



## Musical Connections Evaluation Report



*Written by Quench Arts (on behalf of Grantholder Birmingham and Solihull NHS Mental Health Foundation Trust) July 2017.*

*Amended December 2017*

*Please note that this evaluation report was written for the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) on culmination of the project's 4.5 year Reaching Communities grant and was submitted with an application to support further development and delivery of the project.*

*Unfortunately, though feedback on the project, application and evaluation was very positive, BIG felt unable to support the project for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time due to increased demand for funds. Comments that appear in blue on this report detail reflections in light of the loss of BIG funding.*



## Contents

- 4 Project Background**
  - 4 Musical Connection Background
  - 4 Musical Connections Core Objectives
  - 4 Waiting List/New Member Activity
  - 5 Ongoing Member Activity
  - 5 Professional Development
  - 5 Evaluation and Dissemination
- 5 Background to this Evaluation**
- 6 Project Outcomes**
- 7 Unexpected Outcomes**
- 8 Making a Difference**
  - 8 Beneficiaries
  - 10 Measuring the Impact
  - 10 Reflection Tools
  - 11 Baseline Tools
  - 11 Baseline Analysis
  - 11 Feelings Checker Exercise and Analysis
  - 12 Five Ways to Wellbeing Goals
  - 12 End of Year Evaluations/ Participant Satisfaction Feedback
    - 12 Feedback on Project Delivery:
      - 12 1-to-1 sessions
      - 12 Group/Songwriting/ Special Interest Sessions
      - 13 Session Preferences
      - 13 Recording/Making a CD
      - 13 Project Concerts
    - 13 Feedback on the impact of being involved in the project
    - 14 Feedback on the difference the project has made
- 14 Stakeholder Feedback**
- 15 Member Case Studies**
  - 15 GM (long term member)
  - 19 HQ (long term member)
  - 21 RH (joined in Year 1 of grant)
  - 23 VS (joined in Year 1 of grant)
  - 26 AS (joined in Year 2 of grant)
  - 28 BB (joined in Year 2 of grant)
  - 31 PL (joined in Year 3 of grant)
  - 34 FS (joined in Year 3 of grant)
- 36 Impact Feedback from Healthcare Professionals**
- 38 Meeting Local Needs**
  - 38 Local Evidence
  - 41 Potential Beneficiary Evidence
  - 41 Referral Agencies
  - 41 Current Waiting List/ Service Demand

## 43 What Worked Well

- 43 Project Longevity and Ongoing Support
- 43 Staff Skills
- 44 Project Structure
- 45 Project Dynamics
- 46 Measuring Outcomes
- 46 Member involvement
- 47 Project Residential
- 47 Collaborations, Project Concerts and CD Documentation
- 48 Partnership Working
- 48 Supporting Progression/ Professional Development

## 49 What We Could Do Better

- 49 Waiting List Time/ Greater Reach
- 50 Managing Growth
- 50 Supporting Progression
- 51 Enhancing Profile
- 53 Gaining Further Funding Support
- 54 Enhancing Member Engagement
- 55 Balancing Membership
- 56 Academic Validation
- 56 Recommendations from Evaluation Consultant's Report

## 57 Conclusion



## ***Project Background***

### **Musical Connections Background**

Musical Connections has been running since 1996 and is now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year. The last 4.5 years of the project have been funded by a Big Lottery Fund, Reaching Communities Programme grant, which this evaluation report addresses. The project has benefited significantly from this grant which has enabled us to take on more members and provide ongoing support for vulnerable and isolated adults with specific needs at a time when other services have been cut and alongside a growing demand on mental health support. We have successfully achieved and, in some cases over-achieved, our set outcomes (see below) over the grant period in addition to some unexpected outcomes that have added to the value of this activity.

### **Musical Connections Core Objectives (as set at the start of the programme)**

- To build on the network of people within the project who encourage and support each other in making music and attending musical events.
- To enable participants to express themselves through music, this may include playing, singing, composing and using new technology.
- To enable participants to experiment with music that is stimulating and challenging.
- To provide the opportunity for the current participants to come together and enjoy their common interest in music through 10 group sessions and 10 songwriting sessions delivered throughout each year in an accessible venue (group and songwriting sessions are 3 hours long).
- To provide the opportunity for participants to perform twice a year and contribute to a CD recording of their compositions.
- To produce, with user input, a regular project newsletter (8 per year).
- To produce, with users, a new project web presence allowing members to interact outside of sessions.
- To run 3 project social events per year.
- To offer an annual short musical residential break specifically for 12 participants needing care support, where both carer and participant would benefit from a break away from their current environment to create fresh stimulation and inspiration.
- To coordinate an annual signposting/celebration day, where members can learn about related opportunities, including further participation, educational opportunities and support.
- To ensure, as far as possible, that the project is user led, through the establishment of a monthly members' advisory group and voluntary roles.
- To hold an annual project profile meeting with strategic partners to increase the profile of the project with strategic partners, to aid further recruitment and link into other activity, where appropriate.

### **Waiting List/ New Members (as set at the start of the programme)**

- To provide 1-to-1 preparatory activity for waiting list members via the Music Support Worker role.
- To provide bespoke group activity for service users signposted after 1-to-1 recovery support at Creative Support day-centres, through the Music Support Worker role.
- To provide an annual series of 12 one-to-one music sessions for 12 new members each year, with an emphasis on creativity, delivered in people's homes if appropriate (144 sessions in total. Sessions last between 1-2 hours, depending on the member's condition

on the day). The first and last of these sessions are spent on measuring and reviewing baseline wellbeing information and setting/reviewing the participant's individual aims.

