges, many did carry on and we did complete the project. Of course we didn't get all the results we

had hoped for, but it was meaningful, it did make a difference and some solid and long term friendships were formed, women found like-minded souls going through similar struggles and music was made.

The following reports give you an idea of the impact our activities achieved, it also highlights some challenges and outlines the outcomes, some of which are inspiring. It meant so much to the team involved to see an increase in happiness and sense of connection.

Oh Yeah would like to thank all the good people of Spirit. A dedicated, caring team, engaged as funders, helpful, approachable and understanding. Thanks to Apteligen also and of course to all of our team at Oh Yeah, the music facilitators, partners, venues and of course the carers that took part, made music and felt connected.

Charlotte Dryden, Chief Executive, Oh Yeah Music Centre.



Mothers in Music - Push That Knot Away

2.

### **Introduction**

Oh Yeah is Belfast's dedicated music hub, a charity and social enterprise, it was constituted in 2007 in the belief that music is a valuable agent in Northern Ireland, a catalyst that changes lives for the better. It's a resource for music makers, fans, audiences, community and the business of music. Our mission is to promote, develop and strengthen our music story, heritage, potential and talent, and to include and engage all our citizens providing them with access to music.

Our mission statement is 'Open Doors To Music'.

Oh Yeah Music Centre applied to this grant to support its ambitions to build on its work with women and girls through music. Having already built up a track record in outreach and engagement work in Belfast and through establishing a festival dedicated to women. The Oh Yeah felt the timing for this project was perfect.

It's important to note that Oh Yeah was coming at this from the perspective of a music organisation first and foremost. This was new ground for its work, and work with carers was limited. We were not experts in the field of care, nor had we worked with a method of measuring wellbeing through the likes of ONS4.

What the organisation did have was a proven track record in design and delivery of projects of engagement through music, with results and with deadlines and strict budgets. Oh Yeah had a dedicated and experienced team and a pool of great freelancers and facilitators and experts. With the support of Spirit through specially designed questionnaires and regular reports Oh Yeah was able to collect the data and capture outcomes in new ways. As an organisation we learned a lot through this process.

3.

### **Women's Work Project Overview**

Oh Yeah made a decision to work with four different cohorts of a minimum of 15 participants in each group.

The reason being Oh Yeah was keen to see which project might be able to develop beyond the life of the grant. A way to bring in new partners we had not worked with before, develop relationships and build experience within the team in working with carers with different responsibilities.

**Cohort 1:** Older female carers for family living with dementia.

*"The lovely thing is when I go down to the club I get my youth back. I feel I am somebody again. When you come out of work you can feel like a nobody sometimes."*

**Partner:** Newington Day Care Centre. A drop in for carers and cared for. Set up to provide them with activities, time for rest and care.

**Activities:** A carers choir, weekly sessions, song writing and performance at the end of the project. This resulted in the group writing and recording a song in a professional recording studio.

**Cared For:** Activities were gentle performances of music in the next room to the cared for by musicians.

**Key Staff :** - Project Managers: Paul Kane and Anne McCambridge.

**Monitoring, admin and evaluation:** Charlotte Dryden, Caoimhe O'Connell and Shannon O'Neill.

#### **What Worked & Why?**

- Strong planning and communication with partner organization and participants
- Making organic changes to workshops to accommodate the needs of the participants
- Being open and honest and working alongside participants and facilitating rather than leading
- Gaining good PR in print and TV media
- Getting top rate facilitators who bring a huge knowledge base to their work
- Complete buy in from Newington Day Centre
- Having a legacy of photos, performance and a recorded song as a legacy
- Finally being able to run a parallel set of workshops for 'Cared for' which facilitated a relaxed and trouble free set of workshops.

### Challenges & Solutions:

- Some people had personal illness or caring duties to fulfill and could not attend all workshops. We tried to do short recaps at the start of each session to keep people up to speed.
- Often there are natural speakers in all groups, we used subtle methods of engaging with those who were more quiet in a non threatening or judgmental way to gently bring them into conversations
- As we'd worked with this partner for a long time good planning and small tweaks were all that were needed for a smooth running project
- There were some age differences in the group and we were sure to incorporate material to keep everyone engaged. For example we deconstructed music from film scores in recent years. This was in direct response to a young Carer who told us of her fondness for the work of Hans Zimmer, composer.



Strong Women Carers Choir – Newington Day Centre. Jan 2020.



**Cohort 2:** Carers of participants on a project called Black Moon – a social event for adults with learning disabilities.

*'I have been feeling really emotional today – Thank you – I needed that' – participant*

*'It is just so great to have somewhere that we can both go to'*

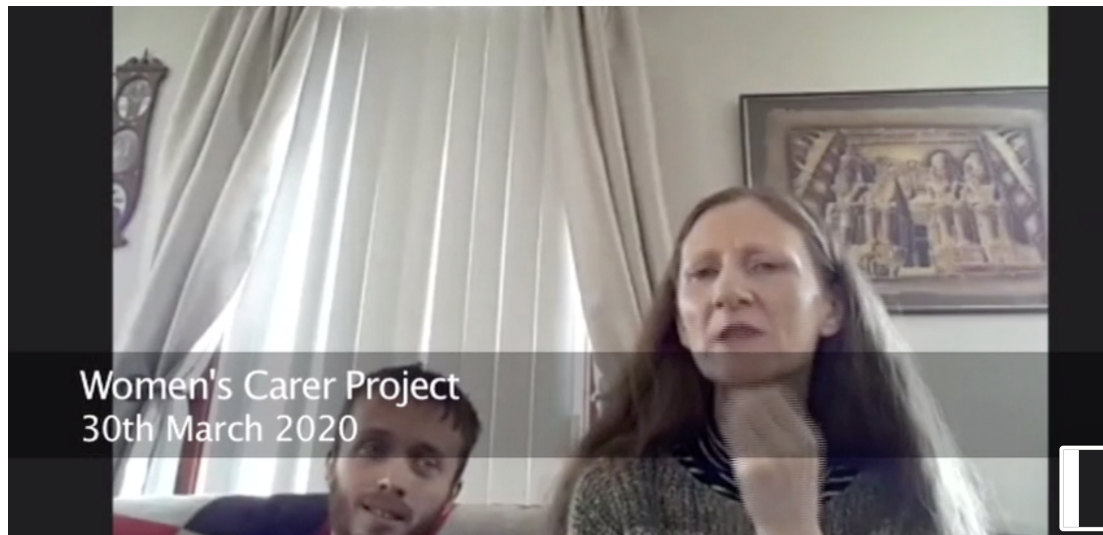
**Partner:** The Black Box, Belfast.

