

Title: Community Orientated and Opportunity Learning (COOL) Music

Authors: Artur Steiner, Stephen Millar, Francesca Calò and Simon Teasdale

Key message: Evaluation of COOL Music indicates that this community based music intervention and personally tailored programme, which uses lyric-writing and music-making activities to express emotions and tackle personal problems, creates an efficient platform to engage hard-to-reach young people. The one-to-one sessions, held with COOL Music participants, create a safe environment for young people to develop trust, self-confidence and new skills. Self-reported data suggests that the project contributes to enhanced positive feelings towards family, friends and participants' future destination. Financially, to secure long-term sustainability of the intervention, a degree of core-funding is required.

Music, Wellbeing and Engagement

Evidence suggests that arts, including music, can help address major challenges relating to loneliness and mental health¹. In Scotland, much of the research surrounding music-making for improving health, wellbeing, and engagement has focused on larger projects, such as El Sistema². However, this approach, perceived as 'top-down' and 'strictly controlled'³, is often neither responsive nor tailored to the specific, and frequently diverse, needs of users. This reflects third sector literature that emphasises the role of smaller, community-based organisations, often working in partnership with public bodies, to co-produce services through specialised and flexible projects that can respond to service users' needs⁴.

Background

Funded by the Scottish Government and the European Social Fund, through the Social Innovation Fund, COOL Music sought to work with hard-to-reach young people from deprived areas to create opportunities for equal development and innovative inclusion. During the twelve-month project (2017-18), a social enterprise called 'Heavy Sound' delivered practical music-making sessions to young people⁵ (12-18 years old) and Glasgow Caledonian University researchers evaluated the impact of the intervention on participants' engagement and wellbeing, and assessed the sustainability of the project.

Methods

Evaluation of COOL Music consisted of three stages:

Stage 1 – desk-based literature review on music and wellbeing; selection of tools for data collection; obtaining ethical approval to conduct the study; recruitment of participants from four intervention sites.

¹ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report. (2017). [Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing](#), 2nd edition. London: APPG.

² See Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2015). [Evaluating Sistema Scotland: Initial Findings Report](#). Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

³ Baker, G. (2017). 'Big Noise in Raploch?', Scottish Review, 21 June.

⁴ For more information, please see Brandsen, T. and Pestoff, V. (2006). 'Co-Production, the Third Sector and the Delivery of Public Services: An Introduction'. Public Management Review, 8(4):493-501 and Arvidson, M., Kara, H., (2017). 'Valuing Third Sector Achievements in a Service Delivery Context: Evaluations and Social Value'. In J. Rees and D. Mullins eds., The Third Sector Delivering Public Services: Developments, Innovations and Challenges. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Some participants lived with their biological parents, while others lived with foster parents or were in care.

Stage 2 – implementation of COOL Music intervention and data collection, including (i) ethnographic observations and qualitative face-to-face interviews with COOL Music participants and stakeholders exploring pathways to engagement and promotion of wellbeing, (ii) quantitative longitudinal survey based on the Good Childhood Index (GCI) subjective wellbeing questionnaire⁶ measuring changes in levels of participants’ engagement and wellbeing before and after the intervention, and (iii) interviews with project stakeholders to identify best practices associated with running the project and its sustainability.

Stage 3 – analysis of Stage 1 and Stage 2 data to evidence outcomes of the project.

Key findings

- Through sixteen sessions of non-formal, participatory music-making, 27 participants at four locations⁷ developed practical skills and learnt how to utilise musical instruments, computer software, and audio-visual recording equipment. Young people learnt how to work collaboratively in a team and, through song-writing, express their emotions in a creative and productive way. A sense of accomplishment and increased self-confidence among participants derived through selecting, developing and finalising their own music-projects. The creative, non-judgmental and safe environment offered by COOL Music had a positive impact on young people’s feeling of protection and supported them in building good relations with peers, tutors and wider communities.
- The majority of participants registered below the national average in the GCI. Longitudinal evaluation of GCI’s subjective wellbeing scores showed non-statistically significant positive changes in attitudes towards family, friends and future plans after participating in the project.
- The nature of the programme (personally tailored and responsive towards specific needs of the target group) proved to be successful in engaging disadvantaged young people from deprived areas. Nevertheless, there were barriers to completion: one young person struggled with the participant-led nature of the project, one moved school, and one started a full-time job, which prevented them from completing the project.
- The project stakeholders stressed that COOL Music-type interventions are very much needed in order to reduce inequalities experienced by ‘hard to reach’ young people. To be sustainable, however, COOL Music requires some level of external funding.

Implications for Policy

Our findings indicate that bottom-up and organic COOL Music-type interventions can be effective in addressing challenges associated with ‘hard to reach’ young people, helping them to engage with productive activities and increase their self-esteem through group participation. When designing and implementing interventions for improved wellbeing of young people, one standardised and fixed approach may not always be efficient. To address gaps in current service provision, tackle social inequalities and meet needs of disadvantaged hard-to-reach people from deprived areas, the government should draw on the expertise and knowledge of less formal, more flexible and participant-led community organisations. Although results demonstrate that the project led to increased engagement and improved positive feelings towards family, friends, and participants’ future destinations, the scale of the study sample limits the generalisability of the findings. To determine if the project would generate the same results across Scotland, it would be beneficial to assess the impact of the project on larger numbers of participants in variety of contexts (e.g. among other disadvantaged groups of people).

For more information on COOL Music, please contact: Dr Artur Steiner, Reader in Social Entrepreneurship, Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University
T: 0141 331 8445; E: artur.steiner@qcu.ac.uk

⁶ Gwyther R., Bradshaw, J., Goswami, H. and Keung, A. (2010) *Understanding Children’s Well-Being: A National Survey of Young People’s Well-Being*. London: The Children’s Society.

⁷ All four case sites were located in the Lothians: Queensferry High School, Wallyford Community Centre, Who Cares Scotland, and The Bridges Project.