

Beyond the Mainstream – Report on Funded Programmes 2009

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introduction

When Sing Up, the National Singing Programme, began in November 2007 its Consortium, led by Youth Music with AMV-BBDO, Faber Music and The Sage Gateshead, made a commitment to encourage and provide regular opportunities for every primary school-aged child to have access to high-quality singing. With targets largely focused on school activity, we recognised that this would exclude a number of children who either weren't in regular mainstream education, or who found it difficult to engage with school. With this in mind we commissioned a report¹ to explore singing provision for these groups and found that although there were pockets of excellent work, nationally the picture was disparate and there was a lot to be done in terms of raising the profile of the work that did exist and developing sustainable networks to encourage its growth and continuation. The report identified the need for more training and better resources for working with primary school-aged children in these groups.

On the recommendations of the report, and with backing from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), we developed 14 projects nationwide, working with children who are schooled outside of mainstream primaries or who find it difficult to engage with singing in their schools. Included in this report are findings from our work with children in these groups; children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) including those with Autism and Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities, children who attend Short Stay Schools, Looked After Children, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Young Carers, children with physical disabilities and children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and Mental Health problems. We have aimed, not only to be a funder but to be a partner in these projects, providing advice and guidance for them, consulting and learning from them and developing a national infrastructure including gatherings for all projects to attend and share their work, their challenges and their successes.

Within the space of nine months between January and September 2009, 825 children took part in Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream projects, with an almost equal mix of boys and girls. The majority of participants were in Key Stage 2 of primary education though there were a significant number from Key Stage 1, and around 100 in the first year of secondary school. There were also a few Young Leaders aged between 14 and 18. The number of children involved in each project varied considerably, with a significant number of projects delivering to fewer than 30 children, providing the specialist one-to-one delivery and close supervision that some of these groups need.

Workforce Development, both for music leaders working on the projects and for the staff who work with these children on a daily basis (foster carers, social workers, teachers, youth workers and many more) had a huge part to play in all of the projects. 46 singing leaders were involved in the delivery of the projects and 171 people took part in training either as part of delivery or in separate workshops. This is a considerable achievement from 14 projects, considering the importance of engaging the staff already working with children in these settings (to help ensure the legacy of it), and is testament to the hard work, planning and commitment to creating a legacy from all of the project management teams involved.

In-school and out-of-school activity has varied greatly, with much of the in-school work taking place in SEN or Short Stay Schools. Out of 591 workshops delivering directly to children taking place across the board, 185 took place on the school premises in the school day with 44 on the premises but after or before school time. 362 took place off school premises (in Youth Clubs, Community Choirs, at venues owned by Music Organisations) with the majority of these happening after school.

The following report is a collation of data from evaluation forms submitted by each individual project, aiming to unpick some of the issues faced when working in these groups and highlighting the best practice that we have been delighted to find across the country. Whilst we accept that some of the information is subjective and not a rigorous scientific evaluation against a measured baseline, we do intend it to be an observation of shared findings and useful outcomes that both the projects and other practitioners involved in this work will benefit from.

¹ Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream Report July 2008, Rob Hunter and Phil Mullen.

What singing does - changes we have seen as a result of these projects

Reading through the final reports of the Beyond the Mainstream projects there is an overwhelming sense of the considerable journeys taken by the participants, the architects of the projects and the deliverers of them. There are many moving stories, but this section of the report intends to outline where we can see visible trends in the types of changes we have seen through singing with primary aged children who exist in these groups.

It is important to note that the changes we have seen cannot claim to be the sole work of singing or indeed the projects themselves. Nevertheless, these trends have emerged clearly through 14 unique projects and so can be said to show clear links with the musical practice that was common to all of them. The practice itself will be discussed further in section 3 of this report.

Improved confidence and sense of self

When asked as part of their final report, 100% of projects said the children were 'much better' or 'better' by the end of the project in the following areas:

- Confidence/Self-esteem
- Enjoyment/Motivation
- Achievement/Pride
- Social Interaction

Whilst many comments on this subject were directly related to singing ('I felt confident to stand up and sing a solo', 'they felt proud of their final performance', 'I now sing at home or with others'), others commented on how children were growing confidence as a whole and how this was helping them integrate with other children better, as well as being clearer and more confident in stating their own needs. We know through other Sing Up research that singing has consistently had a clear effect in these areas, but for vulnerable children in particular, these skills can have a significant effect when applied in other areas of their life.

In particular Looked After Children often commented on the effect songwriting or singing had had on them being able to relate to others.

'S explained that she never really sings in front of anyone so this was a challenging experience and it helped her with her confidence. She also explained that singing helped her to talk about the difficult topic of going into care fairly easily' Project Worker, Pie Factory

A number of projects commented that through singing children had been able to open up topics that were difficult for them through singing, and to share their thoughts with others and own them confidently. This self-awareness was apparent and observed not only by the adults in their lives but the children themselves.

'It was obvious to us as singing leaders that these things (confidence, pride, concentration, interaction) were developing throughout the sessions but it was even more encouraging that the children observed a change in themselves also' Project worker, Pie Factory

Singing in groups also helped children who found it difficult to socialise or make new friends, by giving them a focus and encouraging them to work together in a non-threatening environment. As part of Sound Minds 'Songs from the South' project with children with Mental Health problems they found that one child who had not had any previous significant peer relationships developed a 'joking relationship' with two other young people. This was a considerable achievement for this child and the project had other similar success stories.

