

Children and young people in residential care Engagement in music

This practice note aims to celebrate good practice already taking place throughout Scotland, and give residential child care managers and practitioners ideas as to how they might help music become a greater part of the lives of looked after children and young people.

It is based on research carried out by CELCIS for Creative Scotland, which looked at the opportunities available for children and young people in residential care to participate in music activities.



What we know from the study

-  Music helps children and young people in different ways and should play an important part in the daily lives of the children's houses.
-  Challenges, tensions, and barriers exist which can result in experience being variable, for example sharing different types of music within the residential setting, access to music tuition and opportunities to experience live music, such as attending concerts, festivals and other performances.
-  The barriers to looked after children and young people being able to access music include:
 - Changes in children's and young people's lives
 - Systemic barriers
 - Practice barriers

There are, however, many examples of good practice that can be easily replicated by those working with children and young people.

Background and legal responsibility

Under Part 9 of the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), Creative Scotland became a 'Corporate Parent', meaning that they hold responsibilities to 'uphold the rights and safeguard the wellbeing of looked after children' including their physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development.

As part of their role as Corporate Parents, Creative Scotland wanted to understand the access and engagement in musical activity of children and young people in residential care. The Creative Consortium project emerged from this, bringing together a group of organisations involved in creative arts and with young people in residential care to develop a research and practice development programme. CELCIS was commissioned to carry out this research.

The Creative Consortium research

At the start of the study little was known about music activity within residential care in Scotland, or how to improve children's access to musical opportunities. An action research approach - a method used for improving practice - was used as this is known to be suited to ongoing developmental work. The research was based in four locations across Scotland.



I'm not any good at it but I do it all the time because it's fun.

Young person

The first step was a review of literature, which concluded that there may be systemic challenges in ensuring children and young people in residential care have regular access to music. Then, importantly, the project listened to the experiences of children and young people. Along with colleagues from Who Cares? Scotland, music activity sessions were delivered by musicians from

the Music Plus project and by a CELCIS researcher who is also a musician. The approach was adapted to suit the children and young people participating.

[The Creative Consortium reports with findings are on the CELCIS website.](#)

What does the learning mean for practice?

The value of music in residential care

There is an extensive body of literature within the UK and internationally identifying the therapeutic value of music in the lives of children and young people. Most young people and staff participants agreed with this, recognising that music helped children and young people

in different ways and should play an important part in the daily lives of children's houses. It promotes emotional wellbeing, is linked to personal identity and promotes a sense of inclusion and belonging. It also helps build relationships amongst the young people, and between young people and staff.

Experiences and activities

Staff and young people explained that music was around in their daily lives in different ways;

You can get lost in music. If you're happy, sad, angry, anything – you can just express your emotions.

Young person

there is a constant informal use of music, playing in the background, in the house or during car journeys. Sometimes musical activity was a part of a planned activity: young people and staff making compilations for each other, or karaoke and dance sessions. A small number of children and young people were receiving music tuition either in or outside of school, and some attended dance clubs, music festivals, or children's classic concerts. However, the ability to engage in such activities varied across the four sites and it is likely to be variable for all children in care.

We recently had a guitarist through Arts in the City and young people enjoyed that; it was calming and therapeutic.

Member of staff

Challenges, tensions and barriers

The barriers to children and young people in residential child care accessing music broadly fall into three categories:

-  The number of changes experienced by children and young people, in particular in placement and in school
-  Systemic barriers
-  Practice barriers

Lack of continuity that can be a feature of the lives of children and young people who are being looked after affects the opportunities to play or listen to music.

A recurring theme from children and young people was "I used to but..." Music tutors confirmed this, that they sometimes lose contact with young people and have no means of completing a project or indeed, of saying goodbye. Circumstances of looked after children vary widely and for young asylum seekers, for example, there is the additional challenge of English not being their first language, although music was also found to transcend language.

Systemic barriers exacerbated this: the challenges of group-living for unrelated children of varying ages with different developmental needs; staffing levels and work patterns; as well as concerns of intolerance by neighbours in urban settings, as music can be a noisy activity.

While many of these factors can be overcome, there were practice issues some staff teams raised without solution, and with some negativity : the need for PVG checks on music tutors; lack of priority given to arts and creative activities at a strategic level, in Children's Plans and care plans; concern over lack of funding for music tuition– *however*, this was not the experience of all as several cited

accessing funding as not being an obstacle; the temporary nature of music projects; and lack of knowledge, skill, experience and confidence among the staff in supporting children and young people's music and creative activities.

There are, however, models of good practice to share and help secure the role and enjoyment of music and musical expression for children and young people in care.



**If we had instruments here,
they'd get broken.**

Member of staff

What can we change?

Systemic and strategic

-  Music should receive higher priority and be seen as part of the education, culture and development programme for children and young people in residential care, rather than as a leisure pursuit and optional extra.
-  In order for the residential child care staff to facilitate children and young people's access to music, there is a need for a well-defined strategic approach. Managers need to value and recognise the significance of the arts ensuring that this filters to frontline practitioners by way of ensuring a shared organisational culture, valuing the arts and creativity. This should begin with a clear articulation of the role of the Corporate Parent extending to third sector and private providers in order that they are also aware of their role in supporting children and young people accessing cultural and creative activities. This can be demonstrated for example by encouraging attendance at the range of live performances available across Scotland
-  Music activities should be linked to current policy and practice frameworks such as the [National Practice Model](#) and [Getting it right for every child](#). Culture, creativity and music should therefore be included in the [Child's plan](#) that accompanies the child when they move as well as the Care Plan detailing their day-to-day care.

Residential work / practice

-  Residential child care staff must be encouraged to link music and other creative activities to supporting children and young people's wellbeing and resilience, including through approaches to trauma, attachment and as part of the care planning process.
-  Music activities are part and parcel of day-to-day life; this includes listening to music in the house and car, as well as other more structured music activities. It is important that staff recognise the significance of music in young people's lives and are

encouraged towards creative solutions, for example, organising trips to concerts, shows and festivals or simply giving each child or young person an MP3 player for storing music when they not have access to their phone.



Residential child care staff should use music proactively in their practice. Working in partnership with those involved in education and the creative arts, they need to fully utilise the opportunities offered in their capacity as Corporate Parents, encouraging engagement with music and cultural events.



For those practitioners interested, further training and mentoring should be available, where relevant in partnership with musicians.

Musicians



Some music providers and tutors will visit residential places, avoiding the need for staff to accompanying children to tuition.



By recording musical output digitally, this can be shared with children and young people later regardless of change of circumstances, including where they are residing.



Musicians working with children and young people in residential care should be supported to understand the wider context of their lives and the workings of the care system.

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