**Activities:** Music making and tasters, singing, guitar, music and fashion show.

**Cared for:** Music, art and craft activities in the next room.

**Key Staff :** - Project Managers: Rachael Campbell Palmer and Seonaid Murray

**Monitoring, admin and evaluation:** Charlotte Dryden, Caoimhe O'Connell and Shannon O'Neill.



Black Box: Video Still from Zoom session between carer and musician from home during lockdown.

**Cohort 3:** Syrian mothers group and their daughters.

*"Roisin and Caoimhe are so nice to all of us and especially with me. They provide a lot of support not only in music but helped and worked on my mental health and trying to help me learn English through music. They helped me learn how to speak to my doctor for my illness. Also Hiba the interpreter was so helpful, she makes the classes very easy for me during the sessions and even at other times. " – participant*

*"The sessions were fantastic and we went back home with lots of fun and happiness. My daughter also likes it very much. even during the online sessions and after I felt happy because I have some nice time for myself to relax without the kids and the house work stress. In addition to that talking to the women in the group and laughing was very beneficial to me."*

**Partner:** Initially Extern – this did not work out as expected, but we did engage with a group of women from an introduction through them.

**Activities:** Building, learning and performing on a Ukulele.

**Cared for:** When this project began it was to take place in a school with children provide for the in the next room. This ended up on zoom and was not in a position to offer any activities for the cared for under lockdown.

**Key Staff :** - Project Managers: Caoimhe O'Connell, Roisn Erskine and Hiba Hussain

**Monitoring, admin and evaluation:** Charlotte Dryden, Caoimhe O'Connell and Shannon O'Neill.

### **What worked and why?**

- Providing Childcare and transport pre-pandemic worked really well.
- Moving online and teaching them how to use Zoom first meant minimal technical issues.
- Simplifying things for teaching online made life easier for everyone. Focusing on one instrument.
- The Whatsapp Group.

### **What didn't and why?**

- Playing music together online - timing, Internet speed, audio quality.
- Not being able to play together in person.
- Breakaway rooms - were a challenge without more than one bilingual person to lead each room.

### **Challenges & Solutions?**

- Finding a suitable location that supported the women in the sensitivities around culture, religion, discrimination and safe guarding. We choose the local integrated primary school.



- Transporting the women to the location each week. Had to book taxis for each lady and their children. Taxi drivers had to communicate through myself, as women spoke no English. This was time consuming but ensured participation.
- COVID – Solution was to move online.



Ukulele Making Session.

#### **Cohort 4:** Mothers In Music.

*"Mothers in music is a truly fantastic program, I'm so proud to have been one of the mentors, I think the world of work is ready to take on a more sophisticated approach to working with mothers and care providers and this type of program is exactly what's needed for progress to make a little speed in the matter." - Katie Melua (multi-platinum, UK best selling female artist)*

*"This past year has been tough and trying in so many ways for so many people; your course helped to keep things grounded in real and practical ways" – Participant.*

**Partner:** This was an Oh Yeah initiative.

**Activities:** Music making, confidence building, performance, re-entry into the music industry with mothers that are musicians, but had parked their music interests and careers to care for young children and family members.

**Cared For:** Childcare and crèche costs covered.

**Key Staff :** - Project Managers: Charlene Hegarty and Fiona O'Kane.

**Monitoring, admin and evaluation:** Charlotte Dryden, Caoimhe O'Connell and Shannon O'Neill.

#### **What Worked and Why?**

- Zoom worked, that virtual environment gave rise to some benefits and created wider access to some mothers based in more remote areas who would not have been able to attend 'in person' due to the time spent on travel to and from.
- A consistent meeting time each week - that allowed each participant to prepare in advance and create that space
- A clear indication of what workshops they were going to take part in allowed them to get prepared physically + mentally
- The blend of activities appeared to work well, everyone got something of value from the mix
- The mindfulness classes worked well - participants learned skills for creating 'space' in otherwise busy environments.

#### **What didn't work and Why?**

- Meeting up in person would have brought added benefits including leaving home, sometimes that can be very hard for these women
- Zoom or other online forums can be difficult for those with anxiety problems so it may have taken others longer than usual to feel 'part of the group'
- In person meet ups would have benefited from in person problem solving which can sometimes be easier 'in person' than online via various software packages (especially for 'home recording')

- **Challenges and solutions?**
- Initially finding a day/time that everyone could commit to over the 12-weeks was very challenging
- We were able to overcome obstacles for some women by providing paid childcare
- Accessing the correct range of talent for our workshops. I really wanted the women to feel 'super served' by high quality mentors. Accessing the right kinds of people was helped along by working in collaboration with others i.e. PRS For Music
- Participating in this scheme from home where there were often children present etc - that provided an added challenge for some of the participants but we remained supportive and accommodating in the face of those challenges. Where a participant missed 'all or part' of a session due to a domestic or childcare issue (sickness) the rest of the group sent them updates via whatsapp so they had the general take away points from each session and felt connected

Mourne Observer

## Local mum takes part in pioneering musical initiative

By Amy Cochrane

amy@mourneobserver.com

A LOCAL woman has taken part in a pioneering 'Mothers in Music' initiative, one of the first of its kind taking place in the UK and Ireland, spearheaded by the Oh Yeah Music Centre in Belfast.

Roisin Erskine, who is originally from Downpatrick but is currently living in Crossgar, joined 16 other women from Northern Ireland, Donegal and Dublin who came together remotely on a weekly basis for a series of workshops from music industry professionals between February and May of this year.

The twelve-week online song writing, recording and performance programme is designed for female musicians with caring responsibilities, addressing the needs of one of the most underrepresented demographics in the music industry.

As part of the 'Mothers in Music' programme, participants learned how to get back into making music, regain their confidence and build a community of musicians that can support, socialise, work and collaborate with

each other.

