



Concertteenies

'Musical Stories in South Yorkshire'

October 2022 - July 2023

Evaluation report

Stephanie E. Pitts

Verna M. Vazquez Diaz de Leon

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Summary of project

Between October 2022 and June 2023, Concerteenies delivered a series of 'Musical Stories' live music events in education settings and public spaces across South Yorkshire, featuring professional solo instrumentalists, illustrated and narrated story-telling, and interactive singing and music-making. The project aimed to explore how this work could have a lasting impact in under-served communities. Concerteenies commissioned SPARC Consultancy, based at the University of Sheffield, to evaluate the impact of the events on the children, parents / carers, musicians and staff involved.

The Musical Stories project was funded by Arts Council England, Sarah Nulty Power of Music Foundation, Sheffield Church Burgesses Trust, Sheffield Grammar School Exhibition Foundation, and Sheffield Town Trust.

Headlines

Musical Stories in numbers...

🎵 **84 live music events** took place in **64 venues** across Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield.

🎵 The project reached **41 schools and nurseries** (73% of which were new to working with Concerteenies), and **family venues** including theatres, libraries, a museum, a pub, a playground, a nightclub and a shopping centre.

🎵 **6,094 children** and **grown ups took part** in the live music events.

🎵 The majority of nursery / school participants were 3-7 years, while family events reached people from c. 6 months to 90+ years and included some **family groups spanning four generations**.

🎵 **5 inset sessions** for teachers took place.

🎵 The Musical Stories were performed by **nine instrumentalists** (marimba, cello, clarinet / bass clarinet, and harp) and **three creative practitioners** (narrators / leaders / education specialists). The instrumentalists and creative practitioners were 50% early career artists and 50% experienced / established, and 50% female and 50% male. Two were from global majority backgrounds.

🎵 The project recruited **six volunteers**, of whom half had special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

🎵 The Musical Stories learning and SEND support resources and YouTube films were **viewed over 3,000 times** in the last year.

🎵 The project worked collaboratively with **22 partner organisations** (95% for the first time) this year, including:

- **SEND:** Famlingo for British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation at 3 concerts and 3 SEND specialists to create SEND support packs and 'Walk-round' films.
- **Venues:** including Leadmill nightclub, Greystones Backroom, Victoria Hall, Kelham Island Museum in Sheffield. Cast Theatre, The Point, Frenchgate in Doncaster, 10 Barnsley Libraries, Civic Theatre (Barnsley), Rotherham Theatres, Grimm&Co. And Wath Festival
- **Organisations:** LCEPs; Fusion (Barnsley), Create Sheffield, Imagine Rotherham. The four SY Music Hubs. Ignite Imaginations.
- **SY Local Authorities:** including museums, heritage ,culture, libraries, learning, children's services including 'Family Hubs', 'Looked After Children' and 'Early Years Inclusion'.

🎵 The project attracted **11 pieces of regional press coverage** (including Yorkshire Post, BBC Radio Sheffield and most regional papers), most of these for the first time.

... and in words

Thank you for a fabulous start to our Easter holidays with your fun interactive story telling, finger puppet making, music and bubbles. What a glorious and colourful experience we all had. Your team were so welcoming and thoughtful at every level to ensure this activity may be as inclusive as possible. Our children and their families loved it. (Nursery leader)

It's brilliant, fully engaging for children and parents alike. Lots of actions, involvement, bubbles and instruments. Professionals leading the session are amazing. Accessible for most, as the cost is affordable, for such a high quality musical experience. It just made me and my daughter feel happy. (Parent / carer)

I've really benefited from being involved in this project. Having recently come out of music college, it's really good to have more experience in different types of performance skills and experience. I don't want to just play in [an orchestra] pit all the time. The variety is really important to me. I think it's really important to take music up close to new people which is why it feels really fresh and vibrant. (Instrumentalist)

Full report

Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation aimed to address the following questions:

[A1] What are the **baseline levels** of musical confidence, interest, skill and enjoyment for all participants involved?

[A2] How are those baselines **changed** by the experience of Musical Stories, and what are the key factors that contribute to that change?

[A3] What are the **key development needs** identified by the evaluation, and how could these be addressed with future activities and resources?

These three aims encompass the route through the Musical Stories project for all participants, from expectations and prior experience for everyone from children to musicians **[A1]**, through the experience of the sessions **[A2]**, to future planning to support and expand the activities offered through this project **[A3]**.

Methods and responses

The evaluation aimed to gather perspectives from all those involved with the Musical Stories project:

Children: the young people at the heart of the project, to see how they were involved in the sessions, what made them excited, involved, happy, or otherwise, and what their responses showed about their baseline music and language skills.

Parents, carers and grandparents: for insights on how their children responded to the sessions, and what follow-up activities and future musical ambitions they intended to pursue afterwards.

Nursery and school staff: Early Years (EY) practitioners in nurseries and Key Stage 1 (KS1) in schools, who hosted the sessions and led their children in warm-up and follow-up activities using the website resources, to understand their own confidence in leading music and their ambitions for future activities in their settings.