'There is evidence to support the fact that their education has improved, their ability to relate to each other and their peers has been improved... the relationship they have with their carers has improved which in turn will stabilise their placement. Most importantly they have learned to be children and through the medium of singing they have found a voice and a shared knowledge that they are not alone in the care system.'
Project Worker, Whitewood and Fleming

'Another young person came to us with self-confidence issues and a strong awareness of his own embarrassment and 'going red' whenever he felt the focus of the group... However, given support and a slowly increasing amount of responsibility he was finally able to sing and record a solo... In the feedback he stated he no longer went red in the face and was 'starting to think of himself as a singer.' He also described the project as the 'best six weeks of the year.' *Sound Minds*

In this way we can see that children are 'finding a voice' in a whole new way, by developing the confidence and realistic sense of self that helps them adapt to their surroundings.

Attitude to education or learning

Whilst the majority of projects did not take a 'formal education' route, some projects identified ways in which children had improved skills to help them in their school lives. 13 out of 14 projects, for example, said that concentration had become 'better' or 'much better' with one project not observing. Many projects added that teachers or settings staff had expressed surprise at the ability of often restless or disruptive children to concentrate on singing for extended periods of time, and that this had been reflected into the rest of their school life.

'Normally throughout the school day the young people will need to leave the sessions and it would be likely that not all of the boys would have taken part in the end performance. This did not occur to the level anticipated, rather most of the boys were happy to stay within the sessions and all of them fully participated in the performance.'
Teacher, Cherry Trees School (Spitalfields Music)

Attendance too was often used as an indicator of success in projects working with children who had previously shown little interest in activities (specifically at school) or found it difficult to commit to a project. In voluntary projects such as Brighton and Hove Music and Arts Service's Creative Vocals, a child showing up at a session was proof that they valued it. This shift in attitude is vital in helping a child whose life can be much disrupted to begin to find stability and commitment to something that they enjoy.

'One of my pupils continually turned up late or early, but then he told me his carer had left him to get the bus across the city – the fact that he kept turning up was a huge achievement in itself.'
Singing Leader, Brighton and Hove MAS

Although we asked projects to observe children's attitude to education and numeracy and literacy skills, many projects felt unable to give a definitive answer as it was difficult to tell from a relatively short-term project that was (in the majority) not related to school activity. Those that did (around 50%), observed it to be better or much better.

'K has been more settled in school since Easter (when the New Notes project began). This is the first out of school activity that I have not had to be there for. K is improving at school all the time. Time in school has been increased of late; plans are for full return in September.'
Foster Carer, Whitewood and Fleming

Musical improvement

Many projects saw children showing a marked improvement in musical and vocal language and technique. This was not only useful for children as a skill and a link into the mainstream curriculum, but it also helped foster a sense of pride and achievement, a sense that they had become 'good at something' and were recognised in that. A considerable number of projects showed children following progression routes such as vocal or instrumental lessons, joining a choir or band or working on their own initiative on a project. In Pie Factory Music's project one girl in foster care took the initiative to take a song out of the library to practise and thus showed a significant improvement the following week. In the same project, children were able to speak very eloquently about their musical skills and achievements.

'Practising the Little Mermaid song and writing original song meant a lot to me. It has helped me improve my vocals and be more creative. My timing skills still need to get a bit better but pitching and word pronunciation are better'
Participant

Interestingly, both gatherings and reports showed a divide in the projects when it came to the purpose of singing with children in Beyond the Mainstream target groups. Many felt that singing was an excellent tool to achieve improved confidence, self-worth, pride in achievements and was primarily a route to social cohesion, while some felt that significant musical achievement should be the primary focus of these activities.

'If special needs singing is to progress, it needs to move on from the concept of 'joining in' to what I feel we achieved in the main, which was for children to improve their singing: to learn what to sing and when and how to sing it – with the appropriate learned performance discipline.' *West Berkshire Music Service*

This debate is a healthy one and leads us on to discussing how singing can be used as a leveller for children when integrating with mainstream education, and also how this impacts on our work with children who find it difficult to vocalise.

Singing as a leveller – linking with mainstream education

When looking at repertoire, many projects commented that the songs they were using would be as relevant to children in mainstream schools, and over half of the projects made links with mainstream primaries as part of their work. Greater Manchester Music Action Zone (GMMAZ) in particular, who were working in a Short Stay School for children who have just entered the UK and are about to enter the UK education system for the first time, commented that 'It was good to work with the mainstream primary as our children could see they were on the same level.' Many of the children taking part were displaced, often refugees and asylum seekers, and singing helped put them on an equal platform with children that they may soon find themselves in a class with. This helped considerably with confidence and language skills, whilst also making them feel that they could play an equal part in this part of school life.