- To encourage and support members to access the group activity detailed above.

### **Ongoing Members (Every Year, as set at the start of the programme)**

- To offer ongoing participants further one-to-one sessions (max 16 in total) with the Artistic Director.
- To provide the opportunity for members to take part in 5 small group specialist interest sessions.
- To provide all members with ongoing support on a request basis, including additional 1-to-1 sessions, group and recording sessions, and external performance support, through a part-time Music Support Worker role (18 hours a week).
- To offer ongoing participants one day a month recording/studio time (facilitated by the Music Support Worker and volunteers) focusing on collaborative work.

### **Professional Development (Every Year, as set at the start of the programme)**

- To deliver annual bespoke training for music facilitators on engaging people with specific needs.
- To provide one training day each year for 3 new volunteers annually, as well as current volunteers. These volunteers will support group sessions and online profile.
- To offer a range of member voluntary roles to members, including advisory group roles, 'buddy' roles, technical support, blogging, reviewer and newsletter contributor roles.

### **Evaluation and Dissemination (as set at the start of the programme)**

- To complete and review baseline information with 12 new members (every year) to measure impact.
- To produce case studies each year detailing the impact of the project on new members.
- To recruit an Evaluation Consultant and deliver staff training to be able to devise and deliver an evaluation framework.
- To co-ordinate a project learning seminar in 2016-17 to disseminate our evaluation findings, successes and lessons learned.

## ***Background to this Evaluation***

Each project year, a series of detailed evaluation reports on Musical Connections has been produced, including an annual summary impact report describing the impact of our work on new members, a volunteer training evaluation and a residency evaluation. This document is an evaluation and impact analysis covering the full 4.5 years of participant activity, funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme, and should be read alongside our Evaluation Consultant's report, attached as a separate document.

*Please note that Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust will be referred to BSMHFT within this document.*

## Project Outcomes

- **Vulnerable, isolated and disabled participants will have better chances in life through developing personal, social, artistic and life skills.**

*Of project participants taken on through this grant, evaluation showed:*

*97% said Musical Connections has given them new personal/ social/ artistic/ life skills*

*95% said Musical Connections has given them better chances in life*

*"I was feeling physically and emotionally rubbish at the start of the project to the extent that I had to withdraw. Often when you [the artist] were due to come round for a one-to-one session, I felt very anxious and stressed, but by the end felt positive and happy as though I'd achieved something."*

CS (member)

*"I've got used to relating with different people and performing in different environments. Being involved with Musical Connections has pushed me into different social situations and helped me adapt to new situations."*

FC (member)

- **Participants will feel less isolated, having improved health and wellbeing through music-making, encouraging active engagement in group and social activity.**

*Of project participants taken on through this grant, evaluation showed:*

*95% said Musical Connections has made them feel less isolated*

*95% said Musical Connections has improved their mental wellbeing*

*81% said Musical Connections has improved their health and wellbeing (rather than just their mental wellbeing)*

*"Coming to Musical Connections keeps me focused on my music. Isolating myself is my biggest issue, with my illness I become low and stay in the house and isolate myself. The fact I have to leave the house, get a bus, and go somewhere keeps me motivated."*

AS (member)

*"Musical Connections has been a welcome form of treatment (in addition to my medication) as it provides a different social and physical interaction which no one else is providing and is warmly supported by all of its members."*

PF (member)

- **Participants will develop transferable personal skills enabling them to be signposted to further accessible training/ development opportunities, giving better life-chances.**

*Of project participants taken on through this grant, evaluation showed:*

*84% said that the project has helped them to progress to other new things*

*"Being involved with Musical Connections has helped my confidence to join in with other activities, such as my voluntary work at Birmingham City University."*

(HQ, member)

The project has, *"Opened the doors of opportunity...The path of M.C. has led me to more courses and learning over the next ensuing months."*

GM (member, in interview with Evaluation Consultant)

4 signposting events were held, with a combined total of 275 attendances.

199 volunteering opportunities were given to project members.

- **Workforce development for emerging artists, through volunteering roles and training, will increase participation opportunities for vulnerable adults with specific needs.**

-14 new volunteers were recruited and trained through the project, together with 5 existing volunteers.

-Of the 14 new volunteers, 5 have progressed to/completed related higher education (3 a music degree (1 still undertaking this, 1 moved out of area afterwards, 1 gained work after completion), 1 a paid music PhD and 1 a psychology degree (gaining a position as a support worker afterwards); 8 additional volunteers have progressed to related music work in the arts and health sector, thus increasing opportunities for other vulnerable adults, 1 of these now also sitting on the board of our host venue as a volunteer. 6 continue to volunteer for the project.

-Of the 5 existing volunteers, 2 have progressed to volunteer coordinator roles on the project and one other continues to volunteer on the project. 4 have achieved employment within the music/music education sector.

-Of all 19 volunteers, 6 have progressed to paid trainee or shadow artist roles with Quench Arts (4 new volunteers, 2 existing volunteers).