Musicians: the instrumentalists and creative practitioners involved in delivering the sessions, for insights on what works, how the children responded, what is challenging and fulfilling for them as musicians, and how they see themselves as future performers and / or leaders in early years music activities.

Responses were collected using the methods judged most appropriate for the situations in which the Musical Stories sessions took place, and included surveys, observations and short informal interviews. Musicians and nursery staff, for whom the Concerteenies team had contact details and permission to be in touch, were sent an **online questionnaire via email**, to be returned to the SPARC Consultancy team after each session. For the musicians, this included an additional **end of project survey**. The parents and carers at the sessions were more difficult to contact afterwards, due to GDPR restrictions and on-the-day attendance, and so they were asked to follow a **QR link to an online survey**, displayed on the final Powerpoint slide of the story presentation. Since these methods were likely to miss some distracted parents and carers, and also favour those who were most confident with technology and written language, a Masters student from the University of Sheffield also **observed some of the Musical Stories** in a range of venues, taking notes and having informal conversations before and after the session. Additionally, some of the hosting organisations carried out their own data collection and reported this back to the Concerteenies and SPARC teams, including a **'what three words'** printed survey at Barnsley Library.

Evaluation data in numbers:

♪ **80 survey responses** were received from **parents / carers**

♪ **39 survey responses** were received from **nursery staff**

♪ **7 survey responses** were received from instrumentalists at the start of the project, and a further **7 end of project survey responses** were received from **instrumentalists and creative practitioners**

♪ **15 sessions were observed** by members of the SPARC Consultancy team

Much of the data gathered was qualitative, prioritising the experience and ethos of the project, and recognising that numerical measurement of progress in music or language would be unsuitable for evaluating one-off activities. Nonetheless, there is an element of longitudinal change in the experiences of the musicians, who were able to reflect back on what they have learned in the project, and from the number of repeat attenders amongst the parents / carers, who brought their children back for additional sessions after a positive first experience.

Through the combination of data gathered, we were able to gain a strong sense of responses to the Musical Stories project and their effects on the musical confidence and skills of the children and their families and teachers. In the findings and recommendations that follow, evidence has been drawn from across the surveys and observations to consider the experience for all participants involved: children, parents / carers, nursery staff, and musicians.

In the discussion that follows, **key findings** and examples of **good practice** are highlighted, and suggestions for **future development** are emphasised in bold. Direct quotes from data are shown in **yellow italics** throughout.

Evaluation and key findings

[A1] What are the expectations and needs of the Musical Stories participants?

A1.1 Children and parents' prior musical experience

In the parents / carers survey, we asked whether the children had attended any similar events in the past, and found a mix of repeat attenders at Concerteenies events (54%), and first-timers (31%), as shown in Figure 1.

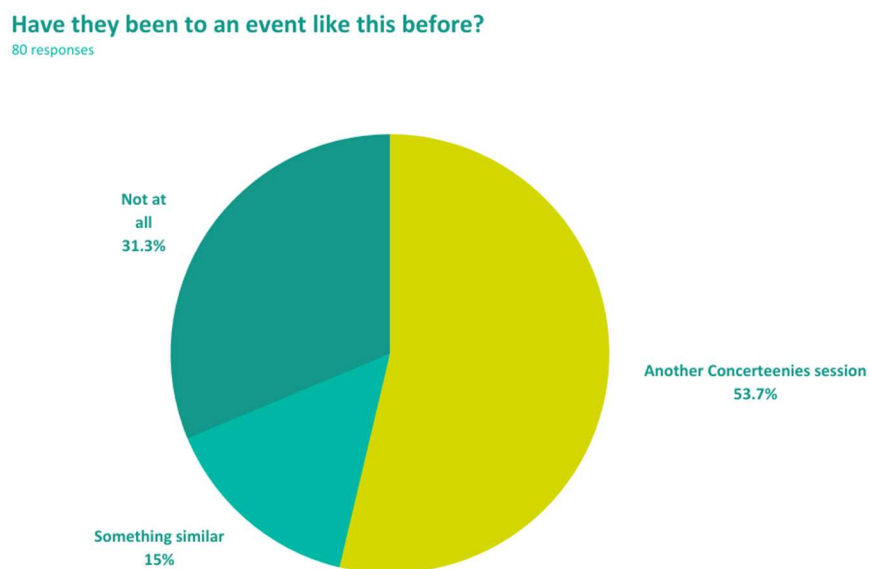


Figure 1: Previous attendance at similar events

Since this was the first time that Musical Stories had worked in South Yorkshire, the repeat attenders are partly accounted for by participants coming back for another event, as noted in the observations at family events. For example, several parents at Barnsley Library had travelled from Sheffield, having previously attended an event at Kelham Island.

The survey aimed to gather more detailed responses on the levels of musical activity and literacy in the home (see Figure 2). While these results suggested that the majority of children came from families that supported music-making and reading, it should be noted that literate and confident parents were the most likely to fill in the survey, so these figures should be interpreted with caution.