At Mulberry Bush, a school that provides therapeutic care, treatment and education for children with severe Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, the link with the local primary meant that children were able to form positive relationships, especially with those who were brought in as 'singing mentors' to help lead the group. The children from the mainstream primary were said to have had made a 'strong impression' on the Mulberry Bush pupils and both here and in the Spitalfields project the singing work has been used to improve the image of pupils at the school who may previously have been regarded in a negative light by the local community.

When settings staff, such as Mental Health Workers in the case of the Sound Minds project, were learning alongside children this also was a good way of putting staff and participants on an equal footing. In one particular instance on this project a Project Manager said of the Mental Health worker and her client:

'Having noted his initial shyness and her reluctance to use her voice, she wondered if by 'opening up' and using her voice if this had changed the relationship with her client and made it more playful, and that she had found this positive for them.' *Sound Minds*

Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream and Every child Matters

Be healthy	Emotional well being (feeling happy and positive through singing, expressing feeling and exploring relationships) and physical benefits, breathing posture, awareness of body.
Stay safe	A safe environment to attend where the child feels nurtured and appreciated and a regular 'place to be' for children with disrupted lives.
Enjoy and achieve	The sense of setting and achieving goals through learning repertoire, writing a song or performing at a concert.
Making a positive contribution	Young Singing Leaders who help support younger children or their peers can feel they've made a difference in their lives
Achieve economic well-being	Creativity, confidence, sense of self, team work and commitment are all skills that are transferable into the workplace and give children a sense of responsibility.

Overcoming physical boundaries and seeing physical benefits

When establishing Sing Up, its Consortium was clear that, when talking about 'singing', it meant vocal activity at its broadest. For Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream in particular we recognise that for some children 'singing' in its most traditionally known sense (learning a 'song', a tune or melody) would be not only difficult but for some, impossible. However, it was important to Sing Up that this shouldn't in any way prevent them from enjoying all the benefits that singing and vocal activities have to offer.

Plymouth Music Zone, a Youth Music Action Zone and the Sing Up Area Leader for Devon ran a specialist project for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities, many of whom could not use their voices. They developed a resource, Zoobiedoo and used vocal looping technology to help engage the children they were working with, with significant success.

'On hearing a song from zoobiedoo she immediately began signing and doing all the actions we were using associated with the song. Despite being unable to use her physical voice, this little girl was still able to comprehend and enjoy the music.' *Teacher*

The teacher went on to say that seeing this potential in the child had opened up new possibilities that they could then build on. In other projects, children have vocalised for the first time when working with animators, due to being able to make a connection between their body and the sound.

Physical awareness is something singing can bring to any child but it is particularly significant to those suffering with long term illnesses or disability. Breathing and posture can also be a very positive health benefit to children and indeed the adults that work with them.

'My daughter has been ill for nine years; last year she had a liver transplant. This project has helped her find her balance.' *Parent – CYMAZ, Tunes from Treliske*

The girl in this project felt more able to integrate back into school (after prolonged periods in hospital) and physically stronger through singing and taking part in activity with other pupils.

How it happens - What can we learn from the successes and challenges of our workforce?

In this section of the report, we will examine the practicalities of how these projects came together. What were the important things that made them work? What made them successful? What were the difficulties? And, most importantly, what can we learn from them to enable future projects to achieve success.

Again, what we have done here is to observe significant trends happening across projects to establish key methods of practice that relate to the specifics of the target groups which make the work transferable and relevant.

Partnerships

In almost all of the projects observed, partnerships have been key to the success of the project. Partnerships can sometimes be seen as a buzzword that lacks meaning, but in the case of these types of project, solid partnerships that focus on the different organisations and individuals involved in a child's life become the absolute life blood of the project. The majority of projects showed an excellent understanding of this and most of them were based upon the relationship between a music organisation and a school/youth club/Children's Service/Independent Fostering Provider in order to ensure that the children involved in the project were having their needs met in a thoughtful and appropriate way.

'They were integral to informing all of our decisions regarding sessions, timing, locations, contacting participants, training and informing our musicians and on top of that were constant participants in our community choir and workforce development sessions.' *CoMusica on Durham Access Service*

'Our partnership with Children's Services enabled us to have a unique insight into the lives and needs of our participants – this is crucial to delivery of a clearly targeted and appropriate project' *Whitewood and Fleming on Cumbria Children's Services*

In the case of these projects and others, music organisations planned alongside a voluntary organisation or Local Authority service that were already involved in improving the lives of the children involved in the project. By co-planning, engaging in constant dialogue, reporting back on sessions, training each other in relevant skills and ensuring that staff from each side were invited to take part in sessions both organisations were allowed better insight into the work involved and the non-music staff were able to help embed the work further with the children, as well as in some cases becoming ambassadors for further work.

Where partnerships were not formed in advance of the project and a lack of research into the lives of the children involved did not take place we saw serious issues arise that in two cases led to an early end to the project. This was not necessarily the fault of the project management team. Partnerships of this kind can be difficult to set up, can take a lot of time to establish and can often lead to tensions, disagreements and difficulties for project teams. However, without them a project risks being unable to embed the work, to see sessions cancelled due to lack of support from senior management, being unable to form relationships with the children targeted due to lack of insight into their lives and to see corridors continually blocked off due to lack of permissions and 'red tape'. Overwhelmingly, although most projects faced some problems with bureaucracy, politics and engaging carers or staff, those that took the time to establish good partnerships up front (or had existing partnerships) had considerably fewer issues.