*“Sometimes I can’t believe how lucky I am. Not only have I somehow managed to achieve one of those highly coveted ‘portfolio careers’, but this particular portfolio also includes two absolutely incredible community music projects: Musical Connections and Wavelength. Both projects are run by Quench Arts and partner Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust and work with vulnerable young people and adults, using music and songwriting as a vessel for positive change. I absolutely love them!*

*I started volunteering for Musical Connections (the adult programme) whilst studying at Birmingham Conservatoire and, after graduating in 2010, it was one of the things that kept me in Birmingham. I had no idea, however, that I would still be involved nearly 7 years on!! I totally underestimated the hold it would have over me and when the opportunity arose to apply for a paid shadow artist role on Wavelength (a youth version of Musical Connections funded by Youth Music), I jumped at the chance. My role as a shadow artist for Wavelength is often very similar to my role as a volunteer for Musical Connections. In both projects, I support group sessions, helping to create a new song/piece of music, whilst also supporting both the members and the artist in whatever way is needed. Thus my role is actually split into two key parts: musical support and emotional support.*

*The biggest thing I have learnt is to remember that we are all just people, each with our own individual strengths and vulnerabilities and that’s why these projects are so unique - everyone is treated as an individual in their own right, not as a label. We are just all involved for the same reason: we are passionate about music and believe in the healing power of music and songwriting.”*

Michelle Holloway, Musical Connections Volunteer  
(edited from a written blog. Full version at <http://tinyurl.com/MCvolblog>).

## **Unexpected Outcomes**

- A three year project called Wavelength has been developed and achieved funding from Youth Music. Wavelength is a youth version of Musical Connections, specifically for young mental health service users in Birmingham and Solihull, created directly due to the success of Musical Connections.
- Relationships with local medium secure forensic units have further developed to encompass bespoke activity for patients in these centres as part of their rehabilitation

and recovery. Several patients have progressed to the main Musical Connections project when gaining community leave or being discharged, which has helped resettlement and reintegration.

- The relocation of the project to the Afro-Caribbean Millennium Centre during the last Reaching Communities grant has raised the profile of the project in BAME communities. Musical Connections continues to have a diverse membership in age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background. This is evident in the wide range of musical styles that can be found on the end of year CDs and in the live performances. It is a fantastic achievement that within the environment of Musical Connections, members and artists are able to incorporate, accept and appreciate different styles of music, which reflect different cultural perspectives.
- The wider benefits of the Musical Connections project continue to develop. Staff now support an independent monthly open-access open mic night called Brainstorm for mental health service users; the Music Support Worker continues to provide group activities in partnership with other local arts/support organisations.
- Collaborations formed between project members have been a real project highlight and success, though not an explicit aim. Two of the bands formed through the project (ADHD and Cosmic Soul) are now performing regularly in mainstream and other mental health settings, helping to profile the project and address stigma associated with mental and physical ill health. For the ADHD band, one of our project participants now deals with all bookings, rather than these going through the project, supporting his ongoing skills and band independence.
- The project has built up an excellent reputation for its work and outcomes. Musical Connections has achieved a National Positive Practice Award 2015 (Art, Mental Health & Wellbeing, highly commended) and was shortlisted as an Arts finalist (out of 600 entries) in the National Lottery Good Causes Awards 2016. As a result, there has been interest in sharing our model and practice with other organisations across the region.
- Our project music leaders have now independently formed a band called The Strangest Feeling, having built strong relationships and musical understanding through the project. This band performs regularly and always invites the Musical Connections community to any events and gigs, further enhancing the sense of community and encouraging members to engage in social and mainstream events. In fact, all external events that artists, volunteers and members are involved with are advertised as opportunities for the wider Musical Connections community and are well supported, providing additional social opportunities and a feeling of openness and acceptance.
- Recent links with the local Recovery College, supported by BSMHFT, have enabled the project to begin to showcase its model and impact to carers and mental health professionals, aiding wider profile and knowledge of the project.

## ***Making a Difference***

### **Beneficiaries**

Musical Connections has an integrated approach, as physical and mental health are closely linked: 30% of people with a long-term physical health problem also have a mental health problem; 46% of people with a mental health condition also have a physical health problem (Fundamental Facts About MH, 2015). Our current total membership of 124 isolated and vulnerable adults have a variety of specific needs. 72% are mental health service users, 14.5% have a physical disability and 9% have a mild to moderate learning or developmental disability, 2.7% have a visual impairment and 1.8% have autism.



Over the most recent period of Big Lottery funding, Musical Connections has taken 48 new members on to the main project, 12 per year, in addition to working with the pre-existing project membership. Of these 48 new members, 3 dropped out and were replaced during their first project year, (1 in year 1, and 2 in Year 4), 1 was sectioned (Year 1), 1 sadly passed away within his project year due to a stroke and brain haemorrhage (Year 2), 1 moved to a therapy setting out of area (Year 3) and 1 relocated to Spain (Year 3). Where possible within the project schedule, the vacant places were reallocated to those on the project waiting list, meaning that the project worked with a total of 52 new members across its 4 years of delivery. Of these new members, 13 are female (25%), 6 have a physical disability (12%) and 21 are of a BAME background/mixed race (40%). Baseline data showed that 51% lived alone, 19% in sheltered/supported housing or a secure setting/care home; 19% lived with family/a partner/spouse; 8% had care/support visits at home; 3% lived in temporary accommodation. These members have all had the opportunity to attend a series of one-to-one sessions, group sessions, songwriting sessions, recording days, at least two performance opportunities, an annual residential weekend and a series of project related social events. In addition, all of these opportunities, except ongoing one-to-one sessions, were also made available to the existing project membership.

