The MusicStart Project

Evaluation of an Isle of Wight Early Years Music Initiative

Stephen Clift, Karen Mackenzie and Fiona Bushell
Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health

The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health is committed to researching the contribution of music and other participative arts activities in promoting the wellbeing and health of individuals and communities.

Current objectives include:

- Undertaking scientific research and evaluation on the potential benefits for wellbeing and health of active engagement in music making.
- Documenting and providing the research evidence base for establishing ‘Singing on Prescription’ for its wellbeing and health benefits
- Working in partnership with health and social care agencies and service users in the South East to promote the role of music and arts in healthcare and health promotion
- Contributing to the wider development of the field of Arts and Health research and practice through membership of national and regional networks, publications and educational activities

The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health is part of Canterbury Christ Church University.

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In association with Healing Arts,
St Mary’s Hospital, Isle of Wight

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This is a summary of the findings from the evaluation of MusicStart undertaken by the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health. Please contact the Centre for a copy of the full evaluation report.
The MusicStart Project was an innovative and ambitious community music initiative, which ran on the Isle of Wight for 15 months between the beginning of January 2005 and the end of March 2006. The broad aims of MusicStart were:

- To make music making and singing part of the everyday creative life of each Island family with members 0-5 years.
- To use music and singing to promote children’s personal learning and development.

The project consisted of a wide range of activities, including the development of a MusicStart Pack distributed by health visitors to families with children 0-2 years across the island; the provision of music with babies groups; and training courses for early years practitioners to support the development of music and singing in early years settings.

The purpose of the evaluation was to establish whether the aims of the MusicStart Project were met.

**Impact of the MusicStart Pack**

Between September 2005 and end of January 2006, all families receiving the pack were invited to participate in a postal survey to give information on their opinion of the pack and how they had used it. Health Visitors were successful in recruiting 154 contacts for the survey, from across the whole island with a minimal number of refusals. Completed questionnaires were returned from 80 families - a 53% response rate. A number of specific questions were asked to assess whether receiving the MusicStart Pack had made a difference to the extent of singing and music making in the family. A central finding was that just under two thirds of respondents said that the pack had helped them to sing and make music with their children more than they might have done without it.

**Impact of Early Years Training**

A second major component of the MusicStart project was to provide training and support in music making for practitioners working in Early Years settings throughout the Isle of Wight. A survey of practitioners attending the training was undertaken over the period January-March 2006. In total, 120 questionnaires were despatched and 64 questionnaires had been returned - 53% response rate.

A major finding was that three quarters of practitioners reported more music making and singing in their setting following the training. Where practitioners reported ‘no change’ in music making, this appeared to reflect the fact that a good range of musical opportunities for children was already being provided.

These findings and considerable testimony from participants in MusicStart, provide clear evidence that the project achieved its aims.
The MusicStart Project was a highly innovative and ambitious community music initiative, which ran on the Isle of Wight for 15 months between the beginning of January 2005 and the end of March 2006. Funding for the project came from Youth Music – a national organisation that aims to promote music making among young people. Youth Music has funded a series of initiatives and research studies aimed at promoting music making in the early years. MusicStart was thus one of a number of related projects concerned with the role and value of music in the lives of very young children.

Aims and Objectives of MusicStart

The aims of MusicStart were:

- To make music making and singing part of the everyday creative life of each Island family with members 0-5 years.
- To use music and singing to promote children’s personal learning and development.

These aims were elaborated into four specific objectives:

- To expand opportunities for children 0-5 years and their parent, family or Carer to benefit from and enjoy music making and singing with particular emphasis on practice in the everyday home environment.
- To train key persons – professionals in early years provision, parents, and musicians in making music and singing so that these become a more significant feature of activities in early years settings.
- To identify the gains acquired by participants from engaging in early years music and singing with particular reference to persons with additional needs and those resident in areas with limited previous access to the arts.
- To identify links between singing and speech and language development and develop programmes of activity which support this.

The funding application to Youth Music also listed ten specific targets the Project aimed to achieve. The most substantial of these targets specified the development and production of a MusicStart Pack that would be distributed by Health Visitors to all families across the Isle of Wight with a child aged from 0-2 years, and the development and delivery of two half-day training sessions for teachers and practitioners from all Early Years settings across the whole of the Isle of Wight.

The MusicStart Team

The MusicStart Team consisted of:

- Maggie O’Connor  Lead Musician
- Marie Sheppard  Assistant Musician
- Cheryl Shepard  Trainee Musician
- Bev Jessup  Speech & Language Specialist
- Erica Myers  Music Link Worker
- Sue Clarke  Music Link Worker
- Niki Leete  Administrator

The work of the Team was supported by an Operational Group consisting of representatives from key agencies in education and health associated with the Project, including SureStart Ryde, the Isle of Wight Early Years Unit, Barton Children’s Centre, and the Health Visitor Team

The MusicStart Programme

The MusicStart Project involved a wide variety of inter-related activities designed to achieve its overall aims.

Team Training

Before launching the project, the newly formed MusicStart team took part in a training programme devised by Maggie O’Connor with input from team
members and additional specialists on a range of issues central to the project e.g. music and young children, key guidance documents on early years provision, music and language development, additional needs policies, and child protection issues. The director of the external evaluation also had an input into the programme. The training period was significant in building a common understanding in the team, and in planning the details of the project’s programme and delivery. Tangible results from this initial team building and planning period were: a project logo, a project song, the MusicStart Pack, a launch event and agreement on monitoring arrangements.