Partnership Dos and Don'ts

DO...

- Spend time developing partnerships with the organisations already involved with the children you want to work with
- Listen
- Be realistic about your needs and expectations
- Plan together
- Provide continual feedback to each other about how it's going and be flexible
- Build relationships with face-to-face workers as well as managers

DON'T

- Assume knowledge of the children or the work of the other organisations that work with them
- Use a partnership only to fulfill your needs – listen to what they need from you
- Base a partnership only on one person – what might happen when they're gone?

What stood out from a number of evaluations was the importance of personal relationships in partnerships.

'S and J got on well from the outset and clearly had shared values and complementary strengths and experience. The importance of this partnership cannot be overestimated.' *Beyond the Mainstream Advisor on the Leicester Project*

Where personal relationships were good, this vastly increased the efficacy of the partnership, but when they were difficult this often led to breakdowns. One 'gatekeeper' who, for whatever reason (often time restraints, capacity or lack of understanding of the project) does not want to engage with a music organisation can make it very difficult for anything to continue. Whilst we do not claim that this is always something that can be overcome, many projects tackled it through diversifying the people involved in the partnership (from ground level to management) and listening to their needs and working around them.

Planning and lead-in time

With the initial Beyond the Mainstream report complete in summer 2008 and Sing Up's funding time-limited to 2011 the time to deliver a programme that would give us usable data for further work was a short one. Delivering a programme in this time frame meant that the time in which we gave people to turn around a project was sometimes restrictive and this made planning and lead-in time difficult.

'Most projects said they could have done with more lead-in time. Well, we all could, the question is whether more time would have enabled projects to know in advance those things they had second guessed. In most cases I suspect not: you don't know what you don't know till you find out you didn't know it. In other words, it's all experiential.'
Kathryn Deane, Beyond the Mainstream Advisor

Whilst many mentioned the difficulty with turnaround time and one project said that *'enquiries were difficult to answer in the length of the project'* or that the *'timing of the project was too short to have a huge impact'* the outcomes of the majority of projects go a long way to suggest that when an organisation is committed to the cause and goes out of its way to maximise the effect of the project, the results can be considerable, even in a short space of time. There were, inevitably, issues around setting dates, having long enough to establish partnerships and things that fell by the wayside in the race to deliver a good project that, in future, we would like to help avoid. However, in part due to the absolute commitment to reflective practice from the majority of projects, we were able to learn a considerable amount from all of them and as the quote above suggests we won't know what would have been different, if anything, had the projects been longer.

Evaluation and reflective practice

Sing Up aims to evaluate all of the work it does as thoroughly as possible, so that we can learn from our challenges as well as using our successes to prove the case for singing with primary-aged children, whatever their circumstances. With Beyond the Mainstream in particular, we wanted to use these projects as a detailed insight into a part of primary education we knew less well, and to encourage those involved to step back and think about the work they were doing, why it was important and how, if and why it worked.

In some cases there was an initial reluctance to get on board with what seemed a potentially

Tools used for reflective practice and evaluation

- Making time – Projects commented that they had to carve out additional time in advance for reflection because it was so easy for it to be lost in the business of running the project. When they made time for it, it was always useful.
- Filming – Spitalfields Music (and others) found that what started as a film for documentation and sharing became a very useful evaluation tool as they were able to look back and reflect on their own practice.
- Individual reflection time – Extratime found that new trainees needed time on their own with the project leader to express their views, rather than doing this in a group, which felt exposing.
- Agreeing a baseline – Many commented that establishing a baseline was vital to good evaluation. Agreeing that baseline with all involved was also crucial, as it avoided a difference in opinion between workshop leaders and those working regularly with the children.
- Gatherings, co-mentoring and advisors – Having someone who knows little about your project to bounce ideas off or give an objective view can be very enlightening, as well as sharing practice with others working on similar projects.

arduous process. In addition to an application form asking projects to identify 'enquiries' that they would like to look into in their project (that was then followed up with an evaluation form at the end), we asked them to engage with one of our Advisors and to attend gatherings where they would share their practice with others.

However, throughout the course of the programme we have seen some organisations' practice transformed by the opportunity to take time out to think about what they are doing and what they have learned, and for Sing Up we have been able to truly get under the skin of the work and see what we can do to support the good learning that's emerging. The gatherings, and the advice, support and guidance of the Advisors have created a sense of a learning community, and for some the gatherings were the first opportunity to meet people working in a similar field. The opportunities that this has opened up for sharing practice and developing new ideas have been significant.

One organisation pointed out that in a number of cases with Beyond the Mainstream work, the participant is unable or unwilling to self-evaluate due to learning difficulties, physical disabilities or reluctance to voice their opinion. In these cases evaluation needs to be considered and relevant as it is easy to be subjective and impose an evaluation on behalf of the children. Reflecting with and questioning a number of individuals working with a child becomes even more important to get a rounded picture of the effect singing is having on their lives.