Do they regularly hear or make music and stories in other ways (please tick all that apply)?
80 responses

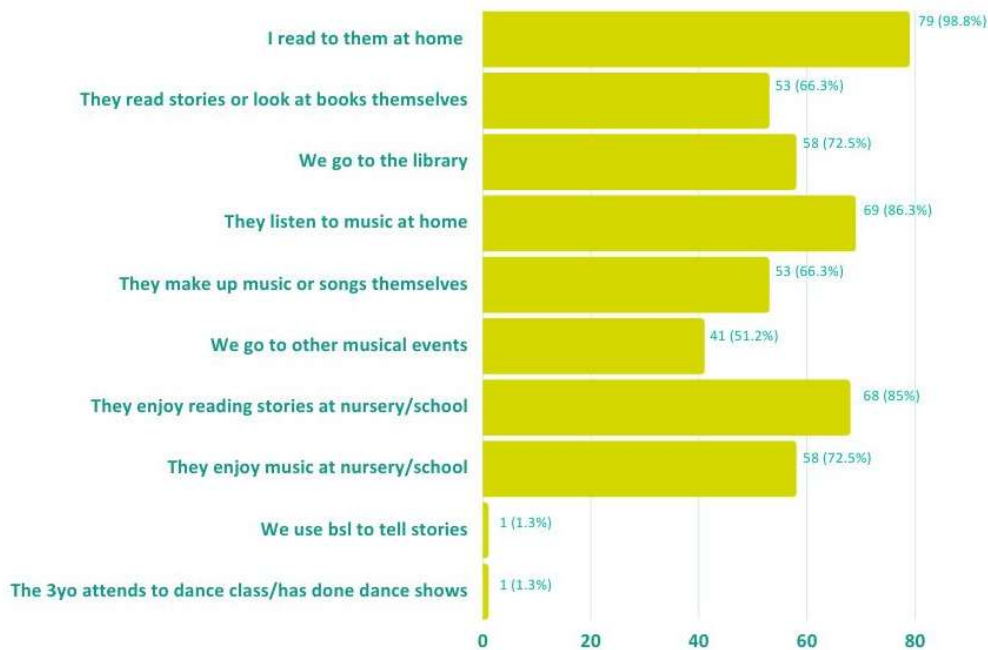


Figure 2: Children's other music and story activities

While the benefits for families who came regularly to similar events were prevalent in the survey responses, there were also insights from parents / carers for whom Musical Stories was their first experience of live music:

We had a fantastic time. It was unlike anything we've ever done before so thank you for making this our first experience. Because it has been so positive, I've decided to look for other sessions similar and that's massive for my confidence as a parent to do so.

(Parent / carer survey response)

Among the survey respondents, it was notable that relatively few had made use of the Musical Stories resources provided online: 40% had not looked at the website, 26% had watched the videos, and only 10% had done the creative activities, which included drawing and craft projects. Many more intended to use the online resources after the sessions though: 49% said this was very likely, and 45% quite likely. This shows that the sessions had been effective and increased the appetite for further engagement.

A1.2 Teachers' baseline musical confidence

Most of the nursery staff felt musically confident all the time during the sessions (79.5%) (see Fig. 3), stating that having previous access to resources was really helpful. This correlates with the high rate of staff feeling very-well prepared for the session (87.1%), shown in Figure 3:

How well-prepared did you feel to take on that role?
39 responses

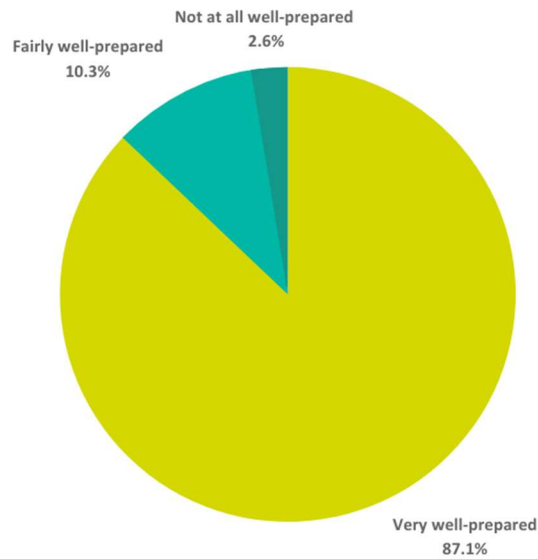


Figure 3: How well-prepared the staff felt for the session.

Many of the staff stated that being able to practise the songs with the children helped them to know what to expect and how to introduce unfamiliar instruments to the children. Staff comments included that having the opportunity to practise helped them to feel more confident:

Once we got into the swing of things practising most days I felt more confident. It's also good to show the children you don't have to be a good singer to enjoy singing.

The video links sent out in advance allowed staff to know what to expect.

The resources provided were great in allowing us to prepare the children for the songs and introducing an unfamiliar musical instrument.

The resources provided were clear and very helpful. They were given plenty of time to rehearse the songs.