**The MusicStart Pack**

The MusicStart Pack was carefully designed and created by the team and consisted of: a song booklet and accompanying CD; two simple instruments; two finger puppets, and activity cards associated with different rooms in the home. The music on the CD was deliberately intended to sound ordinary and to cover songs and activities for everyday activities so that families would use the ideas in their daily routine rather than substitute the CD for live singing. The booklet and activity cards included signs to encourage parents to use these with specific songs. Two and a half thousand copies of the Pack were produced. Health Visitors delivered these free of charge to families with children up to the age of two across the whole of the Isle of Wight. They were also available to families through members of the Team.

**Music with Baby Groups**

Weekly Music with Baby Groups were set up in Ryde and Newport by the musicians in the MusicStart team.

**Music Link Workers**

Two Music Link workers were based in Ryde and Newport as areas of particular social need. They visited families with young children, parent and toddler groups, health clinics, Home Start groups and Opportunity Groups in targeted areas and actively encouraged parents to sing and make music with their babies, and to attend baby music groups.

**Training for Early Years Practitioners**

In order to promote music making and singing with 3-5 year olds on the island, ten pairs of half-day workshops were organised for early years practitioners by the Lead Musician and the Language Specialist. Cover for attendance was provided which ensured that every early years setting and reception class had an equal opportunity to send two members of staff. These workshops took place at 5 different settings across the island to facilitate ease of attendance.

**Children with Additional Needs**

Musicians from the team also went into 10 settings (8 Early Years and 2 drop ins for parent and toddlers) that included children with additional needs. The Musicians led four successive weekly music-making sessions and interacted informally with all the children during their free play.

**Music Motivators**

The early years settings are divided into 10 cluster groups and one practitioner from each cluster group was identified during the course of the training as having particular enthusiasm for music-making. These 10 Music Motivators received additional training and will continue to inspire music-making in the settings in their cluster and support their colleagues if they need further inspiration.

**Training for Childminders**

Childminders’ training sessions were provided which gave practical experience of various ideas for making props and songs sacks to go with the songs. Parents too were offered follow up training sessions.

**Music Fun Days**

Sessions at different venues across the island were held during the course of the project to enable families to make music together. Two hundred and fifty families attended a final live music event, which included local musicians. Children had the opportunity to play and make musical instruments and to paint while listening to live music. Publicity for on-going music groups was available at this event.
The external evaluation of the MusicStart Project was provided by the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, Canterbury Christ Church University. A substantial protocol was prepared for the evaluation detailing the methods and data-gathering instruments to be used and the procedures to be followed in providing information to all potential participants and gaining informed consent. Approval for the evaluation was given by the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Local Research Ethics Committee.

The purpose of the evaluation was to establish whether the aims, objectives and targets of the MusicStart Project were met. The evaluation also sought to identify factors facilitating or presenting obstacles to their achievement, and insights into the factors which explain variations in the projects impact on family music-making or musical activities within early years settings.

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The evaluation team worked closely with MusicStart in the design of instruments to gain feedback from participants of groups and training sessions and for surveys to assess the impact of the MusicStart Pack on music making in families and the effects of the early years training sessions on musical activities in playgroup and school settings.

The MusicStart Administrator was also actively involved in monitoring the details of the project’s activities in order to make a return to Youth Music at the end of initiative.

A number of field visits were made to the Isle of Wight to observe training sessions and musical activities in early years settings, and to interview families about the project. Telephone contact took place on a regular basis with MusicStart team members, and telephone interviews were employed to gain the opinions of Health Visitors and the Operational Group on the impact of the initiative.

It is important to note that constraints of time and resources as well as data protection restrictions on information sharing, meant that it was not possible to undertake pre-intervention assessments of music-making in home and early years settings, in order to directly assess the impact of the MusicStart Project. Nor, given the island-wide and inclusive character of the initiative, was it possible to establish non-intervention comparison groups. Information was gathered, however, to allow for tentative inferences on the effects of key components of the MusicStart initiative within families (the MusicStart Pack, the Music with Babies sessions and the MusicLink Workers) and within early years settings (the training workshops and music sessions lead by musicians in selected settings).

The MusicStart team carefully monitored all its activities, while the Evaluation Team focused on a number of key interventions. In this document, the most significant findings from the evaluation process are presented in relation to the two major aims of the project.

The first aim was to encourage music making and singing within families across the island, and the second was to raise awareness of the role of music and singing in promoting the development and learning of young children. MusicStart pursued these aims in a wide variety of ways as indicated above.

The evaluation focused on the elements of the project given in the table on page 7, which also lists the methods adopted to assess their impacts.
Survey of Families receiving the MusicStart Pack

The Evaluation Team considered it important to gather information directly from families receiving the MusicStart Pack, to determine whether it had made the impact on family music making and singing which the project sought to achieve.

From the beginning of September 2005 until the end of January 2006, members of the health visiting team agreed to invite all families receiving the pack to participate in a postal survey to give information on their opinion of the pack and how they had used it.

Health Visitors were successful in recruiting 154 contacts for the survey, from across the whole island with a minimal number of refusals. Two questionnaires were sent to each household with a request for both parents to complete the questionnaire independently if they wished.

Completed questionnaires were returned from 80 families (72 mothers 2 of whom were also childminders, 7 mother-father couples, and 1 father). The response rate for was thus 53% - a reasonable figure for a postal survey, but disappointing given the personal invitation to participate. Results reported below are based on the information provided by mothers (n=79) responding to the survey.

A number of specific questions were asked to assess whether receiving the MusicStart Pack had made a difference to the extent of singing and music making in the family. These questions were of greatest relevance to assessing the extent to which the Project achieved its central aims of encouraging greater music making in families on the Isle of Wight. The key findings here were:

- Just under two thirds of respondents said that the pack had helped them to sing and make music with their children more than they might have done without it.