Roisin (37) told the Mourne Observer that the 'Mothers in Music' programme helped her to develop skills in song writing, home recording and producing, and has given her ideas, tools and inspiration to keep going on her musical journey.

"For me, music is as necessary in my everyday life as food or water," she said.

"Since taking part in 'Mothers in Music', I have transformed a small space in my home into a recording booth, which has made a real difference to my work.

"It means I can prioritise my music, invest in myself and believe that my work is now of value."

The local woman said now that her three-year-old son Egan is growing up, she feels it's more important than ever to "follow my dreams and show him that creativity can be the most fulfilling 'job'".

"After 'Mothers in Music', my musical goals include creating an original set list which I could play at festivals and releasing a five-track meditation EP by the end of the summer," added Roisin.

Participants on the 'Mothers in Music' programme were treated to Zoom song writing sessions during the twelve weeks, supported by PRS For Music, with a number of high profile special guests.

Katie Melua gave a song writing masterclass during the programme, as well as Ivor Novello award winner Michelle Escoffery and award-winning recording engineer and campaigner Olga FitzRoy, who has worked with bands including Coldplay, Foo Fighters and Muse.

Both Michelle and Olga provided some helpful tips and hints to the women participating.

Olga said: "It was a real pleasure to share my ongoing work campaigning for the rights of mothers in the music industry and beyond."

"The 'Mothers in Music' initiative is much-needed, as too many women face additional barriers to their careers when they have children."



One of the participants on the 'Mothers in Music' programme, Roisin Erskine, with her three-year-old son Egan.

Charlene Hegarty, Talent Development Manager at Oh Yeah, said: "Since 2016 Oh Yeah has run the 'Women's Work' festival, which celebrates diversity and addresses issues faced by women in the music industry."

"We were hearing from a lot of women who were asking for more opportunities to participate in music, but who were unable to attend festival events and programmes due to their caring responsibilities."

"Mothers in Music' is our response to this demand and we were thrilled when the Spirit of 2012 fund was able to help us create and deliver a high-level industry project tailored to the needs of mothers."

Charlene added that the participants came from a range of diverse musical backgrounds.

"Some have written and

performed with household names, some have taught and played music for themselves and others are somewhere in-between," she said.

"What they all have in common is that they have had to prioritise their caring responsibilities over their music."

"We are really proud of how the programme has succeeded in helping participants to build their confidence, enhance their creative and technical skills and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness by bringing like-minded people in similar circumstances together to learn and enjoy music."

An online video of 'Mothers in Music' participants covering 'Push that Knot Away', by KT Tunstall, has now been released by Oh Yeah on their YouTube channel.

Local newspaper piece on a Mothers In Music participant.

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### **Key Findings and Outcomes.**

Oh Yeah identified 5 outcomes that it wanted to achieve through the engagement and activities that were designed with the reducing of isolation and loneliness, wellbeing and connection through music being the key delivery output.

- 1) Participants wellbeing has improved
- 2) Participants feelings of isolation have improved
- 3) Increased confidence
- 4) A sense of achievement
- 5) Participants feel more integrated into the community and accepted – applicable to one cohort in particular.

#### **Outcome 1**

Participants wellbeing has improved:

In spite of the obvious issues that the pandemic presented in that it actually enforced greater isolation from others which can impact on wellbeing in such uncertain and scary times but, the connection through zoom and whatsapp really helped boost wellbeing for many of the participants.

Also across all cohorts – this outcome was consistent – the coming together and the engagement through music transcended the fact that each cohort was a very different group with different types of caring responsibilities.

Feedback is reflected in the data entry forms, but combined with feedback, observations from facilitators and ongoing friendships this project successfully improved the wellbeing of participants in three main ways:

- 1) Increased well being during the sessions – a break away from every day stresses and time for themselves
- 2) Having a safe space with likeminded people going through the same issues helped. It gave participants the much needed space to off load, share problems, mutually find solutions or simply forget and enjoy for an hour or two once a week made a significant impact.
- 3) Establishing friendships, a network beyond the project – sharing and talking on WhatsApp.

#### **Outcome 2**

Participants feelings of isolation have improved:

Again the pandemic presented a new set of circumstances and in many ways we, as a society we have never been so isolated physically from others. Again in spite of this and with the limits of what the project could do in mind,

respondents definitely expressed feeling less isolated as a result of these sessions. Again, even if it was for a short period. However the long term outcome was that as above these participants were brought together and became friends or a support network – knowing that they are going through similar issues, being able to ask for help, advice or a chat reduced those feelings.

The Syrian group in particular felt very isolated as newcomers to NI, with language barriers and lack of community support - this coming, really helped them feel like they were not alone.

### **Outcome 3**

Increased confidence

The main evidence here was in the completion of the creative and performance process for this outcome.

Key indicators of this included for all participating groups:

1) all participants either took part tried out a new activity or performed something as part of the project – starting with reluctance, shyness and less confidence, by the end each of them had achieved at least one thing that they felt more comfortable with.

2) By completion of the 12 session, all felt confident speaking within the group and about music making.

3) All the Mothers In Music group reported a renewed and increase in confidence across the 12 sessions. Many have since released music, booked or played gigs and all took part in a performance video. All now meet beyond the project and have started an open mic night – this would never have happened without the project giving them that confidence.

4) Collective support helped improve confidence.

### **Outcome 4**

A sense of achievement

This was an important factor that contributed to improved wellbeing and an increase in confidence but deserves its own outcome due to the nature of the activities.

Each group had a sense of achievement in completing a task, performance, creating something or trying something new.

Building and learning a song on a Ukulele

Songwriting collaboration and workshops

Zoom performance of a KT Tunstall song.

Taster sessions in drums, guitar and singing.

**Outcome 5**

Participants feel more integrated into the community and accepted. This outcome was mostly in relation to the group for Syrian women. The pandemic did not help this situation as everything was driven online and they were unable to mix with the local community as planned. However they did feel more supported by being on the project. They really bonded and trusted the mentors and felt supported enough to reach out when they needed help. However when in sessions they reported how much more difficult it had become communicating with the local community and did not feel as safe as they would have liked when out and about.



## 5.

### Learning

The key challenge through out the most part was the issues surrounding the pandemic. Having to reset, refocus and move online all set the project back at times.