Moving on from these projects we may well consider a more academic and certainly external evaluation in future work but the culture of reflection, sharing practice and allowing projects to talk about and evaluate their own work is one that is vital to the success of ongoing projects. Those that do not engage with ongoing reflection and learning often see significant problems in their work as they fail to learn from their mistakes. Those that are able to take managed risks, question their practice and do things differently are the ones that we have seen make extensive strides in their practice.

Training and workforce development

The training and development of both an existing music workforce and the workforce involved in working with the target group on a daily basis (social workers, foster carers, teachers at SEN schools and others) has been key to the success of many of our projects. Nearly all of the projects included a large amount of workforce development both for settings staff and for their own delivery staff. This was, overall, seen as invaluable (and yet often unusual) for those who took part.

Many projects had initial problems with engaging settings staff in sessions due to high workloads, other commitments or lack of interest. A key to solving this was often gaining the support of senior management, who would then allow staff to take part and make them feel it was worthwhile. This did backfire in one instance however when existing politics between management in staff exacerbated the problem and the fact that training had become compulsory made some staff disgruntled and disengaged.

Top tips for training – From the mouths of our projects

- 'A gradual transfer of skills, guided by the trainee, is better than a pre-defined programme.'
- 'A number of short training sessions mixed with practise and on-the-job training can speed up learning.'
- 'Get them on board early – teachers who engaged first, progressed farthest.'
- 'Confidence and enthusiasm are more important than previous musical experience. Eagerness and dedication to the development of Young People is vital from leaders.'
- 'It is vital to get senior management/ Headteachers on board from the beginning and involvement of key staff in planning.'
- 'Monitoring/shadowing by teachers helps to generate a mutual respect.'
- 'You need to provide a lot of support for both trainees and experienced leaders (both emotionally and with skills!).'
- 'It is important to learn, practise and then perform; trainees need a sense of progression and reward.'
- 'A positive inclusive approach which values all staff input at any level fosters a good team environment and brings long term benefits.'

In this instance, a change in programme to include only those actively involved and interested in the programme made for a positive change in attitudes which eventually rolled out to other members of staff, resulting in 100% of teachers questioned feeling that singing had increased in and out of the classroom and that 'ideas from the project were embedded with the school and staff.'

Other ways of engaging staff included ensuring training was part of their own work time, helping them to understand the benefits of singing to the children that they worked with, getting them to enjoy the singing themselves rather than just as a teaching tool and making certain that the group felt safe and relaxed so that they didn't feel embarrassed or under the spotlight.

Musicians working with these target groups, often for the first time, gained a lot from the experience and learnt new skills, growing in confidence throughout the course of the work.

'Musicians interviewed all had significant learnings from this process and from working alongside mental health professionals. These included greater respect for firm boundaries when necessary, an appreciation of the need to be 'gentle but direct and clear' and acknowledging that some participant's behaviour would only improve slowly and that we should look for small targets in that improvement rather than a quick cure.' *Sound Minds*

Many projects were led by one dynamic leader handing on their knowledge to a number of trainees or assistant leaders. Whilst most reported that the trainees had gained considerable skills and often felt comfortable to lead a session on their own it was clear when soliciting projects that there is still a lack of leaders who have sufficient expertise to 'train the trainers.' Whilst this work reflects that there are excellent practitioners on the ground and we have developed pockets of excellent practice that are beginning to link up, we still need to train people further in order to perpetuate this work. This is something we will continue to work on in future programmes.

Practical Delivery

It has been inspiring to read about the different ways projects have engaged children in their various groups. In this section we look at how they did it and how their 'top tips' can help replicate that work in other areas.

Structure

The importance of planning, combined with the ability to throw plans out of the window when responding to the needs of the group, ran through all of the projects to some extent, emphasising the need to listen and respond to what the children want whilst encouraging creativity and new ideas.

'If possible don't hang on to rigid timescales by which certain things should be achieved – an element of trust and fun has to be established.' *Singing Leader, Brighton and Hove*

The amount of time allowed for a session varied considerably, though it was noted that children who had opted in for a project (rather than it being scheduled into their existing group/school day) were likely to commit and be able to concentrate for longer. Many advocated the use of 'down time' within sessions when singing was not the focus, e.g. games, writing exercises, choosing from a menu of options. Making the environment as welcoming as possible, greeting children as they come in and making them feel important seemed crucial.

On this theme, many projects stressed the importance of a good space to host a workshop and using the best equipment possible as well as the best practitioners. Behind this was the theory that 'going the extra mile' for children helps them feel valued, and in turn makes them value the work.

Starting out...

Projects suggested that marketing and advertising alone wouldn't work with engaging disaffected or vulnerable children. Try taster sessions at existing groups or work with existing settings to engage children for you...

...it is very important to make sure you research your target group in advance and speak to people who already work with them...

...Once you begin, word of mouth is one of the fastest and most effective ways to get more in!

Whilst some children will value the structure of a session taking a similar shape week on week it was felt that this should be interspersed with fresh repertoire, new ideas and allowing children the time and space to voice their own opinion to keep it fresh and them focused. Risk-taking was seen to be very important to keeping sessions relevant and in many cases it was felt that keeping your expectations open was the key to getting the most from participants.