- Just under a fifth of respondents said that before receiving the pack they ‘hadn’t thought about the benefits’ of music and singing, and ‘the pack has made me think about the value of music more.’ Just over half of mothers said they had been aware of the value of music but that ‘receiving the pack has strengthened my views.’

- 29 mothers (36.7%) were taking children under three to a local music group, and of these, 11 mothers (37.9%) said that receiving the pack had encouraged them to attend (13.9% of the total sample).

- Just under 70% of respondents said they would have been happy to purchase the MusicStart Pack. The most frequently suggested figure they were prepared to pay was £5.

The questionnaire also included a range of questions to discover the extent to which music making and singing was an already an important part of family life prior to receiving pack. It was important to ask such questions as it was assumed that the pack would have more impact within families who were not already actively making music or singing with their children. Questions were also asked about the use of the pack and general attitudes towards the value of music in the family and for young children.

Key findings on these issues were:

- For just over a third of families, one or both parents or older children were involved in musical activities as part of their work or in their leisure time or played musical instruments.

- Most families reported having materials in the home similar to those included in the MusicStart Pack prior to receiving it – particularly children’s books with songs and nursery rhymes and tapes or CDs of children’s songs, but approximately half of families did not have musical instruments appropriate for children or fingers puppets or other toys to
accompany singing.

- A large majority of families reported using the material included in the MusicStart Pack either ‘a few times’ or ‘a great deal’ but over a quarter had not used the finger puppets and just over a third had not accompanied singing with hand signs or tried the activities given on the cards in the Pack.

- Most respondents reported using music or singing at least ‘sometimes’ during bath times, nappy changing and while travelling, but fewer reported using music at bedtimes, while out walking and at meal times.

- A very large majority of mothers were clear that music and singing had ‘definite’ benefits for their children and for themselves, as a source of fun, as a stimulus to developing their children’s interest in music and in helping with their child’s language development. A majority of mothers also felt that music and singing ‘definitely’ helped with relationships between children and helped them feel a closer bond with their child. However, only half felt that music ‘definitely’ helped in coping with the stresses of childcare, and less than half felt it helped them feel more confident in relating to their child. Less than a fifth felt that music and singing contributed to their child’s social development.

It was expected that respondents’ answers to questions about materials already in the home, and the place of music in family life, would influence the impact of receiving the pack. Evidence from the survey supported these assumptions:

- The extent to which families possessed musical materials prior to receiving the pack varied substantially, with some families having no books, CDs or instruments and others having a great deal. Analysis revealed that the pack had more influence on music making for those families with fewer resources. For example, respondents who reported they had no finger puppets or books of children’s songs / nursery rhymes, were significantly more likely to say that they were singing more than they would have done without the Pack.

- Families also varied in the extent to which they used music and singing in a range of daily routine activities. In some families, singing was a regular feature of family life occurring frequently across a range of different activities throughout the day, whereas in others singing was not a significant aspect of family life.

Analysis showed, however, that receiving the Pack increased singing in families that were less likely to be singing regularly, and led respondents to think about the benefits of music and singing which they hadn’t considered previously.

The questionnaire used in the survey of families also included open questions to allow respondents to express their opinions of the Pack and the MusicStart Project as a whole. Three quarters of respondents made evaluative comments on the Pack, and of these a third were extremely positive with no reservations expressed or suggestions for improvements given:

Excellently presented, gratefully received! A great idea – I’ve learned so many new songs and had my memory refreshed with others. A really good way to develop a child’s love of music during the crucial early years giving lifelong benefit. Needs to be distributed as widely as possible.

I think the pack is excellent. It’s great to hear new songs and other ideas for introducing music to our children.

I found the pack to be of great benefit, my daughter really responds to the instruments. The fact that it’s free is wonderful, with that in mind, I cannot see there is any room for improvement.

The remaining two thirds of respondents were generally positive, but included critical comments or constructive suggestions about one or more elements of the Pack:

I feel that the pack has been very good. My son has particularly enjoyed using the instruments. I would have liked more songs also as I didn’t have ready access to a CD player. A guide to some of the tunes that accompany the songs.
I think the pack is a brilliant exciting way to introduce music from such a young age. It would have been a bit better if the finger puppets were brighter. But we have all enjoyed it so thank you!

The CD was the feature of the Pack that most commonly elicited specific comments, both critical and appreciative.

I found the CD awful, even my 8-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son agree with me.

The children’s voices on the CD are a bit irritating! I tended to replay the songs sung by the groups most and never listened to the household sounds.

My 3yr old loves the CD and it is nice to have the children singing on the CD as well as adults.

It’s brilliant, my baby was only 4 weeks when I got it but she took to it straightaway. She loves hearing real voices singing, the kids especially, but also the background noises.

Health Visitors views of the MusicStart Project

As noted above, the health visitor team on the Isle of Wight provided significant support for the MusicStart Project in delivering the MusicStart Pack to families across the island, acting as advocates for the significance of music making and singing for the well-being of families and as a stimulus for the development of babies and young children. It was considered important to gain feedback from health visitors on family reactions to receiving the pack and their general views on the value and impact of the initiative.

Fifteen health visitors (out of a team of 25) were interviewed by telephone between the end of July 2005 and early February 2006.

The Pack was well received by health visitors and they reported that it was widely welcomed by families. Health visitors thought it was well produced and valuable as a tool to aid child development and help mothers and fathers to interact, play and communicate better with their child. Health visitors felt that the Pack had encouraged parents to join music groups and that such group could help to reduce isolation, provide support and increase social capital.

Some observations by a number of health visitors were of particular interest. Three health visitors, for example, referred to the involvement of fathers in music making and singing in the family – and the value of the MusicStart Pack in giving them ‘something to do’:

Talking to dads about the importance of how communication with the child is very important in their relationship although it might feel a bit strange, because some dads feel really uncomfortable with that. It’s almost like you’re giving them something to do, a way to move that forward. I like that very much. And I’ve just sort of integrated it into my work.