Recruitment and retention was difficult and we learned we needed to include more time developing the partnership element, messaging and communication was crucial. As an arts organisation we were not as experienced in the care sector and could have done more in the preparation stages to get their buy into the project. Other charities were already doing their own programmes; there was no commitment to get involved. Recruitment was down to us and an other arts org and the refugee support group let us down.

More time on planning and partner development was needed, but it was a short time scale we were working with.

Some key learnings we took away:

Data capture/ monitoring

The project managed to get all participants (that fully completed each project) to complete the entry and exit forms

Monitoring the group on zoom is much harder, facilitators noted that observing reactions, reading the mood, atmosphere or engagement was a bit harder, but to tackle that they did have more one to one chats with people which were documented as feedback in note form at the time.

Much of the monitoring was observational and case by case.

The Syrian group were also featured as part of the Spirit carers summit as a case study with detailed interviews organised by key mentor Caoimhe with one of the participants. The project captured mood, feeling and levels of participation as best it could through this process including photos and videos that capture the mood and achievements of the group.

Recruitment and Retention of participants

This is something that every project struggles with and it is one of the key take away learnings of the whole project. The Black Box project struggled to recruit initially, however they did manage to recruit 8 of the women from the Black Moon carers social group they worked with (they had 15 in total, but not all completed both data forms). However these participants engaged from beginning to end of project. They had to switch to zoom early on, but this did not see a drop in the existing numbers. Key takeaway is that timing and pre planning is crucial - trying to recruit in Jan is difficult for any project and when

it comes to engaging carers (when in partnership with another arts group) it might not be enough to simply use social media or posters or even the existing group - partnering with a carers organisation/charity early on may have helped in the recruitment for this. However the success in retaining the group was very positive and testament to how comfortable they felt working the Seonaid from the Black Box. The Syrian project also lost people early on due to commitments they could not get around, then lockdown took hold - however again all 11 of the existing women stayed on board. It was difficult to really evaluate this learning because of covid lockdown.

The Mothers In Music group went from over 30 applicants pre covid to finally getting it off the ground with 17 - what was learned from this is the beginning of some programmes

always see an over subscription, but this is good in some ways because you can reach your target. Retention on this project was really good and 17 remained on the programme to the end. Key take away - time, planning, clear goals and objectives and targets should be set for any partners involved. Keep it interesting and constant communication with participants.

#### Partner Recruitment/Management/Communication

Original partner for the Syrian group let the project organisers down, they really didn't support its efforts and Caoimhe did an amazing job coming up with a new plan, she went above and beyond to get the Syrian group up and running, driving round to houses, organising lifts, a safe meeting place for coffee, all to make sure we had a group to work with in the early stage of the Project.

It is possible the project may have expected more than the partner thought was needed of them and perhaps they only ever felt they needed to provide the project with an avenue to connect, but OY were always very clear with them about what this was. Agreements had not been signed at that point so OY didn't have much pressure to be more supportive.

Working with a good partner is crucial, OY did all we could with Extern but the feeling is like all 3rd sector groups in NI especially those working with refugees and migrants, they are seriously under-resourced.

They introduced OY to the group and then essentially walked away. OY were very disappointed but did end up with a lovely group of women as participants. This particular cohort was in need of 3rd sector or statutory support, OY didn't really get that from the original partner.

#### **Communication with participants**

Communication in any project is key - the main learning is to have clear messages in the recruitment stages and clear and regular contact throughout

the project. Any gap in communication can set you back in terms of momentum built or continued engagement.

#### Zoom fatigue

While two cohorts moved online relatively easily, there was a point when it became clear that zoom fatigue was setting in. Everyone enjoyed it, it definitely made it easier to attend for some participants as they could log straight in from home and overall it worked well, with no other real alternative during lockdown anyway.

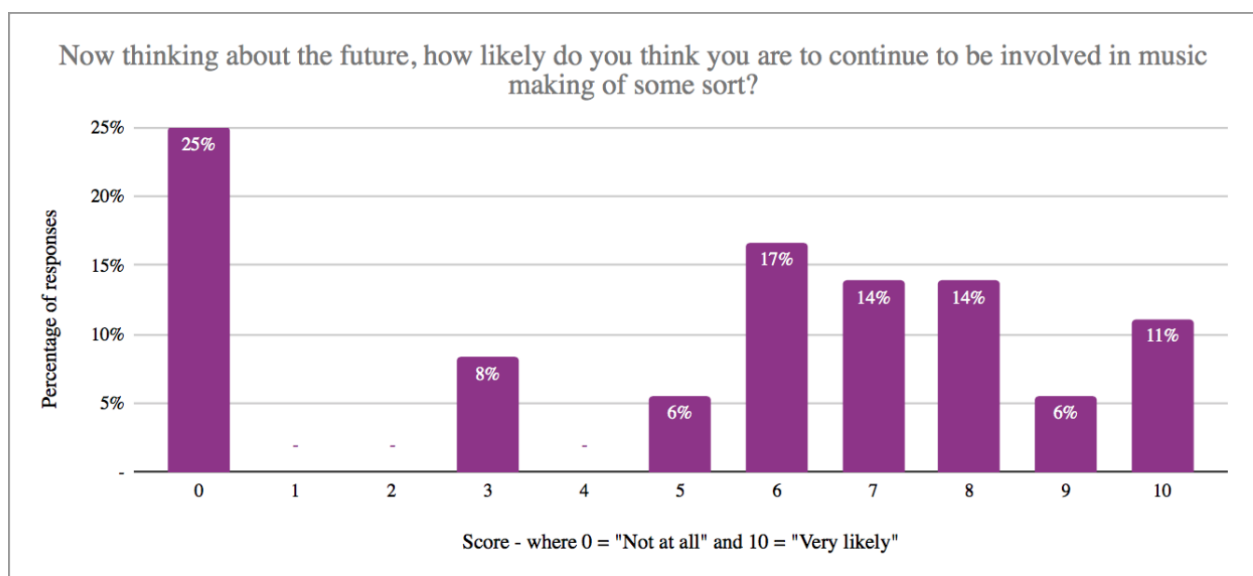
But there is nothing that can compare in person and face to face. Human connection is crucial, set aside all the issues around recruitment or finding a time that suits everyone, the sort of issues with any face to face project, is that it just isn't the same; as one participant put it and several facilitators also made the point. It's also way more difficult to sing or teach music in the same way as you can in person. However OY learned that it can be done, that it is possible and ideally a mix of both going forward would be the ideal scenario - to check in on a regular basis on zoom and then coordinate face to face for music and performance activities.

