Music for Life: Promoting social engagement and well-being in older people through community supported participation in musical activities

Sue Hallam (PI), Andrea Creech, Helena Gaunt, Anita Pincas, Maria Varvarigou, Hilary McQueen

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Little attention has been paid to the potential for music-making to effect a contribution to the quality of life of older people.
Possible benefits of music making

- Personal motivations (self-expression, recreation, self-improvement, use of leisure time)
- Musical motivations (love of music, performing for oneself and others, learning more about music)
- Social motivations (meeting new people, being with friends, sense of belonging) (Coffman, 2002)
- Spirituality (Hinkle, 1988)
- Health benefits of singing (immune system, exercise, breathing, posture) (Clift et al., 2008)
Music and well-being

‘In addition to creative expression, the arts offer a whole range of personal benefits for older people themselves and to the wider community in its relationship to older people. It is even possible that use of the arts could decrease expenditure for the NHS. …the current economic climate makes it even more important to try to do this …’

(Baring Foundation, 2009)
Aims

To explore the way in which participating in creative music making activities can enhance the lives of older people;

To consider the extent to which this may impact on social, emotional and cognitive well-being

To consider the specific processes through which this occurs
Examples of musical activities (video)
Design

Multi-methods approach
3 case studies
Control groups where possible with other activities
Comparisons within and between groups
Case studies

The Sage Gateshead – Over 500 people aged 50+ engage in weekly activities (mainly white population, has satellite classes which widen participation, has intergenerational classes)
Connect programme of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama - community projects in East London Sheltered Housing (one intergenerational project, one project with novices aged over 50, strong ethnic mix)
mixed-generation choir
over 50s singing groups
over 50s music appreciation class
over 50s keyboard class
Non-music control group

Language classes (4)
Art or craft classes (5)
Yoga
Social support (2)
Book group
Social club members
Measures

Pre and post questionnaires including:
CASP-12 quality of life measure (subscales for control, autonomy, pleasure and self-realization)

Basic psychological needs scales including sub-scales for autonomy, competence and relatedness

Nature and frequency of activity documented, perceived benefits, difficulties experienced, how might be improved
Qualitative data

• Focus group interviews to explore experiences in greater depth (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, level of musical expertise)

• Ten participants from each case study selected for in depth study – case histories – family member also interviewed

• Musicians acting as teachers/facilitators given questionnaires, sample were interviewed
What we asked participants

Some contextual questions
Previous and current engagement in activities
Views on barriers to participation and how to overcome them
Reasons for participating
Why music?
Issues related to teaching and learning
Observations

Videos made of a range of musical activities followed by interviews

Where performances given videos made of these
The sample

451 participants
349 musicians
102 non-musicians
The Sage Gateshead 290
Guildhall 16
WAES musicians 31
Age range 43 to 94 most between 60 and 80
Overall Male 86 Female 341
Most white British (77%)
What our participants say
‘Talking Heads’
It is a joy to be made to concentrate, to think quickly, to enjoy singing and have fun and make new friends.

For many years I have suffered periodic bouts of depression. Since being welcomed into the Silver Programme I am happy to report that I have been depression free. Unless you have this condition you cannot imagine what a blessed relief it is to be without it for almost a year.

My husband died suddenly over 2 years ago and I found the participation in the singing and an instrumental group was one of the greatest supports in my life. Singing is always uplifting and it is difficult to be sad while playing the ukulele.

For people like me who live alone outside activities are very important, if not essential part of life. They give us a chance to meet people, make new friends, socialise as well as learning new skills which give us a sense of achievement.
Measures of well being were consistently higher amongst the music participants (n=398) than amongst the control group (n=102).

There was either no change or positive change over time on the Casp-12 quality of life scales and Deci and Ryan basic needs scales (NS).

Comparison between 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Age:
- CASP-12 Autonomy or Pleasure (NS)
- Casp-12 Control and Self-realisation – 4\textsuperscript{th} age lower
- Deci and Ryan Autonomy and Relatedness (NS)
- Deci and Ryan Competence – 4\textsuperscript{th} age lower
KEY FINDINGS – 2: Benefits

**Social:**
- Structure
- Belonging
- Community
- Intergenerational contact
- Fun

**Cognitive:**
- Challenge
- Skills
- Achievement
- Concentration
- Memory

**Health:**
- Vitality
- Mental health
- Mobility
- Feeling rejuvenated

**Emotional:**
- Protection against stress
- Protection against depression
- Sense of purpose
- Positive feelings
- Support following bereavement
- Confidence
- Creativity
Key Findings – 3: Barriers

**STRUCTURAL** I wish it was during the day, I really do, ... I don’t like going out in the dark alone ...

**Social** This is the greatest opportunity that I have ever had to express my musical talents. Before it always felt that it was an elitist sphere.

As a full time carer I sometimes find it difficult to attend

**DISPOSITIONAL** Motivation for the first time is THE hardest thing

People are frightened of it because they think ‘oh, we’ve got to pay money’.

The main barrier is having the guts to come out of the house to a new group of people

**INFORMATION** It was a year after I retired that I actually saw this ... I wouldn’t have known about it if I hadn’t seen the leaflet at the library
Facilitators of musical activities with older people had specific training needs but few opportunities for CPD.

Effective facilitators:

- Played key role in fostering positive outcomes
- Rejected deficit model of ageing
- Worked towards goals
- Provided opportunities for performance
- Were professional and credible
- Acknowledged prior experience and knowledge of participants
- Worked together with participants in choosing relevant repertoire
it must save the health service and the social services an enormous amount if they put these in place everywhere ... it must be good for our health ... I think music is therapy, you know. I think it can really pick you right up.