*"Before joining MC, I felt very restricted and isolated. I didn't know anybody but now with MC, I'm not isolated and have been able to show greater freedom of expression."*

KH (member)

In addition to the main project beneficiaries, Musical Connections has also reached a wider number of vulnerable and isolated adults through partnership activity: for example, that delivered by the Music Support Worker at Creative Support in Year 1 (the organisation that took over day centres. *Note: staffing issues at Creative Support and a change of priorities restricted group activities here from year 2*) and through supporting at the Brainstorm mental health focused monthly open mic sessions and other organisations' events. 28 non-member isolated and vulnerable adults have benefitted from longer term, ongoing input from the Music Support Worker, as well as a significant of other vulnerable adults through one-off/drop-in engagement. In addition, a number of project case studies emphasise the wider impact of the project beyond our project members, including family, child and carer relationships: one participant had her children returned into her care because of her improved mental health; another member went on their first ever family holiday.

Musical Connections also benefits its volunteers (most of whom are developing music leaders with portfolio careers), some of whom have stayed with the project over multiple years, as seen in the outcomes section above. Each volunteer has received appropriate training and been given valuable experience and development opportunities over the course of their attendance. Several volunteers state that the Musical Connections project is the reason for them staying in the area after the completion of their studies (see quote above).

The recent Big Lottery grant has also enabled us to run an annual residential weekend for members with full and part time care needs, taking 12 members away each year. These members were accompanied by their carers, where relevant, who benefited from this experience. Over the period of this Big Lottery funding, 12 different carers have benefited from this activity.

Musical Connections Delivery Summary: (Years 1-4)

- 14 new volunteers were recruited and trained, with 5 existing volunteers
- 549 one-to-one sessions were completed with new members in their first year
- 150 extra one-to-one sessions were given with members in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year struggling to access group sessions

- 834 sessions were delivered for longstanding members by the Music Support worker, plus 51 recording days, encouraging collaborations
- The Music Support Worker also supported members giving 108 external performances, plus ran 36 sessions supporting other organisations through partnership work.
- 40 group sessions were delivered, giving 717 experiences
- 44 songwriting sessions were delivered by the Music Support Worker, giving 280 experiences. The 2 remaining sessions were delivered over July and August 2017.
- 20 special interest sessions were delivered on a specific musical theme, giving 156 experiences
- 13 socials events were held
- 45 newsletters were written, with member input and editing, reaching 148 people
- 8 Musical Connections performances were given
- 4 signposting events were run, with a combined total of 275 attendances
- 199 volunteering opportunities were given to project members

### **Measuring the Impact**

Over the duration of this Reaching Communities grant we have worked with an Evaluation Consultant to review the evaluation and monitoring tools we use, particularly in regards to participant reflection at group sessions, helping make project monitoring and evaluation more creative and more user-led. In addition, this consultant has been working with the staff team and members' advisory group to ensure that evaluation is fully embedded within the project activities in a manageable and productive way. Over year 1 we trialled various new reflection tools with the help of our members and member-volunteers and, from year 2, have used a set framework to enable us to capture and compare data across years. These tools have been invaluable in helping us evidence project impact against our expected outcomes on an individual and cohort basis, triangulating reflection materials with other observations, baseline data, participant satisfaction and evaluation forms and case studies to back-up our impact analysis.

In addition, the Evaluation Consultant was asked to help analyse not just whether outcomes have been achieved but also reasons and activities/ processes which have had the most impact – the why and how, to help us plan for the future of the project. Finally, the Consultant was asked to help collate and validate findings from across the whole project grant and undertake follow up with participants, stakeholders and partners to assess long term impact. This Evaluation Consultant's report is attached as a separate document, with examples of tools used, quotes and analysis which enhance this evaluation document.

### **Reflection Tools**

These included a dedicated member reflection room set up (where we had the space in our old venue) with:

-A velcro target board with a statement/outcome written against it. Participants place a dart an appropriate distance away from the bullseye to determine how far they agree with the statement and/or are meeting the aim. The statement is set by the members' advisory group for each session.

-A metaphor reflection box. Participants pick an object from the box which reflects how they feel and why and this is documented in writing and with a photo of them holding the object.

-Member comments box, with prompt questions and blank sheets, for members to give private comments and feedback (what was good/what can we change, etc., etc.).

-Confidence tokens box. At the beginning of the group session each member is given a token to put in the relevant box (very confident, average, unconfident) and this activity is repeated at the end of the session to measure change.

-Graffiti wall: a blackboard space for members to write any feedback they like, during or after the session.

This sessional feedback informs planning for future sessions.

## Baseline Tools

A variety of new baseline tools and processes were trialled in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of this project grant, with full data being collected from year 2. Baselines taken at the start and end of a new participants' first year measure project impact/individual progression. These baselines use creative and practical activities to engage participants in the process using Likert scales reflecting social, wellbeing and musical indicator statements collated from sources such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), outcomes/mental health recovery star and Five Ways to Wellbeing nationally recognised tools. New members each year are asked to evaluate themselves in terms of their confidence levels, self-esteem, social skills etc., on a scale of 1 to 10, once at the beginning of the year and again at the end. These two data sets are then compared to see if there has been any distance travelled over the course of the project year. Data is analysed on a cohort basis to give statistical results on impact, together with a user satisfaction survey around each project element.