The 4th cohort - Mothers In Music was all on zoom, but each session was so different and varied with an end result being that there would be a group performance that was shared publicly - all 17 stayed on the programme and while zoom fatigue was discussed, this group really gelled and plan to meet and set up a regular performance group post pandemic. So it is about incentive and constant encouragement too.

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### Data Evidence

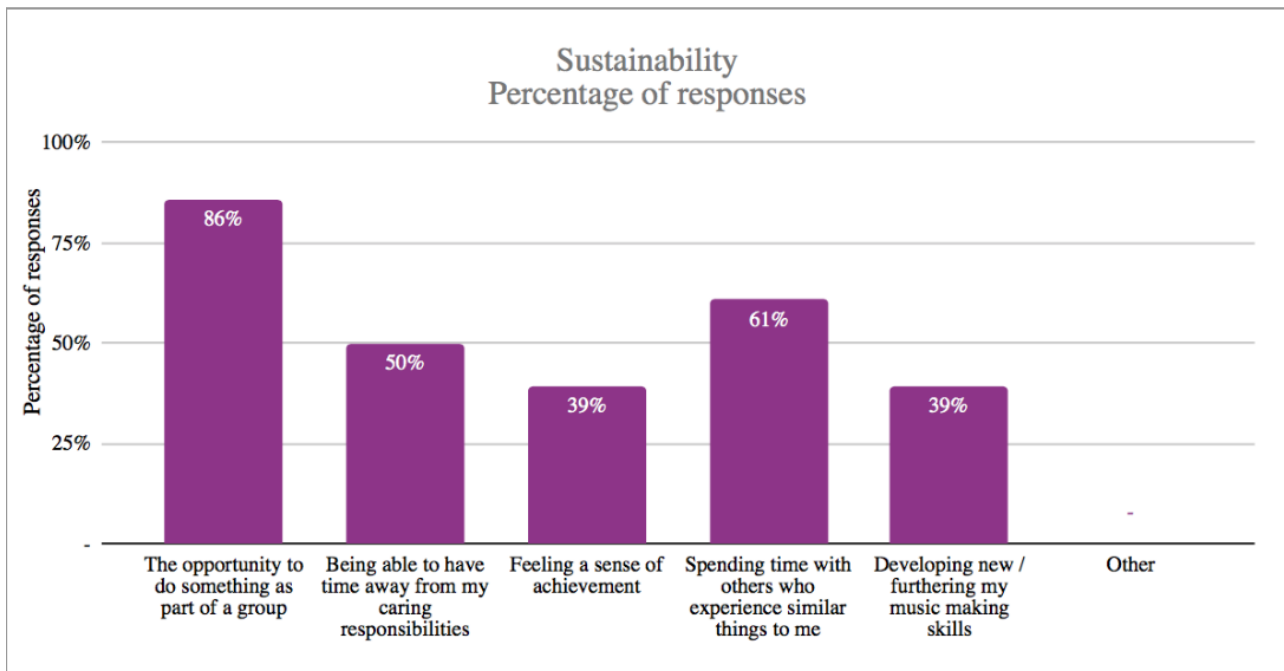
Graph 1. The question below was asked after the projects had ended. 66% of participants said they are likely to take part in making music again of some sort. With the exception of the Mothers In Music cohort, participants (for the most part) were not previously involved with making music and therefore we can see that our work has encouraged them to stay involved in this creative process.



Graph 2. Question: **Thinking about your involvement in this activity, which of the following do you think had the biggest impact on you? (Tick up to 3)**

Participants overwhelmingly valued the opportunity to do something as part of a group with almost 90% selecting this option. It is worth noting that during 2 of the cohorts lockdowns were strict and we were relieved to see that both the Mothers in Music and Syrian Mothers cohorts supported the women in a way that we could never have anticipated.

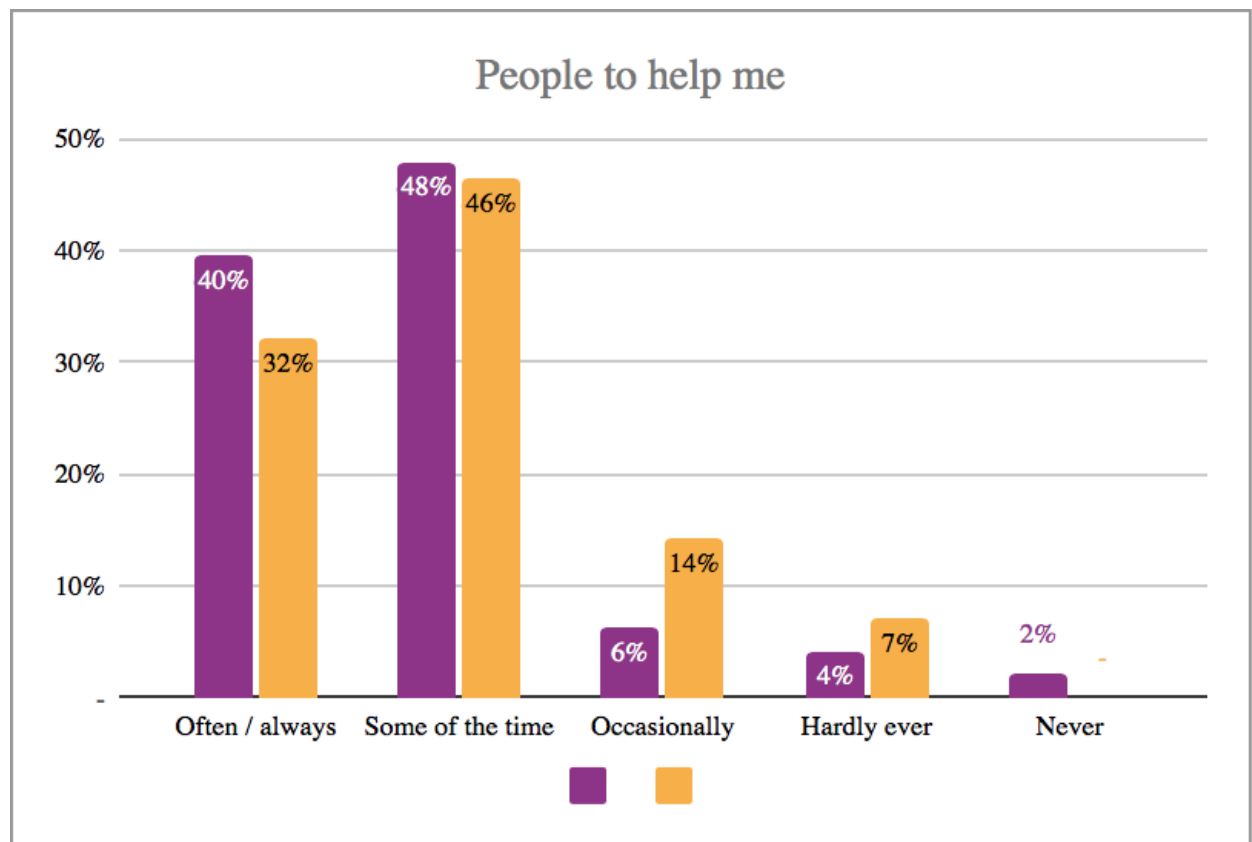
Half of the women felt that having time away from their caring responsibilities impacted them in a big way while over 60% felt that spending time with others who had similar experiences to them were top benefits of the project. It is clear from the data below that the social and emotional support aspect of the groups were what the women felt they got the most benefit from.