Importantly, one project commented on the importance of saying goodbye and ensuring that the end of the project is handled sensitively so that all participants are aware of when it's coming and have time to input how they feel about it and discuss what might happen afterwards.

Group Size

Sing Up did not impose a scale or target number of children in these projects, as we were aware that it was likely group sizes would be small and that work carried out would often need to be intensive and small scale. In the main, we were right and the larger groups we saw documented were usually based in a SEN or Short Stay School and even these were much smaller than average class sizes.

Many projects used both one to one provision and small group work in their projects and overwhelmingly there was a consensus that they worked better as a complement to each other rather than as a stand alone exercise. One to one sessions were said to help further develop technique or to work with particularly shy children, though some said quieter children often liked the feeling of being within a group rather than being singled out.

Whitewood and Fleming, in their work with Looked After Children said that one of the most important things was '[noticing and valuing individual contributions at the key moment](#).' They added that it was less the size of the group that was important, rather the intensive leader support and good participant ratio. Others contributed that the importance of personal space, and balancing that with the number of adults needed to provide adequate social care was vital to ensuring the session went well.

'It was fantastic to have a proper group – 16 people stood together singing is brilliant and leading becomes much easier. It was also great to have J to support me in leading the session. Some of the children have behaviour/ concentration issues but a few of the younger ones like to run around so it really helps to have two adults keeping things together. Especially as in this group we rely very much on learning visually (actions) and singing from memory. So having one doing actions and one the music just makes it a more solid delivery.' *Animateur – Leicester Project*

Repertoire

So what can we learn from these projects about what repertoire works and what doesn't? A list of resources developed as part of the projects is included as Appendix 2 but here are some observations about what was most commonly found across the board.

When asked what methods of teaching they had used, teaching by ear (aurally) was by far the most popular with 100% of projects teaching in this way at some point in their delivery. The use of backing tracks, Kinaesthetic or Dalcroze methods and signed song were also widespread. There were a wide variety of singing styles used across the projects with popular ones including rounds/canons, songs in other languages and vocal percussion. Both a cappella singing and instrumental accompaniment were used widely and songwriting and improvisation were prevalent. The genres of music used were again very diverse spanning classical, traditional, world music, pop, rock, jazz and songs written by the participants themselves.

Structuring the day of your session*

Host a Team meeting prior to the session (with settings staff and music leaders to update on children's progress, find out about their week and discuss any pressing issues)

Deliver the Session

De-brief after the session (To identify any issues, address them and plan for the following week)

Document the de-brief and circulate notes to staff involved and other key personnel (to ensure feedback is constant and useful)

*This structure was used by a number of projects

Many projects commented that there was not one specific kind of repertoire that worked better than another. Singing leaders on the Leicester project felt that **'Passionate delivery and good relationships were the key'** rather than one kind of repertoire, whilst others found that diversity and a constant change of pace is what helped motivate children and keep them engaged.

It was commonly felt that starting with material that was familiar to children and then moving to wider repertoire was a good way to engage participants. Rap or urban music was used as a hook in a few cases but interestingly was not repeatedly asked for and children's favourite songs were often surprising, as likely to be a sea shanty as a pop song. One issue that was raised was ensuring the suitability of songs and checking with teachers or settings staff to ensure that they were appropriate. This was vital in gaining the trust of children, teachers and parents.

'Routine songs' (singing the register, singing in circle time, singing a goodbye song) as part of the school day or songs that were able to be personalised to the children or feel relevant and current were often popular and made singing easier to embed in their daily lives. The culture of allowing children the opportunity to make a choice about what they sing and to feed in ideas and suggestions was one that seemed encouraged across the board.

"One young lady wasn't sure she wanted to take part but the tutor asked her what music she liked and taught the small group a song by this band. The girl instantly engaged and came up to the tutor asking to do it again and discussed different groups she liked. The Centre Manager said he had never seen her so engaged." *Pie Factory Music*

This was further enhanced in those that developed resources or led songwriting projects. Children and adults felt proud both that they had been able to contribute and of the finished result.

Songwriting

The use of songwriting was common to many projects as it allowed projects to tailor work specifically to children as well as allowing them to express their feelings and talk about potentially difficult issues in their lives. Many commented that it seemed to give a healthy way for children to talk about their issues and to own them, to feel confident about talking about them and discussing them.

'It has meant a lot to me, it's helped me be more confident, believe in myself more and it's a lot more easy to express myself. I've been able to talk to other people more and help other people with their problems. The songwriting bit has made me express my emotions and talk about my problems' *Looked After Child – Pie Factory Music*

Repertoire and song-writing – What works well?

- Teaching by ear
- Song-writing
- Diversity of genres
- Starting with something they engage with and then expanding their range
- Listening and responding to the children's needs
- Songs with repetition
- Personalising songs to include the child's name or make it relevant and current
- Varying tempos, rhythms and pitches of songs to maintain engagement
- Rounds and Canons
- Songs in other languages
- Vocal Percussion
- Recording songs that have been written to instill a sense of pride
- Allow children to express emotions through song-writing but be prepared for it, and ensure that your responses are appropriate
- Build up to song-writing, start with repertoire first

Ways into Songwriting

- Using a backing track or drum beat to improvise over
- Writing new words to an existing song
- Doodling then writing words about the doodle
- Describing foods or favourite activities
- Using found objects to tell a story
- Using rhyme, fridge poetry and/or non-sense words

Projects often talked of the children or adults involved in songwriting feeling pride in their work and a sense of achievement above and beyond that of singing repertoire. This was increased further when projects reported that they had recorded the children singing their compositions. Having a CD to take away and to share with others or listen to themselves added to the sense of achievement and worked really well in gaining the interest and acceptance of the children.