## Baseline Analysis

Collated baseline analysis data from across years 2-4 of the Reaching Communities grant shows that the project is having a significant impact on members' health, wellbeing, personal and social skills and feelings of belonging:

73% showed improvement in the statement, **'I can achieve what I want to'**. 21% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 45% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

70% showed improvement in the statement, **'I find it easy to sing/play in front of others and express myself through music'**. 24% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 49% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

73% showed improvement in the statement, **'I feel valued and accepted'**. 18% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 49% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

67% showed improvement in the statement, **'I find it easy to work with other people and I can compromise'**. 18% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 49% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

64% showed improvement in the statement, **'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests'**. 18% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 39% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

64% showed improvement in the statement, **'I am able to do things as well as other people'**. 27% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 36% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

*\*Potential progression points reflect actual progress made in comparison to the potential progression points on offer. For example, if someone marks themselves as a 10/10 at the beginning of the project, then there is no progression available and it impacts upon the 'showed improvement' statistics. To work out the potential progression points achieved, we analyse the potential number of progression points available after the initial baselines and give a percentage figure as to how far many of these had been achieved by the end of each year.*

## Feelings Checker Exercise & Analysis

This exercise was used as a check-in and balancer at 3 points throughout the project year, to gather contextual information on progress and external factors at points throughout the project. Whilst data gathered here has been analysed in regards to difference between data

at the beginning and end of the project year, the purpose of this exercise was primarily to inform case study and baseline data collected through the outcomes star and give a wider context. For each statement, members had a choice of 'dire', 'poor', 'okay', 'good' and 'fabulous' (scored here are 1 for 'dire' and 5 for 'fabulous').

71% showed improvement in the statement, '**How do you feel about your artistic skills at the moment?**'. 23% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 55% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

55% showed improvement in the statement, '**How do you feel about your opportunities to connect with other people through Musical Connections at the moment?**'. 29% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 42% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

61% showed improvement in the statement, '**How do you feel about your health and wellbeing at the moment?**'. 32% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 43% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

64.5% showed improvement in the statement, '**How do you feel about your level of social confidence at the moment?**'. 29% stayed as they were at the beginning of the year. 47% of the collective potential progression points available were achieved\*

### **Five Ways to Wellbeing Goals**

Participants set their own personal goals related to the Five Ways to Mental Wellbeing (connect with others, keep learning, be mindful, give to others, get active) for their involvement in the project. 95 personal goals were set. Of these, by the end of their first year of involvement, 18 goals were still being worked towards (19%), 56 had been met (59%) and 21 were exceeded (22%).

### **End of Year Evaluations/ Participant Satisfaction Feedback**

Collated evaluation feedback collected at the end of each project year with new members shows:

#### **Feedback on Project Delivery:**

##### 1-to-1 sessions:

16% said they were good; 84% said they were very good (*from a choice of 'poor', 'okay', 'good' or 'very good'*)

62% said the number of these sessions was just right; 38% said there were too few.

38% achieved what they hoped in these sessions; 54% achieved more than they expected; 11% partly achieved what they hoped.

*"Enjoyed every single one. Got more confident with each one. I was confident at writing but not with music. Before I used to mouth words, I'd never sing, but now I find myself singing my heart out. Bursting into song all the time! Sing along with everything - never used to. I've realised how happy singing can make you."*

KS (member)

##### Group/Songwriting/ Special Interest Sessions:

22% said they were good; 70% said they were very good.

81% said the number of these sessions was just right; 19% said there were too few.

45% achieved what they hoped in these sessions; 32% achieved more than they expected; 23% partly achieved what they hoped.

*"The way they motivated people were phenomenal - ice breakers made people really gel quickly."*

PF (member)

*"I liked the way everyone came together and worked as one, split into smaller groups and then came together at the end back into the larger group. It was very interactive."*

RST (member)

### Session Preferences

81% preferred 1-to-1 sessions; 46% preferred group sessions; 24% preferred songwriting sessions; 11% preferred special interest sessions (some selected multi options).

For 1-to-1 sessions:

*"You get to do your own stuff the way you would like it to be done."* NT (member)

*"121 sessions give you personal space to be uninterrupted in your own work. Group sessions are more social and can be busier."* DW (member)

*"With the 1-1s I'm more confident with what I'm doing."* AB (member)

*"I have learnt a lot in my 121 sessions. Especially learning to sing on my own. I have gained confidence."* BB (member)

For group sessions:

*"Could hide behind other people if feeling more vulnerable. Others to fall back on if it went wrong."* KW (member)

*"Being part of a group is more of a surprise as you don't know what you're going to be creating!....Not felt so comfortable in a group for a long time. I can enjoy the activity instead of being apprehensive and anxious. All the anxiety had gone after 15mins the first time I came, and since then I've been relaxed and feel I can ask anything."* KS (member)

*"It's great to have ideas flying around - lots of input is inspiring."* AW (member)

### Recording/Making a CD

In regards to the process of recording and making a CD, 5% thought this was ok, 22% good; 73% very good.

*"Something to show for what you've done. I can play it to friends and family and have achieved something that I wouldn't have been able to do on my own."* JB (member)

*"Liked adding different instruments and other musicians. I've never recorded before this project".* AS (member)

### Project Concerts

10% thought that the project concerts were good; 90% thought they were very good.

*[I liked] "The chance to perform and the group dynamic, showing what we've all done together. There was a lot of warmth and goodness in the room for both gigs."*

BT (member)

### **Feedback on the impact of being involved in Musical Connections:**

97% said Musical Connections has given them new personal/social/artistic/life skills

95% said Musical Connections has given them better chances in life

95% said Musical Connections has improved their mental wellbeing

95% said Musical Connections has made them feel less isolated

84% said that the project has helped them to progress to other new things

81% said Musical Connections has improved their health and wellbeing (as opposed to just their mental wellbeing), also backed up with the baseline data analysis.