Graph 3. A comparison of before and after projects took place.

The question asked was “If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me”

Data from this question can be difficult to analyse as situations changed for many of our participants due to COVID.19 for example; many who had regular or semiregular health visitors or groups to be part of, lost that support. For this reason in some cases participants felt that people helping them was less frequent. *Although no women reported **never receiving help anymore** which was a drop from 2% before the project began.* This is positive and hopefully an impact of our work.

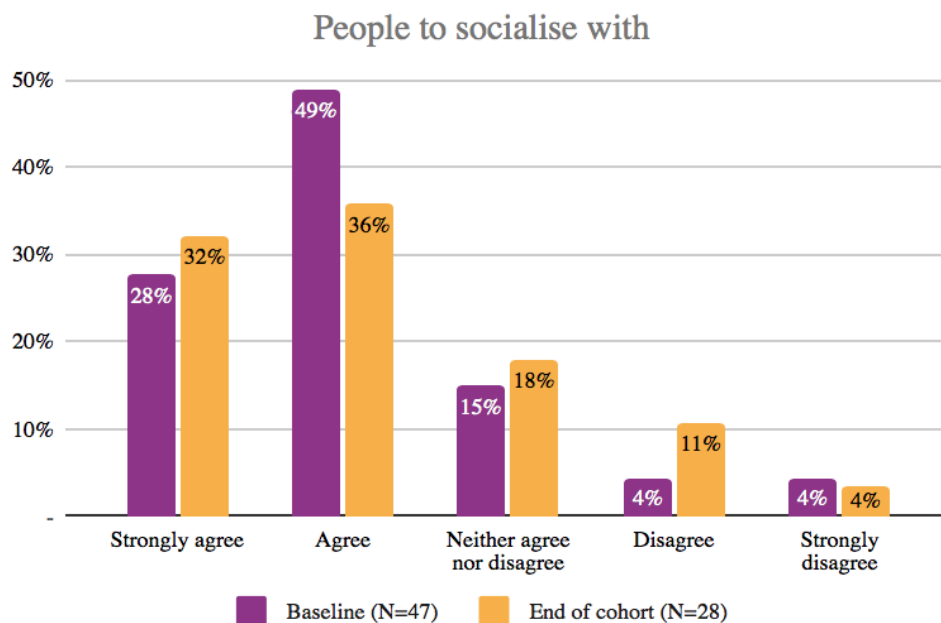




Graph 4. **Question: If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on**

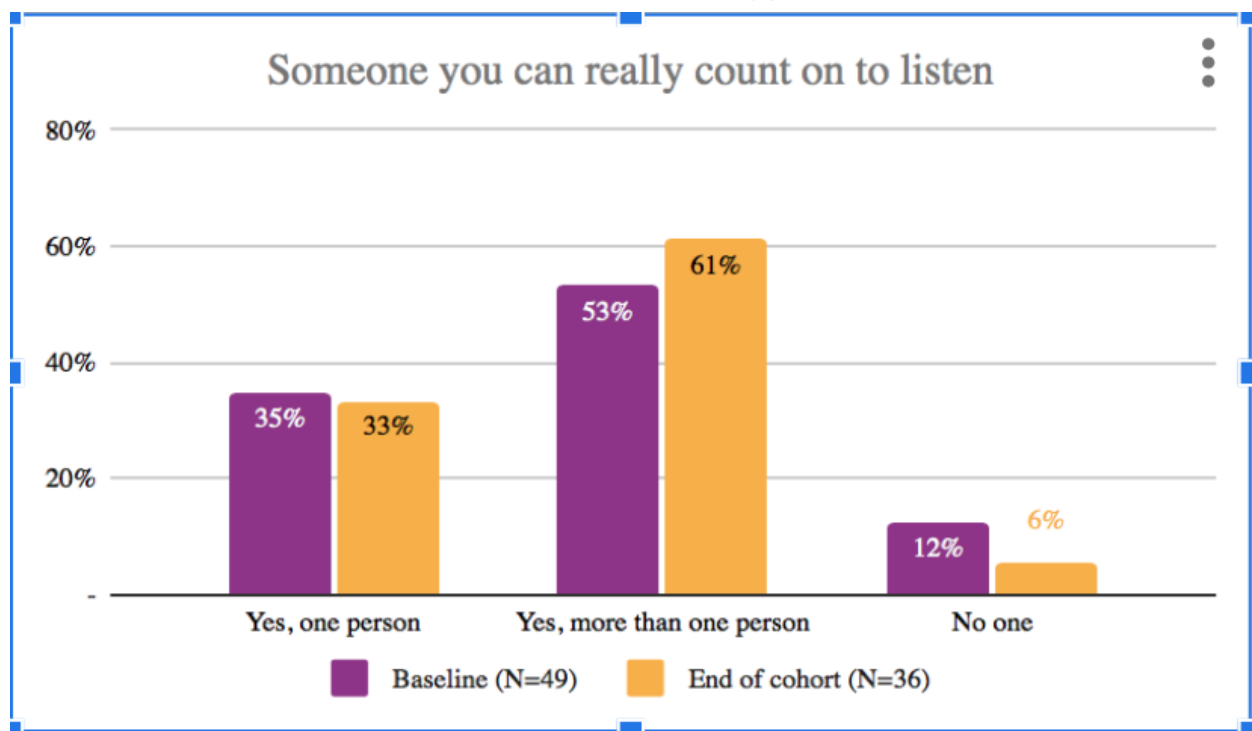
As in graph 3, the outcomes have been affected by COVID and our participants ability to socialise was almost completely removed. When we discussed our results with the participants, some stated that 3 out of 4 of Cohorts completed the Baseline Questionnaires pre March 2020 and again 3 out of 4 Cohorts completed the End Of Cohort questionnaires during the pandemic itself.