Health visitors also highlighted the fact that some mums did not know the songs on the CD and they felt the Pack was a good tool for parent education and helped parents who may not have had much experience of play themselves as children:

I’m a great learning through play person and the thing I notice quite a bit is that we’ve got parents who haven’t actually played themselves, because they haven’t played, when it comes to playing with their children it’s difficult, there’s an element of maybe they are catching up with some of the play that they didn’t have.

Health visitors were also very supportive of the idea of music groups for parents and babies. The groups were believed to provide support, reduce isolation and help less motivated parents:

Where the mums quite often are isolated and maybe getting a little postnatal depression with the reality of having a baby, the music baby groups are good for the babies but also good for the mums and parents and being able to get out and meet with other parents.
The positive support for the whole MusicStart initiative is well summed up in the following comment from one health visitor:

**A very good project and it’s been well received and the mums and babies have totally enjoyed it and I just hope it continues really. It’s so nice to have something positive, something enjoyable and something which is educational for the parents that they can join in and learn something to do with their children... Mums of all levels can relate to music.**

**Music with Babies Programme**

An important part of the MusicStart Project was the setting up of two programmes of Music with Babies sessions in Ryde and Newport to provide families in those areas with additional opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in making music and singing with their young children. In total, 88 families enrolled on the Music with Babies programme, and 53 adults (mainly mothers, but a few fathers and a grandmother) completed feedback sheets (a satisfactory 60% response rate).

Feedback was overwhelmingly and consistently positive. Parents were highly appreciative of the sessions themselves and provided considerable evidence of the wider impact that attending the groups had on their use of music and singing throughout the week in different settings and in supporting routine activities (meal times, nappy changing etc.).

**Made me more aware of using singing and rhythm as a way to keep C amused**

**The sessions have given me more confidence to sing to M and ideas of how to entertain him when at home**

**I use singing now when doing things like getting her dressed, in the buggy and at meal times to make it more interesting and she associates certain songs with what we do.**

Feedback also highlighted the perceived value of music and singing in improving the quality of interaction between parents and children, in offering pleasurable musical experiences for their babies, in providing a resource in dealing more effectively with potentially stressful routine activities with babies, and in stimulating their cognitive, linguistic and social development.

**M will generally stop fussing when I sing to him, so singing is a useful ploy to distract him when he is bored. He likes ‘action’ songs the best particularly those when I can touch parts of his body or swing him around**

**As long as it is not too overwhelming, he loves it, he smiles, babbles and is extremely content!**

**As soon as I start he smiles and his whole face lights up. He is also starting to join in with the actions and just starting to try and sing some of the songs himself**

**Better and better every week. I feel he is better than the last week in listening and dancing and stopping when the music stops**

Feedback on the programmes from the lead musicians was also important in highlighting the extent of participation of families for whom English was not their first language. Some non-native English speakers also gave direct feedback on the Music with Babies sessions and were very appreciative of their value in introducing their children to the language through the medium of song:

**Now I know English songs...He can speaking and singing in English language what is very good for me and for B before she will start her school**

**I usually singing the Music Start songs outside because I’m a forghner (sic) and I don’t know lots of songs**

Of the 53 respondents giving feedback on the Music with Babies sessions, 39 commented on the Music Start Pack. The rest had not received a copy of the Pack at the time of giving feedback, but most acknowledged that they would receive a copy shortly. Comments on the Pack were consistently positive, with the CD coming in for particular praise:
Great – R loved it! So nice to have a CD of the music to do at home when the group is closed for summer.

I have found the whole project brilliant for M. He has show great interest and recognition of the music/lyrics. The more he takes part, the more enjoyment and feedback we get.

Very useful, the CD allows us to sing along at home, the instruments help M to recognise different sounds, textures – and the bag itself is handy for carrying toys around!!

Very good. I use the CD all the time. L and her Grandma do all the songs together once a week and I use it to calm her down.

The Contribution of Music Link Workers

In addition to developing and distributing the MusicStart Pack, and organising Music with Babies sessions, the MusicStart Project also provided additional encouragement for music-making and singing in Ryde and Newport (with a focus on Barton) through their Music Link Workers. At the outset of the project, ambitious targets were set for the Music Link Workers to make contact with families in Ryde and Barton expecting a new baby and to make up to three visits over the course of the project to encourage and support music and singing during the first year of the baby’s life.

An account of the contribution of the Family Link Workers to the Project is based on a series of six telephone interviews conducted with both workers over the lifetime of the Project. The interviews highlighted a number of key issues:

I think it was going all very well, the visits that I’m making are successful, people are very keen on the project, meeting some very interesting people, learning also about what people do with their music and how they sing to their children, which I’m noting down, but we have come up against a bit of a crisis, I think, in these last couple of weeks in as much as we are not getting any referrals. That, obviously, has changed the whole thing.