(Teacher survey responses)

One of the key aims for Concerteenies was to equip nursery staff to include and prioritise more musical activities in their classroom. Many of the staff stated that they were very likely to increase the variety of musical activities in their classrooms (66.7%), it was also reported that the main obstacles to this are lack of confidence, training and time. Budget and finance to acquire musical instruments or training is also complicated when there are other priorities within the nursery or school setting. Many teachers agreed that their children would benefit from the opportunity to engage with more musical activities and experiences, however, the

stated preference was still to have frequent visits from the Concerteenies team. This demonstrates an appetite for ongoing work from Concerteenies, as well as the need for further training to help teachers build their musical confidence.

It was good for a number of staff to see and take part in the [inset] session, so that they can then take on elements within their delivery of either music or story. The difficulty with the teaching of music in schools is that staff confidence can be low, also subject knowledge. Early years is less of an issue but I do feel the delivery in KS2 can be difficult for non-specialists.

Mostly it is time constraints and for me confidence in delivery.

We already participate in quite a lot of singing activities although I'm not so confident with instruments.

Musical expertise of staff. Although including song and simple percussion is relatively easy and cost effective, exposing children to more instruments is trickier due to cost and staff expertise.

We are not all talented at music but keen to try.

I would love to do more musical stories, but don't feel I have the expertise to do so.

(Teacher survey responses)

[A2] What is the experience of Musical Stories and how does this change the musical horizons of participants?

A2.1 Children's responses in the sessions

In asking the parents and carers how their children responded, we made a distinction between engagement, understanding and enjoyment, with some revealing results reported in Figure 4:

Please tell us in general about how your child responded to the Musical Stories session?

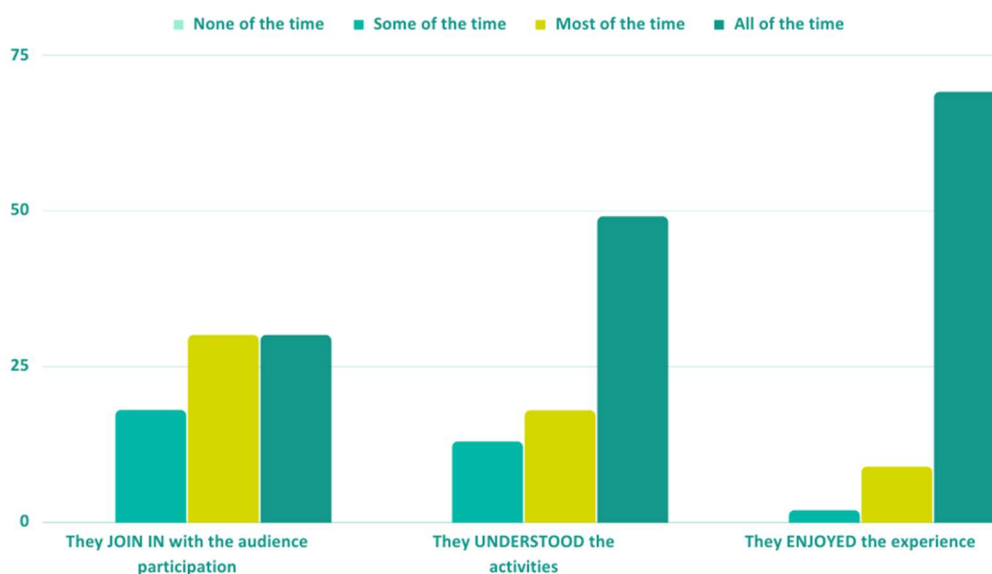


Figure 4: Parents' and carers' ratings of children's joining in, understanding, and enjoyment

The much higher rating for enjoying activities all of the time (69%) showed that the parents and carers understood the value of the children being in the session, even if they were not joining in all of the time (30%) or fully understanding the activities (49%). The observations illustrated that 'joining in' takes many forms (and in retrospect, was perhaps not the right term for the survey):

One child was quiet and not interacting but as soon as his grownup did, the child did as well.

A few quieter children who aren't verbally joining in, still engaged and watching- inclusive for all.

(Observation notes from events at Kelham Island)

In their survey responses, the parents / carers reported a wide variety of 'highlights' across the sessions:

Hearing and watching Matt playing the marimba and saying hello to Matt afterwards.

The set up itself - telling stories through music

My 4 year old watching and copying the signing and songs. 1 year old didn't engage loads but loved the bubbles!

The joining in refrains of the song. My 4 year old said he liked the parents doing the singing and being silly.

The fact it felt like a real 'experience' and trip out for them.

The story, cello, bubbles, dinosaur outside, singing.....all of it!

It was lovely for me as a grandparent to come to this event with my children and grandchildren. We all enjoyed it in different ways. As a retired teacher I'd give it 10 out of 10!!