Although, there was a slight increase in those that felt strongly that they had people to socialise with.



Graph 5. **Question - Is there anyone who you can really count on to listen to you when you need to talk?**

Overall the women felt that they had more people listening to them after the music project and we saw a decrease in those who felt they had no one listening to them at all. This also matches the qualitative interview data we collected from participants that showed us they all really valued having a chat at either the start or end of each session so that they could chat and catch up. Sometimes these chats were very emotional and heavy and participants were great at listening to each other. Projects such as Mother In Music have a legacy now of staying in touch with each other as a constant source of support and love.



Graph 6. A range of Questions based on the Wellbeing of participants.

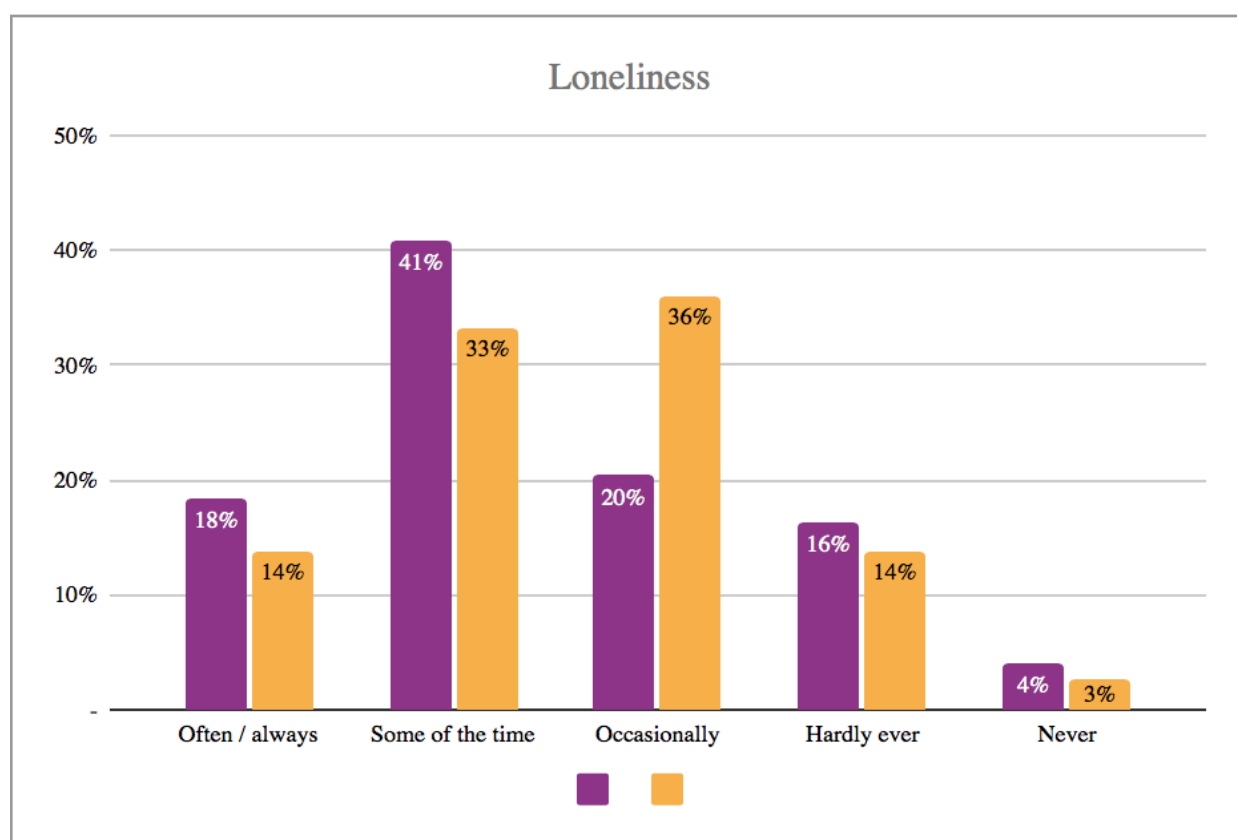
You can see that across all four areas the scores have moved in a positive direction. For example we have seen an increase in satisfaction, feeling worthwhile and happiness and we have seen a decrease in anxiety generally. At a time when many of these emotions were heightened around the country for women and carers, it is our hope that we played a role in easing this for the women we worked with.

Statements	Baseline average score	End of cohort average score
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	5.92	6.84
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	7.23	7.37
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	6.19	7.05
On a scale where 0 is “not at all anxious” and 10 is “completely anxious”, overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.57	4.58

Graph 7. Question - **How often do you feel lonely?**

There are distinctly positive changes when participants answered this question after taking part in the project. Although there was an increase in those who said they felt occasionally lonely, this shift seems to partly have come from those who said previously that they were *always*, *often* or *sometimes* lonely.

Suggesting a reduction in the frequency that loneliness was felt. Again this matches with our interviews and discussions with the women who reported feeling lonely as part of their caring roles and feeling less so when they met others in the same position.



## CASE STUDIES

### Mothers In Music:

“I saw the Mothers in Music scheme advertised and thought the description read like it must have been made for me. I really wanted to devote more time to music, to learn from industry professionals, and to meet a network of like minded people with common interests, who understood the challenges of making music from a mothers perspective.