(Erica Myers)

Feedback from both Music Link Workers suggested that these problems had arisen because insufficient time had been given in the early stage of planning the Project in establishing inter-professional collaboration and robust referral systems. However, these difficulties were quickly overcome as a result of the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of the Music Link Workers in proactively seeking alternative routes for making contact with families to engage them with the Project. These included visits to parent and toddler groups, health clinics, and Home Start groups to talk about the project, encourage music making, and arrange home visits, if requested. Sue Clark summed this process up during the final reflective interview in the following way:

As the Music Link Worker job on the plan, it hasn’t gone to plan, but I feel Erica and I have definitely done our best to make the most of it, if you see what I mean. We’ve done lots of things in order to generate referrals ourselves via Parent/Toddler groups and Health Visitor groups, Midwife groups, and all sorts of things we’ve done, and also we’ve done other things as well, so we’ve actually visited Parent/Toddler groups, and chatted about ways of doing a Circle Time and all that sort of thing, so we’ve done lots of other things as well. I feel we’ve made the most of the job that we could have done in the circumstances. Had things been different, we’d have spent all of our time visiting which would have been brilliant, but we tried to get to all the people anyway by other means. In a way I think they’ve been good means because, as I think we’ve found some of the parents that would really benefit, in some of the places that we weren’t expecting to be, so that’s been quite nice. For instance, the Home Start groups (Sue Clark)
The Music Link Workers’ wide experience of meeting parents and visiting homes over the course of the Project highlighted a number of important issues. Firstly, approximately three-quarters of all families contacted were interested in the Project, but the remaining quarter appeared to be less enthusiastic:

And, again, the actual visits themselves are, I would say, 75% of people really enjoying it and taking it on board, 25% perhaps aren’t terribly interested but you don’t know, and I think something that I’ve learnt is that you walk away thinking, that’s not going to go anywhere, and then they’ll suddenly appear at a music group, or when I go back the second time they’ll have done all the things. So you can’t assume! Yes, people are generally very interested and loving it. (Erica Myers)

But interestingly, her account indicates that an initial reticence or apparent lack of interest could be misleading. Sue Clark also highlighted that a majority of families visited appeared to be already aware of the value of music and singing with little children:

I would say two-thirds of them are, what I call, doing it, and a lot of them are already musical, very musical some of them, I have been to somebody who sings in all the nightclubs on the island and her husband is a DJ and also plays different instruments. But you do find, and a lot of the people we’ve been to, and this is Erica as well, have been very musical and that’s why I think we are getting them as referrals because they see the need to do the right thing for their babies for them to become musical and they want to know any input they can get. Although they’re musical themselves they want to do it the right way for their babies which is lovely, I think it’s absolutely lovely. (Sue Clark)

However, the Music Link Workers also met with parents who were very lacking in confidence about music and singing:

You do get quite a thread of people who say, oh no I sing terrible, I can’t sing, oh no I would feel stupid, I feel really stupid. And sometimes, it’s funny because they’re not the ones you would expect to say that, they seem a very confident person, quite able and everything, and they say, I would feel daft. And that surprises me sometimes, in the people

One specific observation of some significance is the interest both Music Link Workers found among fathers. This is something also commented on by some of the health visitors as noted above:

Another thing that I’ve noticed, the dads are quite interested, because it’s music, (…) when the dads have been about they’ve been quite keen to listen in to the child, some of them have perhaps come in from another room and I didn’t know they were there, dad came home from work and he was very interested and you get the feeling that because it’s music the dads feel more that they can be part of it where, for instance, with a health visitor sitting there talking about, I don’t know, how to cope with the umbilical cord or whatever, they may not feel that was their department. (Sue Clark)

The accounts provided by the MusicLink Workers were also invaluable for their insights into the difficult challenges facing some mothers, and the ways in which contact with the MusicStart Project was of value to them. Here are just three examples provided by Erica Myers:

... a lady who’s obviously going through some domestic violence difficulties at the moment and so she is in a hostel and I meet her elsewhere. She’s expecting another baby and she’s got a little one as well, but I am trying to go back more frequently at the moment because she seems to really enjoy this and she’s going to music groups as well.

... another lady who, she and her family have English as a second language, and she is very, very isolated and, again, the children are older but she’s very, very keen that these children learn English songs.

... a lady who I saw when she was pregnant, she was absolutely glowing with anticipation
about the baby and all the things she was going to do, and I’ve been to see her in the last couple of weeks and she was just absolutely miserable because she’s had a crying baby and dad’s not interested, and it was absolute misery. And she said that the only thing that will keep the child quiet is the Music Start CD. (…) But she was desperate to come to the music group which was that day and managed to organise herself, and I went with her in the end and met her there, and she was a different person, so I would say that she would be someone who would certainly be very happy, because she’s a very articulate girl but also very shocked I think at how she felt when she had the baby. So I am going to see her again in a month’s time. (Erica Myers)

Family Case Studies

Visits were made to five families identified by the Music Link Workers in February 2006 to gain further insights into the impact that family visits had had, as well as assessing the value of other aspects of the MusicStart Project (the Pack and Music with Babies sessions). In two of the visits, both parents were interviewed, and in three visits the project was discussed with mothers (two of whom were currently lone parents). These visits provided concrete and striking evidence of the value of the Music Link Worker visits in encouraging more music making and singing in the families concerned. Some of the most striking issues illustrated are:

- The significant impact of the Project even in families with substantial material resources and an existing interest in music
- The important role of Link Workers in promoting engagement with music and singing and encouraging participation in Music with Babies groups
- The varied activities which singing and music making contributes to during the day and the extent to which it provides structure and support in over the course of a day, as well as being a source of pleasure, distraction, soothing and stimulation for infants, and emotional support for parents
- The significant role played by fathers in making music and singing with their babies, and participating in Music with Babies sessions

Some examples of comments made by parents during the home visits serve to illustrate the value of the MusicStart Pack, the Music with Babies groups, and the Music Link Worker visits.

Martin was delighted with the pack, because it gave him ideas and confidence to begin singing:

At that point (when the pack arrived), I said, ‘Thank goodness for that!’ because all I could sing to him was adverts (…) but from the CD to have something to sing along to… I did feel quite awkward singing, because I hadn’t really sung before. It allowed us to not be inhibited – we just said ‘Come on, we’re not doing this for ourselves’, but then it was quite fun, wasn’t it? – well not quite fun, it is fun, we do sing all the time.