*“(Musical Connections) has made me realise I’m not as bad as I thought. It gave me something to my existence. I’m not just stigmatised as a mentally ill person sitting at home any more.”*

TG (member)

### **Feedback on the difference that Musical Connections has made:**

97% state ‘It allows me to express myself’

97% state ‘It gets me out of the house’

92% state ‘It has enabled me to make new friends through music’

92% state ‘It has given me new skills (musical, social or personal)’

89% state ‘It has made me feel more confident’ (*note: this is a higher figure than obtained through the baseline exercise detailed below for social confidence, which has a slightly different focus*).

86% state ‘It has opened up new opportunities/introduced me to other new things’ (*note: but maybe not progress onto these yet, as per the impact statement above*)

84% state ‘It has made me realise what I am capable of achieving’

68% state ‘I can say things through music that I can’t say otherwise’

65% state ‘It has helped me become more independent’

95% of members stated that it would make a big difference to them if the project was to stop. The reasons given for this were because they would be more isolated (81%); it would limit their social opportunities (68%); they wouldn’t be able to take part in activity as regularly as they would like (54%); they wouldn’t be able to keep in touch with the friends they’d made (35%); other projects couldn’t accommodate their needs (35%); they wouldn’t be able to carry on with their music (27%); they don’t go to anything else (22%).  
*Note: some people gave multiple reasons.*

*“The project must not stop. Musical Connections brings people together who some people in society look down on and helps them show or express their talent to the public. I think that there is no airs or graces, everyone is on the same level and we gel well together. Musical Connections is the best thing to have happened to me in a long time.”*

WK (member)

## **Stakeholder Feedback**

The project has a wide range of partners and stakeholders who think highly of its staff, activities and outcomes. This is backed up by consultation and questionnaires with stakeholders (detailed in the Meeting Local Needs section) and also by independent consultation and interviews undertaken with the Musical Connections Evaluation Consultant on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017. Full transcriptions of face-to-face interview responses are available on request, with highlights including:

*“Everything runs like clockwork. It speaks volumes that as an NHS manager I have very little to do because of how professional it is, how well coordinated and how excellent the communications are. There is a completely user-led ethos. The people develop longstanding relationships. The music is key but so is peer support. [On the project] people stay well and do not need to access clinical services because they are recovering the community as they should: so many people becoming a family. It provides excellent relapse prevention.”*

Lakhvir Rellon, Director of Community Engagement, BSMHFT [current grantholder]

*“It is useful for us to be able to connect. M.C. [Musical Connections] is unique with the overlap between music and mental health. It is an innovation that the project will also support people with more complex needs. Staff are very musically accomplished. It is the only good musical project for adults with mental health issues I know about....”*

Jessica Holland and Sabina Bealt, Creative Support

*“M.C. [Musical Connections] come to perform at our events - it’s a mutually beneficial relationship because they are so reliable and also they know they are coming to perform to a receptive audience. I have confidence in them. The showcase is astounding: the range of people and the range of music too.”* Cathy Crossley, Arts All Over The Place

*“An organisation that offers a vital creative outlet to vulnerable people, offering them, at the simplest level, the joy of music, building their confidence along the way...A nurturing and long-lasting approach, MC [Musical Connections] always spend an amazing amount of time with people.”*

Rebecca Nolan Wellbeing and Recovery Service Manager, Birmingham Mind

## **Member Case Studies**

We have collected many case studies over the duration of the grant related to the impact of the project for newly recruited members each year. Below are case studies written by the Evaluation Consultant who has completed follow-up impact research revisiting representative participants who joined the project over each year of the recent Reaching Communities grant to assess longer term impact. In addition, there are 2 case studies which have been completed with members who have been involved in the project since prior to the recent Big Lottery funding, to show the wider impact of longer-term engagement.

## **Case Studies of Two Representatives taken on in prior to the recent round of Reaching Communities Funding (but benefitting in this round)** *Written by the Evaluation Consultant*

### **Member GM**

December 17 update: GM also has completed a video case study highlighting the impact that the project has had on his life. Please see: <https://tinyurl.com/GarysMCStory>

#### **Context:**

GM is a member who joined the project prior to the current funding round. He has a diagnosis of bipolar disorder and from 2007 - 2009 was treated as an in-patient at Reaside Clinic (medium secure forensic service) prior to joining Musical Connections.

*“I went through a terrible time ten years ago coming into contact with the police as a result of a severe mental health problem. The facilitators know about this but it has never been an issue the entire time I've been there.”*

Artistic Director Pete did some small group sessions at Reaside and GM found it “*really exciting*”. Pete encouraged him to start writing and recording. When he got out of hospital he joined the project and went on one of the residential weekends soon after, saying, “*It was really fun*”. He remembers an early M.C. concert at South Birmingham College, where he had been a student there for a year doing Music Technology:

*“This was my first real concert where I'd played bass guitar to a large audience. I thought it was a really well organised event and what I thought was good was playing on other member's tracks to a degree that was better than I expected. My confidence grew and grew during that concert and I felt a sense of belonging during the entire time. I even helped the sound technician set up amps etc., using my knowledge of live performance.”*

He describes music, particularly playing and writing for bass guitar as a key part of his life and his wellbeing.