(Parent / carer survey responses)

These varied comments show that the format and ethos of the sessions works well, encouraging interaction and involvement, and giving the parents the opportunity to watch their children enjoying musical activities. The experience reflected in the final quote above has inspired an MA Psychology of Music student at the University of Sheffield to investigate inter-generational musical activities for her dissertation research: her **early findings show the benefits of the sessions for family bonding across generations, which is something that could become a focus of future marketing and planning for Concerteenies.**

The musicians observed, similarly, that the children were most engaged when there were active instructions to follow, and these responses clearly energised and enthused the musicians too:

Some children knew the words really well and were enthusiastically joining in! I saw a lot of smiles. In the parts where they could participate in the music, like the ROAR moments, they joined in with a lot of energy and enjoyment.

The children enjoyed the actions during the participatory singing songs and were particularly engaged during the warm-up games where the cello mimics the instruction ("could you please stand up" or "touch your head"); children also responding well when the teachers joined in and were engaged too!

(Musician survey responses)

The observation notes showed how the creative practitioners and instrumentalists used sound and activity to focus the children's energy and attention:

*Polly asking questions to get the children to concentrate
Children mostly quiet during calming song and joined in with breathing
Children moving between sitting with adults and on their own*

*Babies crawling around on the floor towards the marimba
Children quite loud but Matt plays the marimba to quieten down*

Children asking to help and come to the front

Loads of volunteers to go to the front

(Observation notes from visits to three different sessions)

A2.2 Adults' responses in the sessions

The children's responses, discussed above, were affected by the presence and participation of 'their grown ups', as the workshop leaders called them in the sessions: this was true both for the teachers and staff in the nursery schools, and the parents, carers and grandparents in the public venues. In the family settings, which included libraries and the back room of a pub, the enthusiasm of the parents was evident, and they often pointed and spoke to their children about the musical instruments they could see:

Grown ups pointing at things and explaining to the children

Grown ups talking to each other about children

(Observation notes from library session)

Both of these responses were understandable, and in some ways kept the children engaged; however, they added to the noise in the session, and the workshop leaders began adding a request to "please save your chat with each other for later, but join in with the singing because your children will love that!" One of the musicians observed that for some parents unfamiliar with live music events, joining in was potentially quite a challenge, but their presence was nonetheless important:

I think parents are often nervous about joining in. But I think it's so important that they are there, listening, sitting alongside their children even if they don't sing or look a bit shy or embarrassed.

(Musician end of project survey response)

It was evident from some of the adults' interactions as they arrived that some knew each other and were attending for their own social wellbeing as well as that of their children, so this is a **potential hidden benefit of the Musical Stories sessions that could be considered more in future projects**. Indeed, this forms part of Concerteenies' business plan, with events including relaxation concerts and nursery rhyme gigs aiming to tackle social isolation and poor mental health (especially for young, single parents), and to give musical opportunities for families who have lack of confidence or access to cultural events (Concerteenies Business Plan 2022–26, p. 8).

In a different setting, that of the Leadmill nightclub in Sheffield, one parent noted the social benefits with an element of nostalgia for past clubbing days!

It had a really amazing atmosphere at the Leadmill. So cool to be in a nightclub with our children early in the morning! It brings back many memories!!! Sarah, the assistant, was really brilliant as well, it's really good to see that Polly is providing opportunities to someone young and upcoming. The other people on the team were really great at making us feel welcome and supported. It all felt really well organised and calm and special for us, as families, to do this kind of thing. I also invited 3 dad friends with their kids and they really enjoyed it too. They didn't know what to expect before. It was good for us to catch up at the bar too!!!! (Parent / carer survey response)

One of the musicians noted the fine balance between adults contributing their knowledge of and relationship with the children, but leaving the leading of the session to the Concerteenies team:

Some children did appear a little anxious or uncertain at the beginning of sessions and it helped them to see their teachers and caregivers joining in/smiling/giving safety cues etc. Encouraging staff involvement and participation is key in school settings as well as welcoming children in a friendly and engaging way, which Polly does excellently every time.

(Musician survey response)

The involvement of adults in the nursery / school settings was observed to be variable, though since it was generally more focused on encouraging all children to join in, rather than the one-to-one encouragement offered by parents and carers, it had the potential to be more helpful to the running of the session. Some teachers expressed a clear understanding of their own value to the session, describing their roles as preparing children for the activities in advance and managing their behaviour and engagement on the day:

Encourage participation from the children, ensure the children were comfortable with a new experience, to take part in the session so the learning could be extended following the session.

Joining in with enthusiasm and a zest for life, we watched the videos beforehand and practised the songs, we loved getting fully prepped.

Modelling to the children how to engage in the activities and supporting them to follow the directions given to them.

(Teacher survey responses)

A substantial number of teacher responses included the word “modelling”, showing that they were prepared to get involved and knew the benefits of this for ensuring the children were engaged. This approach also helps to make the Concerteenies activities sustainable, by avoiding the idea that Polly and the musicians as “experts” are the only people able to make music with the children. However, quite a few teacher responses were more distanced, referring to booking rooms and equipment, or feeling able to be “able to sit back and enjoy the performance with the children.” Overall, 76.9% (n=30) teachers reported feeling musically involved (see Figure 5):

How would you rate your own experience of the session?