Irene also valued the pack for the ideas it gave, even though she and her husband and their 15-year-old daughter were able to play instruments:

I thought it was super! I thought it was really good because it, it had all the little, it had the bell thing in it, the shaker, and the castanet thing, and I wouldn’t have thought of using those so early with Colin, although I play music and things, I never thought of those sorts of things, using the instruments and getting him to listen to it, using it as a distraction to start with and things – so I thought it was quite good. It made me think a little more about what we were doing or weren’t doing

Iris highlighted how important the visits of the Music Link Worker were for her in encouraging use of the MusicStart Pack, especially given the difficult time she experienced shortly after the birth of her first child. The account clearly shows that for this mother, if she had simply received the pack from a health visitor it may not have had as much impact:
It gives you a really easy way of interacting with your child I think, and we... F was a difficult baby, we were so shell-shocked by the whole thing that it was really nice for someone to come around and say 'Why don’t you try this?' and make it sound quite sensible, because I would have never, in a million years have thought of that, especially at that time when Freddie was ill, my mother died, and I was massively depressed – the whole thing was ghastly, and to have someone come round and offer the opportunity to get into it, made such a difference.

Sally found Sue Clark’s visits valuable in helping her to engage more widely with what the MusicStart Project had to offer:

Having Sue come round too really encouraged me to go the Music with Babies group. I’d only recently moved to the island, so it was good to get out and meet people, but good that Sue came around to encourage me, that was good

Nancy also felt that Sue’s visits were of value in encouraging confidence and use of the pack in a creative and flexible way:

I probably would have used it and played the CD and used the bells, but I don’t know if that on it’s own would have been enough to have given me the confidence to sing to her myself or like I said about adapting a song, I probably wouldn’t have done that.

All of the parents talked at some length about how they used music and singing during daily activities, and the benefits they felt it had for their children and for themselves. For all of them, music and singing was valuable at certain times during the day - as a source of distraction, relaxation, stimulation or simple enjoyment. For Sally, it was a consistent thread running throughout the whole day, and for her music was ‘a tool’ that really works:

Oh, I sing songs all day! So it will be, ‘Hello Lilly!’ like in the morning, we sing a song; it’s nappy time, we’re changing a nappy, and then we get dressed, and then we come down stairs and we’re singing all the songs, and then with food, I’m doing the ‘Miaow’ song to open her mouth, it is, it’s part of our, it’s sad really isn’t it? Like how much I used it! (laughter). It’s a tool, it really is, and it does work, and like when she was really little, like calming her down and when they get bored and they can’t move and do anything as well, it was something to do...

Iris and Martin believed that singing was valuable for Fraser in soothing him when ‘fractious’ or keeping him occupied and amused, but both stressed the value it had for themselves. For Martin in helping him develop his relationship with Freddie:

And for me, that’s it, that’s the thing, I’m able to communicate with him, we’ve got something in common, I’ll sing and he’ll listen, and it might not get a response every time, but I feel that I’m doing something, so my involvement comes from singing a song that he should know...

and for Iris in helping her cope with the demands of childcare:

And also it cheers us up. When you’re unhappy, because we had a very tough time, it is so nice to be able to sing things. I don’t know whether Fraser liked them or not, but it cheered me up, you know?
A second major component of the MusicStart project was to provide training and support in music making for practitioners working in Early Years settings throughout the Isle of Wight. Ten two-half-day training courses were run in five venues across the island. The first series of five courses ran from April-July 2005 and the second series ran from September-November 2005.

The aims of the training courses were:

- To increase vocal and musical confidence of practitioners
- To make links between music and language development

The first session focused on:

- Voice work and singing
- Demystifying musical terms through exploration of junk sound-makers
- Creating imaginative musical activity areas
- Ways of supporting children’s spontaneous musical play

The second session focused on:

- Feedback on action based on ideas introduced in Session One
- Outside musical play, including ideas for making large instruments
- Using music across the curriculum, linking music into themes and making song sacks
- Developing song-writing skills
- Use of Makaton signing in songs and stories

A target figure of 190 participants from Early Years settings across the Isle of Wight was set at the outset, with participants coming primarily from pre-school organisations and reception classes.

In total, 115 practitioners attended the first part of the training and 93 attended the second part (22 attended only the first part, and a further 5 attended only the second part). In total, therefore, 120 practitioners attended one or both of the training sessions provided (63% of the target figure).

A simple feedback sheet was employed to request comments from participants after each session.

Respondents were asked: ‘What parts of the session were most interesting or useful for your work with children?’ The most frequently given answers mirrored closely the planned content of the training:

- Making song sacks
- Making instruments
- Developing music areas
- Making up songs
- Signing
- Developing outdoor music areas

Respondents were also asked: ‘How will you make use of the experience / learning gained from this session in your work?’ Virtually all respondents could identify in detail some practical ways in which they would make use of the training. Typical examples of comments were:

I shall certainly re-evaluate how I use instruments in my setting and encourage further ‘free’ music sessions. I shall involve other staff in the creation of a music area, explaining the reasons for it first. I shall try out the 3 A’s and develop a music bag to use at circle time.

Using our harvest presentation in 2 weeks – getting the children to create rhythms/music to do with autumnal nature. Setting up a more inspirational music area

Continue to develop the music area, especially in the outdoor area, through making instruments to hang up and making music bags for the weather
I am going into my pre-school and look around for areas that will enhance music and give children more opportunities to access (not just music corner). At staff meetings we will plan into every day music opportunities

I will introduce some of the ideas I have gained from today and observe the response of the children. I will try the song sacks, clapping rhythms, making instruments and providing a range of everyday items for exploration

**Survey of Early Years Practitioners on the Impact of Training**

The feedback from the training sessions was very positive. Participants clearly gained information and enthusiasm and had clear ideas of what they would do in their settings following the workshops. For the purposes of evaluating this aspect of the MusicStart Project, however, it was clearly important to go further and contact practitioners after the training events to find out what differences the training actually made to their practice.