**GM's Personal Musical Connections Story (June 2017):**

My one word description of Musical Connections is, '*liberating*'. If the project ceased to exist I would miss getting together with other group members, sharing experiences and ideas. I would miss the opportunity to make music with others. I feel a part of something very special and it has led me on to other projects and opportunities.

My own mental health is better as a result of doing this, and a drama group. Since being a part of M.C., my anxiety has been reduced, my confidence in performance has been increased and I feel I can handle myself from day to day in social situations. I have had good social interaction with other members. We've been on nights out and I've become close friends with some of the members (without being too dependent on them). I've had nights at Brainstorm [a mental health focused open mic night] that have been really successful and enjoyable and I perform to a friendly crowd. I shall explain that other projects have come up since doing M.C: A new band, *ADHD* has grown out of the project, coordinated by the Music Support Worker, Steve. This is very important for me and its other members: we meet weekly and it is such an amazing release. We're all committed to it.

I'm involved in the BSMHFT Peer Support project (although I'm doing some courses at Fircroft as a result of this to improve my skill levels). I became involved in a voluntary position at Worcester Snoezelen which is a place of sensory happiness. I play bass guitar there and we encourage service users to perform in a safe environment much like M.C., however we don't write songs as such here but we empower people to get involved musically. The service users are vulnerable adults such as people with Downs Syndrome and various disabilities. I have become involved in Trevor Boddington's projects at the Custard Factory also, where I write their film scores and also act in their productions. Then there's *ADHD* the band, which has become a mainstay in my life, involving Steve Ison one of the project facilitators. Without the project I wouldn't have done these things.

Within Musical Connections itself, currently I am helping VS and other members record their new songs and I am often asked to play on other people's songs. This is very rewarding and I've never done it before. [One member in particular] and I get to bounce ideas off each other and we are so well suited: we both love to improvise. It is so much fun and I never had that chance before. Amazingly, I am doing more creative stuff now I am recovering from illness than I ever did back when I was well.

There have been several occasions where I have been anxious before a group session, but on doing it my mood has been lifted. I remember doing a group session where Nicola [project artist] was leading the group (this was at Hopkins Centre - one of the last sessions there) and we came up with harmonies and I worked out a bass line for the song. I really enjoyed that session because before I felt anxious as to what I was going to contribute then it all naturally came together in the end and the group felt a sense of pride afterwards. It sessions like this that I really enjoy.

I feel that I can connect with the project facilitators. Without their input I wouldn't have the confidence I do now. They do not judge. Pete, Paul, Steve and Nicola [facilitators] give the project its unique quality. Plus I've met some amazing people as a result who share my views of what a wonderful project this is. My life has changed considerably in the last ten years and I thank M.C. for it.

Music is a therapy for me and I need it in my life. The creative process is usually linked to people who have mental health issues. Bipolar patients are usually very creative people and writing as a group with others is much better than being in a vacuum writing by oneself (the



group element helps with this). Before my mental health problem was treated I was very isolated and my bipolar illness was much worse because I wasn't interacting with people. M.C. has provided me with the platform to work with others and connect with them. No one is judgmental at M.C. and I think that my creativity has improved greatly working with others with similar issues.

It is really important to keep it going. I think the main challenge for me is to manage any past or future gaps in funding: it would be hard to manage to carry on these activities independently and it has been such a big part of my life, especially over these last four years. I have never spoken to anyone about all this before, but I think it is really important for us to make the case for Musical Connections.

**Statement from Bill Wilson, Community Psychiatric Nurse:**

Musical Connections has been brilliant for GM: he always has good words to say about it. He really enjoys it and it gives him a good purpose in life. It helps with his general anxiety day to day and while he is at the project, all that anxiety disappears. You can see it is a major part of his life: through his time in hospital and afterwards, it was the only thing that kept him going.

It has made changes in his life and, because of the benefits to GM, I would be looking to refer others to M.C.

**Changes mapped:**

I asked GM to look at the baseline questions we have used with new members. After scoring them (on a scale of 1 to 10) for 2017, I asked him to think back to before the current funding round, to the time when the project had to be put on hold, and provide a retrospective score.

GM was clear that he had made improvements in all six of the confidence outcomes we measure, with the strongest changes being shown in response to the statements 'I can achieve what I want to' (plus 3 points) and 'I find it easy to sing/play in front of others and express myself through music' (plus 4 points).

GM was also able to identify three new wellbeing goals for himself for which Musical Connections provides significant support:

- 1) *"Learning to trust my instincts and learning to say no when people become too demanding of me (I still have issues with this now). I never did this beyond five years ago. I was always quiet and reserved (and especially not very assertive)."*
- 2) *"Becoming a (M.C.) volunteer maybe, but this is tricky due to M.C. group sessions sometimes clashing with other volunteering."*
- 3) *"Developing the band ADHD: I see this as a flagship of what you can achieve with the right ingredients."*

**Project Artist Steve Ison's Comments:**

I've known GM for 8 years, since I first met him on the residency in 2009, when he first joined the project. I heard for myself what an excellent self-taught musician he was and we connected straight away in our shared love of creative 70s and 80s pop music. I helped him write a couple of original songs shortly after as part of my music support role and got to know him even better as we were both involved in a week long group written "Music Play" rehearsed and performed at The Spotted Dog pub: 'Professor Tigh's Magic Music Machine'. GM has always struck me as an extremely kind, generous-spirited person, always supportive of other members and willing to go the extra mile to help in whatever way he can. He's often initiated meeting vulnerable members at pre-arranged places they know, so they can feel supported coming to different M.C. events. He also came to another residency as a volunteer member to actively

friend-support a very vulnerable, isolated member AG who wouldn't have been able to attend without this.