I moved to the North Coast literally 1 month before lock down started, when our baby was 3 months old. It was an incredibly isolating time. Chris, my husband was working long hours in the NHS all throughout the pandemic. Friends and family were not allowed to visit. All baby groups, creches, means to network or have support were cancelled. Throw in reflux, bad teething and sleep deprivation that went on for 18 months! Mothers in music has been such a source of comradeship and support. I feel like I have made a whole bunch of new friends who are all incredibly talented in their own right.”

### Syrian Mothers

“The needs of this group as refugees in a relatively isolated part of the country were wide-ranging and serious. From our position we aimed to combat loneliness and isolation through music. To participate they would need help with childcare and transport which we provided. When COVID hit their needs changed, they could log in on zoom with children downstairs so our task was to ensure the quality of the session remained high and beneficial. It became apparent that they may now, in fact, be more isolated than ever before, especially with 5 of the ladies living rurally. Our online lessons provided a safe space for discussion and chatting, English lessons, emotional support alongside our Ukulele and song. The project grew into so much more than music lessons.

The project went beyond the ‘one hour a week’, with the Whatsapp group becoming an extension of the sessions. We would use Google Translate and Whatsapp Voiceclips to communicate more easily. We shared family news, good and bad. We discussed COVID restrictions and we developed our friendships over 18 months. The Whatsapp group is still going strong and you can see that we all use the knowledge, skills and relationships formed in our cohort to be there for each other.” – key observations from Caoimhe O’Connell

## Interview with Marie Shearan for Irish News



### BEHIND THE HEADLINES

## Carers making sweet music

**GRAEME COUSINS** finds out about a music project that has given carers and renewed energy to look after loved ones

**T**he power of song has helped to give carers a new lease of life as they enjoy a unique music project.

Marie Shearan, 56, a relation to the poet laureate, is one of those carers whose dedication to a loved one in Marie's care her husband Bernard.

The 69-year-old attends Newington Day Centre in north Belfast once a week when she sings her heart out as part of a choir of carers while her husband is in bed.

hands in the most recent. The Carers' Music Fund project in the day centre is facilitated by musicians from the Oh Yeah music centre in Belfast, who provide sessions every Thursday for a group of women with caring responsibilities far from easy, many of them living with dementia.

Marie said: "The lovely thing is when I go down to the club I get my push back. I feel I am somebody again. When you come out of work you can feel like a nobody sometimes."

Marie goes to work in the Mater Hospital years ago to look after her husband. Her husband had dementia before

I met him but over the years that got progressively worse. He would have kidney trouble as well as a missing heart beat. He has a lot of difficulty getting around.

They would come out to work and spend some time with Bernard because what the use in working your life away. I did it out of love for my husband.

Bernard has been attending Newington three days a week for a number of years while the project which has seen the formation of a new choir has been running for the

past six weeks.

This week the choir will be in the hall at the Oh Yeah music centre to record the 'Friday of Love' song they've called 'Hey Girl'.

Marie said: "All of our ideas came into the group, everybody was given a chance to be included. Two women in the group had a chance to be included. The women on the side of people came out, that happens with music."

Marie has had a love affair with her life. I had a very active life when I was young. I loved dancing and loved music. I remember going to see all the showbands in the Oh Yeah (former dance hall in York Street).

"No dance played the piano and accordion, there was always music in the house."

Marie's first job was on the 'Shankill Road' in the days before the Troubles. You could go all over the place, from the Falls into the Shankill.

"I had that job for 20 years, then I went into the Mater Hospital. I worked there until I was 60."

"I got up one day at the antenatal clinic and I couldn't walk. My knees had gone. I had to be taken out in a wheelchair."

"I'm a strong minded person, I kept myself going. I was

able to pull myself together and keep going."

Some people may have a vision of a carer as a younger, fitter, healthier relative, but that often isn't the case.

Marie will be seen on a waiting list for two years for a carer for the same reason when she decided the role of carer for her husband. It was a role she was accustomed to in her job as she began helping her mother look after her father after he suffered two strokes.

When Bernard got a place at Newington Day Centre, Marie was not there. The retirement just focused on the people being cared for. Margaret McCruden, who runs the centre, was looking for carers for day out. I was getting tired with the club, we'd dance once a month, or every three months. I began to feel my strength to look after Bernard.

"I was so grateful. It's hard working in a hospital in a caring role and then coming home to look after your carer."

She added: "Margaret can't be of any help. She's giving them a

new lease of life."

"She's keeping people out of nursing homes. It's giving people with the same job with dementia a better way to live for, to be part of a big, get something out of life. It's a great thing to do."

"Bernard goes to Newington on Thursday. I go on the Tuesday but I'm a new girl on the Wednesday."

She told the story of a singer she knew called Tony who lost his voice after having a stroke and the wonderful Margaret worked with him. "For a man who is a professional singer losing your voice is a big thing. He said I don't know how I should get round it."

"She heard about Margaret and went down to see her. Margaret got them into the club at Newington. A singing group and Tony started coming round. There was a last line of a song and Tony would come in and sing the

whole song. It was an amazing moment."

"It's a shame of how ordinary people like Margaret can bring something out in people that otherwise couldn't."

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### Caring by numbers

**2016**  
On Year of the Volunteer  
**12**  
Weeks from November to March  
**72**  
% of those in receipt of carers allowance are women  
**8 in 10**  
Carers are socially isolated due to caring responsibilities

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8.

### **Recommendations & Feedback from Facilitators**

- This was a unique opportunity to provide a meaningful programme of workshops to people who are the unsung heroes of the caring profession
- Target more projects at these groups of people, look to build a bigger programme to have more Carers across Belfast and NI involved
- Listen to the needs of these people and provide practical solutions to their caring role
- Use music as part of a mindfulness campaign
- Combine music with other disciplines at one time such as visual arts, poetry, drama
- Place Carers on an equal footing to the Cared for.
- Renewed support for women refugees, especially mothers who are often isolated in their new country but also in the home if they are not working or attending education like other family members.
- Long-term music projects that are on-going.
- Arabic data collection forms and questionnaires.
- It is vital we continue this support for mothers
- Mothers in Music face additional challenges so additional support should be provided
- All mentors are on-board for another round of Mothers In Music and all participants on this pilot scheme are advocates for the power of it's effect