A survey of practitioners attending the training was undertaken over the period January-March 2006. For those practitioners attending the first round of training, the survey started approximately 7-8 months after the training, and for those attending the second series, it began approximately 2-3 months after the training.

Questionnaires were sent to all practitioners who attended the training sessions, with the exception of settings within Cluster 4, which were the focus of visits and case studies. In total, 120 questionnaires were despatched in January 2006. A reminder letter was sent in early March. By the end of March 64 questionnaires had been returned. The 53% response rate was somewhat disappointing given the circumstances of the survey.

The questionnaire asked respondents a range of questions designed to assess whether the training had actually made a difference to the extent and quality of music making and singing in their setting. The first question presented a list of the specific issues addressed in the training and asked practitioners to indicate whether they felt these had been achieved. Most of the statements given concerned the impact on music making with young children, but some related to their understanding and skill levels.

For virtually all of the areas listed, a clear majority of practitioners felt that the training provided by MusicStart had helped to develop their understanding and practice ‘a great deal’ or ‘to some extent’. The clearest impact of the course related to practical activities such as: setting up music areas (88.9%), helping to link music with speech and language development (82.5%), setting up outside music areas (82.8%), and making instruments (81.2%).

Respondents were asked if there was more music making in their setting following the training course. Three quarters of practitioners said that there was more music making and singing, but a quarter indicated that there had been no change. Examination of the relationship between responses to this question and answers given in the first section of the questionnaire indicated that those respondents who were most influenced by the training also reported that more attention was given to music in their setting following the training. Overall, the evidence suggested that where practitioners were reporting ‘no change’ in music making in their setting, this was probably due to the fact that practitioners were already providing a good range of musical opportunities for children in their setting.

The questionnaire also explored the links between music making and the six areas of the ‘Foundation Stage Curriculum’. The results showed that the large majority of respondents believed that music can ‘definitely’ make an important contribution across all areas of the curriculum: Communication, language and literacy (90.2%); Mathematical development (85.5%); Creative development (85.0%); Physical development (83.6%); Personal, social and emotional development (82.3%), and Knowledge and understanding of the world (67.2%).
Respondents were invited to give examples from their own experience of how music and singing could make a specific contribution to children’s learning and development in each of these areas. The response of the practitioners to this request illustrates very graphically the collective wealth of experience and insight into the role of music in early education within this group. It was not possible in this evaluation, however, to assess the extent to which their specific knowledge and insight had been influenced by the training provided.

The questionnaire also asked practitioners about the relevance of music and singing to the five key issues highlighted by ‘Every Child Matters’. The results showed a clear differentiation across the areas, with a large majority of practitioners regarding music as having definite relevance in enabling a young child to ‘enjoy and achieve’ (88.7%) and ‘make a positive contribution’ (78.7%). Just over half felt that it ‘definitely’ contributed to the child being ‘healthy’ (53.3%), but fewer saw a definite contribution to ‘economic wellbeing’ (32.8%) or helping a child to ‘stay safe’ (27.1%).

Finally, the questionnaire asked practitioners for further comments on the training programme and the MusicStart Project as a whole. Comments on the training were invariably positive and constructive with only four practitioners making critical comments about the programme. Approximately half of respondents also commented on the project as a whole. Some were aware that it included families and children from 0-3 and involved the distribution of the MusicStart Pack whereas others did not know anything of the project beyond the provision of training – but most were full of praise for the initiative which they felt was very worthwhile. A selection of the comments is given below:

I found the training useful for some of the ideas given which I was able to put into practice and the children reacted positively to them.

I found the training very worthwhile. There were some good ideas and new ways to look at things. We learnt how to incorporate music into all spheres of learning.

I feel it is a good project to promote as many children build confidence through it. As a group in general, we have always used a variety of music and dance and the course enabled me to bring a few new ideas back to my group.

I thoroughly enjoyed the training. Although music is very much a part of our curriculum, we now feel that we can extend a child’s learning and development with more confidence.

I have really enjoyed the training and although I regarded our pre-school as quite musical to start with I have learnt such a lot and have been able to implement lots of new ideas into our curriculum. We are developing our outside music area and make lots of instruments for the children to take home.

It has made me more aware of music in the classroom and outside. As an Early Years practitioner I’ve always known the importance but it heightened awareness.

Early Years Settings Case Studies

Throughout the MusicStart Project a number of early years settings were visited to gain insights into the role of music making and singing within each setting and to assess the impact of the MusicStart training programme. Information gathered from four settings served to illustrate how practitioners who attended the training were able to implement new ideas, but also highlighted some of the challenges they faced. Details of these case studies can be found in the full evaluation report available from the principal author.
Work of Musicians in Settings with Additional Needs Children

Marie Shepard and Cheryl Sheppard designed a series of four-weekly sessions for each of six Early Years settings, which included children assessed as having ‘additional needs’. The approach adopted was inclusive. Practitioners did not formally identify the children with additional needs and they were given the same amount of attention as any other child/children who showed an interest in the musical activities.

The sessions actively included practitioners and served to model a variety of ways in which music could be included in all activities in the Early Years setting across the curriculum.

One unplanned spin-off from the visits by MusicStart musicians to settings was the setting up of a short guitar course for a number of practitioners who expressed interested in learning to play.

Feedback from practitioners was very positive and highlighted the benefits of having musicians demonstrate ways of working with children in settings as a further development on from ‘off-site’ training:

We have enjoyed having Music Start with us. It has been nice to experience music in so many different ways. Staff have seen how music can be incorporated in virtually every area. I have been interested in how music has settled some children in their transition from home to playgroup.