Technology, instruments and props

The use of props as a tool for engagement was fairly prevalent among the projects. Involving children in a singing game with props often helped take the attention away from the singing itself, reducing nerves, and children with learning difficulties could often make sure of a toy or prop when they had difficulty vocalising or singing along.

Instruments too, were used to help engagement and children with Special Educational Needs were often seen to respond to music made by instruments. They could be used to get or keep attention and to help support those who found singing a whole tune a challenge.

'The guitar was used to create spaces within and between songs whilst still maintaining a musical thread. A simple drum was used to keep momentum and guide the tempo for some songs.' *Extratime*

Plymouth Music Zone used technology to engage children as part of their project for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities. Vocal looping was a useful tool for allowing children to hear themselves sing and build on the effects of this but one particular freeware programme proved difficult to use and actually caused distress to a group of autistic children using it because of the intensity of the sound. Therefore a looping pedal was used instead to great effect. The children began to *'improvise with their own voice and understand their own interaction with the microphone to produce vocal responses.'* The project leaders also *'used a mirror with built in microphone to allow participants to look at their own faces as they produce vocal responses: the participants developed an inquisitive approach to discovering their own voices and communicative/self-expressive skills.'*

Performance/celebration

Within the programme overall 8 projects out of 14 delivered one or more performances. Those that did a performance felt that on the whole it was a very positive experience and allowed the work to be showcased to people who cared about the children and were involved in their lives, as well as giving the children something to feel proud of and an achievement to work towards.

Projects who worked towards an event expressed the importance of handling the build up sensitively and ensuring that the children felt aware and comfortable with what they needed to achieve. Two or more projects mentioned the importance of practising 'performance conditions' beforehand to prepare them as much as possible, so that they weren't thrown by a change of atmosphere.

Young Leaders/peer to peer learning

At Sing Up, we define Young Leaders as being:

Young people (under the age of 19) leading, influencing change and making a difference to their own lives and the lives of others, in all areas of society

- *Young people supporting the learning and personal development of their peers and younger children;*
- *Making their voices heard in school councils, in their own communities, through youth organisations and civic bodies;*
- *Expressing ideas, making choices, decisions and taking action about issues which concern them;*
- *making positive contributions to business and enterprise;*
- *Leading their own lives, playing sport, making music, supporting peers, being effective role models.²*

² Sing Up Young Singing Leaders How-To guide

The use of Young Leaders was not a requirement of the Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream programme and on the whole was not a major feature in the work, although many mentioned it would be something they would like to build on in the future. Three projects had attempted to build in Young Leader programmes but time constraints and a commitment to ensuring the main body of the project went well led to them not progressing with this strand of work.

West Berkshire Council was one of the main projects in which Young Leaders were an integral part of the programme with older children buddying children with Special Educational Needs as part of a residential music camp, culminating in a performance. The older children helped with 'lyrics, melody lines and actions. They assisted with folder holding, putting on costumes, standing and sitting and with some behavioural issues.' They also pointed out when their buddies needed a rest and kept diaries on 'Which songs motivated their buddy and how it was that they were helping.' Both in this project and in Mulberry Bush, the older children had a considerable affect on their 'mentees' and this provision of a positive role model is something that should be replicated in future projects.

Other projects, such as Pie Factory Music, used older Young Leaders (aged between 16 and 18) as trainees. They were involved in a significant amount of training and were, in the case of Pie Factory Music, paid expenses for their time working on the project. This was helping to develop a new generation of Music Leaders, and providing role models for the Looked After Children involved in this work.

Parent and carer Involvement

Overall parent and carer interaction with the projects was reasonably strong with 100% of projects indicating some level of engagement. Whilst we might expect that a lot of this interaction would just involve attending a concert, over half of projects said that parents or carers had also asked advice of the singing leaders and/or observed a workshop (some had taken part) and many said that parents or carers had arranged instrumental or vocal tuition and/or asked about progression. 9 out of the 14 projects indicated that they felt parents and carers attitudes to music making had changed as a result of their child's involvement in the project.

These figures reflect the significant effect that parental or carer involvement (or lack of it) can have on the development of the children involved in the work. Several projects commented on 'the ability of parents and carers to restrict singing opportunities for young people.' Specifically, if parents or carers weren't able or willing to provide transport or give up time to take children to sessions, this often meant they could not attend. In some instances not attending sessions was used by parents or carers as punishment for children if they had misbehaved in the week.

Tackling these issues was often about ensuring parents and carers were kept well informed, and engaging them from the outset of the programme. Spitalfields Music came up with an innovative way of reaching the parents and carers of the boys involved in their programme, by sending home a video of the project half way through.