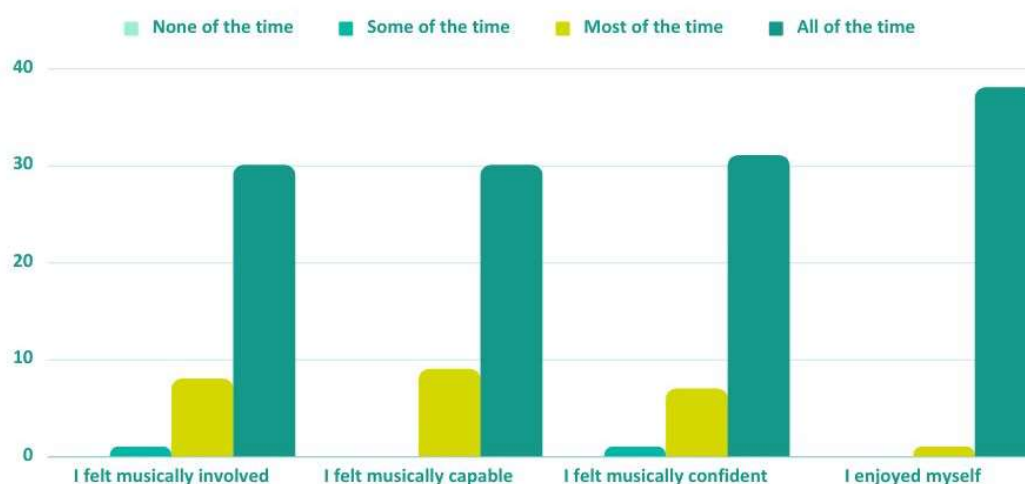


Figure 5: Teachers' rating of their experience of the session.

It was observed by the creative practitioners that visits to schools who were familiar with Concerteenies' work tended to go more smoothly: these teachers had often prepared more extensively and were able to trust the creative practitioners to lead the sessions without too much teacher intervention, beyond enthusiastic joining in. Moreover, these schools were the ones to state that their hopes for the session was based on children's enjoyment of music and storytelling, implying knowledge of the different benefits of live music and the Concerteenies sessions. For new schools, their hopes were more specifically focused on learning processes and access to musical experiences (see Figure 6).

New Schools

We hoped the children would enjoy the session and that they would demonstrate a good level of comprehension of the story following the session.

The children to experience and enjoy live music and learn about a musical instrument.

A live and engaging performance relevant to KS1.

Familiar Schools

To see children participate in a storytelling event like no other.

Enjoyment and appreciation of live music.

That the children would be excited and participate in the session.

Figure 6: Teacher survey responses on expectations of the Musical Stories sessions

Support from venues was also essential in the family events, and a theatre new to the project confirmed that "we're delighted to be working with Concerteenies as it offers something really

different for our audiences.” At Barnsley Library, one of the observers heard the staff working out how to accommodate the afternoon’s chess club while the Musical Stories session was happening: they were clearly very supportive, noting that the sounds emanating from that end of the library were “very relaxing, but maybe not when you’re playing chess”! Another venue manager sent feedback after a session:

You involve the families. Irrespective of their culture or background your beautiful music and fun creates a happy belonging feeling of togetherness . Priceless. Your team was so welcoming and thoughtful at every level to ensure this activity may be as inclusive as possible. This is very important for our venue.

(Venue manager, email feedback)

For the musicians, the satisfaction of participating in the sessions came partly from witnessing the “excitement” of the children and the “appreciation” of the adults, but also from developing their own musical skills and broadening their career portfolio. One player, who concluded by saying they were “really proud to work with Concerteenies”, gave the following reflections:

It's a win-win for the audience and a win for me - the younger generation are inspired and I am doing what I love. It's so amazing to be able to present [my instrument] in friendly relaxed informal and approachable settings. It also has made my career as a professional musician more sustainable by giving me plenty of work opportunities in new locations with new audiences.

(Musician end of project survey response)

[A3] What next? How can the learning from Musical Stories help with future planning and training?

A3.1 Future plans for families and children

There was a strong endorsement for the sessions when parents / carers were asked whether they were likely to attend similar events again: 92% said that this was very likely, and the remaining 8% that this was quite likely. Several parents reported that they hoped their child would play an instrument “if they’re interested”, and demonstrated that Concerteenies could play a role in increasing this interest:

Would LOVE there to be accessible (and possibly interactive with some actual instruments?) sessions like Concerteenies to introduce little ones to the different instruments in an orchestra - it would help my little one decide which instrument he would like to learn.

(Parent / carer survey response)

While many of the parents who answered the survey seemed already to be thinking about exposing their children to music, there was also evidence that newcomers had been impressed by the experience and wanted to find ways to repeat it:

I'd love to come to more of your concerts. Now we know about you we'll look out for more. I'm going to talk to our children's school too as this should happen in schools.

(Parent / carer survey responses)

The adults seemed to really enjoy seeing their child enjoying the experience. I think a lot of the adults weren't used to seeing live instruments up close so it's a good opportunity for them too.