All of the children and adults enjoyed learning new songs. The children remembered some of the songs and asked if we could sing them throughout the week. Using the props helped the children focus on the songs….. I would like to find props for our music session as I think this worked well and it was very simple.

The music sessions with MS & CS have inspired me to update our music time with the children. We will be introducing some of the songs and activities we have done over the last few weeks. I was very impressed to see how the children reacted to the instruments, especially the guitar and will be taking “strumming” lessons for the future. The Special Needs children interacted particularly well in all the music sessions.

I have found this to be a very positive experience both for myself and the children. One particular child with whom I work closely as he has SEN, appears to have enjoyed this greatly and gained a lot from it. He loves music and song anyway, so having this has motivated him and inspired me in things to do. It has given all the children a chance to experiment with new instruments and vocal techniques. The group has brought all of the children into a new world of music, which the majority have enjoyed.
Did the MusicStart Project achieve the aims, objectives and targets it set for itself at the outset? The short and simple answer is ‘Yes!’

The project was undoubtedly ambitious, aiming as it did to promote and enhance the role of music making and singing in families with children 0-5 years and in early years settings, across the whole of the Isle of Wight, in just over a year.

Within the first three months, the individuals appointed to the project had become a cohesive team; designed a logo for the project; composed a MusicStart song; produced the MusicStart Pack ready for distribution to families, and worked out a program for training early years practitioners. They were ready to start work!

Over the next twelve months the project was not without its problems, but everyone involved rose to these challenges with admirable commitment, enthusiasm and energy. After designing and producing the MusicStart Pack, some concerns were expressed by health visitors about safety issues if very young children were given the musical instruments to play with, and these concerns were allayed through careful discussion and agreement about the information parents were to be given about the pack. The Music Link Workers found that the expected flow of referrals for family visits did not happen as expected, and they pursued additional ways to make contacts with families through existing groups and clinics.

Evaluating a project as diverse and complex as MusicStart also presented challenges. Limitations on available funding and resources, as well as the time-scale of the project and the need to develop aspects of the programme of work during the initial three months, meant that an ideal evaluation design involving pre and post comparisons of intervention and control groups, was not feasible. Nevertheless, detailed monitoring was possible, and the evaluation team worked closely with the project team in designing simple instruments for systematically gathering feedback on the various activities of the project. This process operated smoothly and efficiently and provided a core of data to assess the benefits of MusicStart activities for families and training provision for Early Years practitioners. In addition, the evaluation team were able to undertake two surveys – one of families receiving the MusicStart Pack and one of Early Years practitioners following completion of the training programme, both of which could address the impacts of the project, and help to assess the extent to which it had achieved its central aims and objectives. In addition, telephone interviews with health visitors, as key NHS partners in the project, helped to broaden feedback on the work of MusicStart beyond the team itself and the individuals directly participating in its activities.

What then, are the main conclusions that can be drawn from the evaluation?

- The survey of families showed that the MusicStart pack had helped just under two thirds of mothers to sing and make music with their young children more than they might have done without it.

This is a very encouraging result from simply receiving a music resource without necessarily having any further input or support. It should also be remembered that one of the important reasons for mothers saying that receiving the pack had not helped them sing more, is that they were already aware of the value of music and were singing to their young children. Of course, only just over half of the families included in the survey responded, and the level of positive response among those who did return the questions may not be true of those families that did not reply. Taking this fact into account, however, the most conservative estimate of the impact of the MusicStart pack would be that in a third of families receiving the pack, a positive change was initiated towards giving more attention to music making and singing. Given that over 2,400 MusicStart Packs were distributed across the island by the project, this suggests that at least 800 families with young

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS
children received some benefits. In addition, as the results given in this report show, families have also benefited from attending Music with Babies groups and from coming into contact with Music Link workers.

- The survey of early years practitioners showed that three quarters of practitioners said that there was more music making and singing in their setting following the training course than there had been before it.

This too is a very encouraging result. The practitioners clearly valued the training provided and went on to implement many of the practical ideas they gained from it. Again, it was clear that for the remaining quarter of practitioners who said there had been no change in their setting, the main reason was that they were already aware of the value of music making and singing across the early years curriculum. It should be acknowledged that, as with the family survey, only just over half of practitioners included in the survey responded and so again, the most conservative estimate is that approximately 40% of practitioners across the Isle of Wight reported increased levels of musical activity in their settings. This positive change was no doubt enhanced by the visits of MusicStart musicians to settings catering for children with additional needs and hopefully will be built upon by the work of Music Motivators, identified and trained by MusicStart.

Over the course of its fifteen-month life, the MusicStart Project became better known across the Isle of Wight. Its various activities and special events attracted good publicity and served to raise awareness of the value of music making and singing for young children and had an impact in families and in early years settings. But for the team this was not without its frustrations. As the project became better and more widely known and more and more people were touched by the value of its activities, so the time hastened on when the project would come to end. If the project had achieved so much in such a short space of time, how much more could it have done if funding had been available for it to continue? Fortunately, the project has left a legacy – of greater awareness, greater enthusiasm and greater confidence - which should continue to sustain an understanding of the value of music making and singing in the lives of young children in families and early years settings in the first crucial five years of our children’s lives.

What more fitting end to this report than to quote the mother who said of the MusicStart Pack:

*I don’t think it could be improved - it is a great pack and if I didn’t have it, I wouldn’t of known how much my daughter loves me singing.*
Sidney De Haan Reports

An occasional series of reports on the work of the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health.

General Editors: Stephen Clift and Grenville Hancox

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Report 2


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