'When he brought the CD home he said... "Can you put it on?" and he was so excited, he really wanted, um [me/you] to hear it.' *Parent, Spitalfields Music*

This showed the carers the process that the boys had been through, rather than just inviting them to the performance (which they also did). It also gave the boys something to be proud of. Overall, when parents and carers were given a chance to interact with a project, the children felt an additional sense of pride.

Top tips for involving parents and carers

- Get in touch with them up front – where possible let them know about the project and invite them to be involved
- Keep in touch – send letters home or invite them into sessions
- Get them singing – put on sessions where parents and carers can get involved and/or do their own singing
- Keep talking – listen to their feedback and ask them questions about their child

How Sing Up involvement makes a difference

As mentioned before, Sing Up hoped to ensure through its Beyond the Mainstream programme that the relationship with projects was more of a partnership than a strictly funder/fundee relationship. On the whole this worked well and was well received with the gatherings being well attended and receiving excellent feedback and the Advisor's input being greatly valued. The feeling too, of being part of something bigger, lent an extra sense of purpose to many of those involved and allowed the sharing of practice (often for the first time) between some of the key practitioners working in this field.

How did projects engage with Sing Up?

- Almost all projects registered with the website and encouraged usage within the settings they worked in.
- All projects attended at least one of the Sing Up gatherings and shared practice with one another.
- The majority of projects have attended training organised by their Area Leader.
- 50% of projects have received Vocal Force Training.

'The accessibility of Sing Up opportunities such as area workshops and the conference at Brighton Dome made the trainees feel part of something very positive and exciting. This has contributed to their enthusiasm in the project and their motivation to develop their skills in this area which is key to them continuing to deliver singing sessions at Extratime in the future.' *Extratime*

Many singing leaders took part in Sing Up training and some have commented that they will continue to do so after the life of the project. Linking with Area Leaders too has been useful for legacy as organisations can work together on exit strategies and ensuring progression routes for participants.

On the other hand, some have felt frustrations with restrictions on timing that the project imposed. Sing Up has been as responsive as possible to the needs of programmes but in order to ensure that data would be useful in future Sing Up work a limit of nine months was put on all projects, preferably to include evaluation (though this was extended in many cases). Only one or two individuals indicated that they had significant issues with the amount of reflection that was expected of the projects and that they felt 'under the spotlight.' On the whole, this reflection was seen as a positive thing.

Moving to the future it is important that the positive feeling surrounding this group isn't damaged by changes in direction and that the momentum of these projects is allowed to continue. Each project has been given the opportunity to apply for up to £2,000 to assist with plans for legacy or continuation. So far around 50% have taken up this offer. Sing Up will also continue to invite them to national gatherings and events.

Leaving a legacy...

A selection of what is happening after the life of the Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream Pilots

'Having participated in the Sing Up project, we are delighted to say we have now incorporated Performing arts and singing as part of our weekly provision and will be using the medium to meet our outcomes. Sing Up has helped us to understand the value of singing in working with children and young people.' *Contact Project, Leicester*

'40% of the children have expressed a real desire to own, play and learn an instrument of their own.' *Whitewood and Fleming*

'The project has enhanced the desire and need for training and interest in singing amongst musical leaders at PMZ.' *Plymouth Music Zone*

'100% of teachers interviews said that singing had increased in and out of the classroom and that ideas from the project were embedded with the school and staff.' *GMMAZ*

'One Young Person is joining a rock group. Brighton and Hove MAS is delivering free music lessons to all Looked After Children. All Looked After Children at KS2 will take part in Soundmakers. Downs View (Special School) are having weekly Soundmakers session with the singing leader. One Young Person has been nominated for Youth Music Mentors' *Brighton and Hove*

Moving Forward

The journey travelled from the conception of Sing Up Beyond the Mainstream to where we find ourselves now in early 2010 has been a considerable one. We have been able to learn so much from the successes, as well as the challenges, of all of these projects. The invaluable support of our advisors has lent so much to the work of Sing Up and the often lively debate between us has constantly challenged us to go further and in new directions.

The managers of these projects have worked hard to ensure that the legacy of them will continue locally and we have already seen that some groups continue to run, settings staff and new trainees are feeling more confident to use singing in these settings, individual children have gone onto further singing or instrumental tuition and the organisations themselves have built much better capacity for delivering this sort of work. However, the legacy will also continue through learning that Sing Up has been able to take from the programme.

Building on this learning we intend to:

- Increase the accessibility of Sing Up's existing resources and develop further resources specific to this field
- Continue to provide training and professional development that supports the growth of a workforce to deliver this work nationally
- Develop further practical projects on specific areas that we need to know more about to feed into national resources and training
- Raise awareness of the importance of singing in settings 'beyond the mainstream' and campaign for further change
- Work specifically with Children's Services and Music Organisations on developing a programme for Looked After Children and Young People, helping to improve their well-being through singing and utilising the learning from projects to create resources and training to further this work nationally.

With Sing Up's funding currently due to finish in March 2011 it is vital that we work quickly and in a targeted way to ensure a legacy for this work. It is important, however, to remember that this will only be effective if we continue to reflect on our work, be open to new ideas and listen and learn from the people that, through these projects especially, have proved themselves experts in the field.