(Musician survey response)

The parents were asked for any recommendations for changes to the sessions: most said they could not think of any, and a few made small practical suggestions, such as using a bubble machine rather than moving between the children. A few comments related to cost, and one to the “nightmare” of city centre parking. The length of the event was mentioned a few times, but the range of responses showed that needs varied on this aspect: “it was the perfect length of concert for his age group”, “the intro on the cello was a bit long for them”, and “they both said they wanted it to be longer.”

A3.2 Future plans for nurseries and teachers

The nursery staff gave a strongly positive response to the question “How likely are you to increase the amount or variety of musical activities in your classroom, following the Musical Stories session?": 26 (66.7%) said “very likely” and 13 (33.3%) “quite likely”. Responses from the teacher survey stated that the sessions provided ideas for using music within the classroom by including familiar music into storytelling or by incorporating simple singing games. Staff agreed that adding songs or music to stories is a way to “bring things to life with music”, which is a way that children can express themselves, and is part of the early years curriculum. Many staff saw musical experiences as a way of embedding a positive culture towards music, and bridging the gap between families and the school community, particularly where home attitudes to music might be different, as one teacher noted:

As a school in a multicultural area, music is not always appreciated by our families. We often feel we are giving them a very different message than the one they get at home or during their out of school religious teaching. We have to try to bridge that without maligning the thoughts of the community. Giving them a musical experience in this way makes it easier as the children enjoy it so much they talk about it with their families. (Child pressure!)

(Teacher survey response)

Some staff gave specific ideas for how they would increase musical activity in their future teaching, referring in many cases to the storytelling component and their new understanding of how to add sound and music to this familiar activity:

The session gave the staff a good model for storytelling strategies such as including the whole class with actions during the story to help with comprehension and engagement

I loved how the music created the mood and how the children were involved in creating this, I would love to add this to our own story telling in school

(Teacher survey responses)

The enthusiastic responses of the children were clearly a strong motivator for the teachers to want to try future musical activities, though the reported lack of confidence, funding and time remains a familiar barrier, which Concerteenies could help to overcome through planned long-term interventions in future projects.

A3.3 Future plans for musicians and creative practitioners

The end of project survey responses illustrated how the musicians had “learned on the job” and developed their skills by participating in Musical Stories:

I learnt how flexible and adaptable the sessions can be - I will definitely be communicating more within the concert and picking up cues while reading the room and working well as a team.

To enjoy the time explaining how my instrument works and to play with everything with commitment, including the improvised bits at the start and end.

I wasn't sure what to expect at the beginning of the project but the team are such experts in supporting us as musicians to do what we do. I've never performed concerts like this before and was really nervous that the children were really young.

It's helped me build confidence in taking music into community settings and in interacting with audiences. I've been able to work on improvising and being adaptable and flexible in a performance setting.

The project has shown me how to deliver a performance that can be engaging and exciting for young people. I felt like I was able to step outside of my classical performance brain, which can often be hard to do, and focus on the energy of the music and how I could bring the story to life for the audience.

(Musician end of project survey responses)

The role of the trainee creative practitioner - commented upon favourably in some of the parent / carer responses - was integral to Musical Stories, and involved training, scaffolding and support designed to increase confidence in leading sessions:

My confidence definitely grew across the project once I got to grips with the general overview and the typical running of a session. I also grew more secure in going with the flow and adapting/improvising on the spot where necessary. I really enjoyed all the sessions, perhaps even more so as my confidence grew.

At the start I was encouraged to join in with singing along and the actions as well as setting up the tech. I had really clear instructions but was still a bit nervous. As the weeks went on I felt more and more confident singing and encouraging the children to join in too. I received some training (Trauma Informed Practice) in January and that too really helped me feel more confident to do my role facilitating as I understood more research (e.g. I smiled more at the children and welcomed them into the sessions, things I was already doing but now had reason to and scientific backing).

(End of project trainee creative practitioner survey response)

For other musicians, there was also evidence in the end of project survey of how scaffolding opportunities by increasing levels of responsibility and involvement had helped them gain confidence. These responses showed the potential of Concerteenies to develop future musical careers for its staff, and likely also its volunteers (though they were not included in our data collection):

In the last few months ... I was the narrator/ main facilitator for about 8 sessions which I really enjoyed. It was so kind and empowering of the team to let me have that opportunity - it helped me grow as a musician and enjoy the project on a new level.

(End of project trainee creative practitioner survey response)

Most of the musicians reported already being “very confident” in their role, sometimes drawing upon previous work with Concerteenies, or other musical experience with children.

Nonetheless, they reported feeling confident and effective “most of the time”, rather than entirely, and offered some suggestions for further development:

As had been the case for the teachers, the musicians felt that theirs was a valuable supporting role, and when asked hypothetically to think about taking on a workshop leading role, they identified a need for additional training:

If I was to deliver a session I would want prior support on: narrating without losing your voice, engaging the whole room, dealing with distracted children and engaging staff well.

I felt pretty confident with the rehearsal we had. Perhaps a session focusing more on delivery as I was in a more accompanying role.

(Musician survey responses)

The musicians’ awareness of their role in the sessions is similar to the teachers, but the gap in their skills is quite different, with secure musical knowledge contrasting with confidence to manage the children and grown-ups in the session. **There is potential for a skills exchange between early years teachers and musicians, which could also increase understanding of one another’s role in the sessions, and Concerteenies leaders would be well placed to deliver this kind of training.**

Several responses noted the potential - if not the capacity - for Concerteenies to reach more schools, public venues, and young people and families, as summarised by one of the musicians:

There is so much potential for the project to go to a national level. There is so much demand and so many more audiences that would love to see the music. It's so exciting that more national venues are now interested in booking us. This model of project is really adaptable. I'm excited to bring young audiences into bigger concert venues too.

(Musician end of project survey response)

Summary and recommendations

This report illustrates the successes, reach and impact of the Musical Stories project, which has brought musical enjoyment and learning to over 6000 children and grown ups across 84 venues in South Yorkshire. The parents / carers, the early years practitioners and KS1 teachers, and the musicians involved have overwhelmingly praised the format, ethos and effectiveness of the project, and been grateful for its contribution to their children's musical lives.

Where small criticisms have been offered, these have usually been practical limitations - such as space, parking, and noise levels - but this evaluation has sought to look beyond this for ways in which Concerteenies might offer even more musical and educational value in the future. These points, highlighted with evidence throughout the report, are summarised here:

🎵 Relatively few parents / carers had made use of the online Musical Stories resources, though 94% said they were 'very likely' or 'quite likely' to do this in future. **There is scope to promote these online resources more strongly, and to follow up with families afterwards to ensure that this intention to use them is supported.**

🎵 Teachers showed an awareness that their children would benefit from the opportunity to engage with more musical activities and experiences, however, the stated preference was still to have frequent visits from Polly and her team. **This demonstrates an appetite for ongoing work from Concerteenies, as well as the need for further training to help teachers build their musical confidence.**

🎵 Adults showed in their ratings that children enjoying activities all of the time (69%) did not mean they were necessarily joining in (30%) in a conventional participatory or attentive way. This is important knowledge about the value and variety of musical engagement: nonetheless, **not joining in was a distraction for the musicians and could be improved by parents and teachers being encouraged and equipped to focus and support the session.**

🎵 The observations of sessions gathered new evidence of the benefits of attending for parents and carers, including grandparents. **Promoting Musical Stories as an intergenerational event, and building in opportunities to increase these interactions, could have potential for the design and delivery of future projects.**

♪ A high number of parents reported that they hoped their child would engage in music or play an instrument “if they’re interested”, and demonstrated that Concerteenies could play a role in increasing this interest. **It is rarely possible to monitor the long-term impact of projects like Musical Stories, but the number of returning participants suggests that a generation of “Concerteenies children” could hold the key to understanding more about the benefits of early years interventions: this could be built into a longer-term research project.**

♪ Teachers and musicians reported contrasting skills gaps, with confidence levels in musical delivery and session management rarely being found together. **There is potential for a skills exchange between teachers and musicians, which could also increase understanding of one another’s role in the sessions, and Concerteenies leaders would be well placed to deliver this kind of training.**

Postscript

As the Arts Council England funded project comes to an end, Concerteenies has just gained charitable status and appointed its first Patron, the singer Roderick Williams OBE. Since many of the musicians, parents and teachers credit the Concerteenies founder, director and lead narrator / presenter, Polly Ives, with the success of Musical Stories, it seems appropriate to end with her own reflections on this project and its distinctive qualities:

In my 20 years of presenting concerts, this project has been the most immersive and reflective. I've thoroughly enjoyed working with such a highly skilled team of quality musicians over 80 performances over a sustained period of time. It has allowed me to try out new techniques for engaging different audiences (whether that's a school group of 5-7 year olds linking to the national curriculum, or a family session in a small library, or a group of non-verbal children at an SEND setting). This project has enabled me to have a fresh new energy and freedom in my performance by musically improvising with the solo instrumentalists, responding to the children more and also playing around with sensory and non-verbal communication. I've been truly inspired by working with Famlingo BSL interpreters, SEND specialists, teachers / carers, Ignite Imaginations and Soundhouse Media, Concerteenies Marketing Manager, volunteers and team because it's shown how much potential there is for making our work even more accessible. And the need to improve the quality of our marketing and supporting resources. One of the joys of this project has been that we have genuinely reached diverse communities so it has felt fresh, responsive, reactive and so adaptable. It gives me so much joy to walk out into the concert, look into the audience and respond and relate to everyone's needs. I love the thrill of bouncing off the audience - seeing their reactions to what is often their first live music experience. This 'job' is an honour and a privilege. Working with Sarah Carroll as our trainee has been an absolute pleasure. She is a breath of fresh air with exciting creative new ideas and an exceptional ability to relate with diverse communities.

(Polly Ives: Concerteenies Founder, Director and Lead Narrator / Presenter)

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Contact us at sparc@sheffield.ac.uk

Social media: @SPARCsheffield

<https://www.sparcconsultancy.org/>