As a very active, popular member of M.C. he has been able to build up a network of friends through his involvement, many of whom he sees socially outside of project events.

Through all this though, I've been aware of GM's debilitating bi-polar mental health condition. He manages this as best he can through medication and being creatively involved in music. There have been many times he has arrived at a session saying how awful he feels and been able to change his mood when he starts playing/writing and enjoying the magic of the music in the moment with friends. He's also told me his mood has shifted just knowing he's coming to a music session, as this gives him *"something to really look forward to."*

Since having the pleasure of playing together with him in *ADHD* 3 years ago, I've got to know GM even better. *ADHD* is an all original pop/rock band made up of two M.C. members, a M.C. volunteer (and mental health service user) and myself. We've been invited to perform at many different mental health events around the city plus a lot of gigs in the wider community we've organised ourselves. GM even initiated and spent time organising a gig for us in London at the famous Dublin Castle where we played and stayed overnight.

For GM, being a member of *ADHD* has been very important for him, as he's told me many times "I don't know what I'd do without this band." As a group, we're all very naturally supportive and caring for each other (even referring to ourselves as a "family") and this has given GM a real sense of belonging. The creative freedom offered, where we've written so many songs we all love and believe in together has really helped lift his spirits as well. The regular practises and gigs have given him a real sense of purpose, security and filling his life with something meaningful, doing what he loves. There's also the incredible positive feedback the band has received from the wider community which has boosted GM's self-esteem and self-worth too.

Since being involved with the band, GM has even had the confidence to put himself on a self-assertiveness course, tackling a personality issue which has caused him a lot of suffering and which I've personally talked about and tried to help him with many times.

GM seems in a pretty good place at the moment and Musical Connections is, by his own admission, a huge part of his life and the support he's received through it has had a powerful influence in helping him feel this way.

#### **Evaluator's Comments:**

GM takes a holistic view of the benefits of being a member of Musical Connections and has made the most of the opportunities of being part of a network. He describes the project as having, *"opened the doors of opportunity"* for him.

He is very clear about the opportunities for musical development it has provided and the support it has given him in personal development:

*"The path of M.C. has lead me to more courses and learning over the next ensuing months."*

During his time with Musical Connections GM has moved from quite substantial isolation, to writing and performing with the band *ADHD* which has grown out of the project, and also pursuing voluntary work which utilises his new-found community music skills.

I find his observations on the development of the project very interesting. As someone who has seen the project develop over eight years, his comment on the current incarnation of the project is:

*"I think Musical Connections is better, stronger and has developed as a project over the last few years, as it has gained new members."*

He also talked about there being less interaction with other Mental Health Service User Groups in the last few years: projects which may well have felt the impact of diminishing funding in a way that Musical Connections has not.

The overarching feeling when talking to GM is a sense of optimism. He says that when he imagines his future, there is *"always a warm glow surrounding me."* GM sees his role within the M.C. network as key to this bright future: his story is a fitting testament to the changes the long term project has brought about.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Member HQ**

December 17 update: HQ also has completed a video case study highlighting the impact that the project has had on her life. Please see: <https://tinyurl.com/HelensMCStory>

### **Context:**

HQ has been an enthusiastic and thoughtful member of Musical Connections for the last 10 years. She loves to participate in the songwriting activities and contributes extensively to the lyric writing. She has also developed her skills and coordination playing both assistive technology instruments (such as the Kaossilator) and acoustic instruments such as percussion and (her favourite), Nicola McAteer's harp (one of the project artists). She also enjoys taking part in and is adept at project reflection. HQ is a wheelchair user with a very significant level of cerebral palsy. She uses a communication aid to type and then playback her contributions to song lyrics and her thoughts on musical content.

She is accompanied to sessions by one of her personal assistants (frequently Lynn Chapman, who comments below) who also takes an active part in the music-making. She has taken the opportunities offered to work with all four of the artists on different musical challenges and has been a very regular participant in group sessions, concerts and residencies.

### **HQ's Personal Musical Connections Story: (March 2017)**

Before I joined the project I had very few regular social activities to take part in. It has always been a challenge to find things and activities that I can do and take part in despite my disability. However I have always found the project very welcoming and inclusive. I enjoy all my sessions with Musical Connections tremendously. At times it helps me focus on something different, when things go wrong with my care and equipment.

I think sometimes in the past my communication has been a challenge for other members to understand and this has made me feel isolated during sessions. It also sometimes made it harder and slower to express and put forward my ideas in group situations. However this has changed since I have had my communication aid. There have been several times when I have felt a bit low going into sessions, and when the session has started and we all start writing lyrics and making music, it has often lifted my spirits enormously.

My general experience of M.C. has always been fantastic: fun, support, music making, and individual song writing. The annual residency is one of my favourite parts. I love all of these activities and being part of such a fantastic group of people. At the summer concert for 2016,

Nicola (project artist) and I had been working on a harp piece. A few weeks before the performance I was given a small group of people to work with me and build on my ideas for the piece and develop it into a song to go with my harp piece. I just felt like all my ideas were listened to, and I had so much help from them.

I also now belong to an integrated dance group called 'Wheels and Toes', and being part of M.C. has given me the confidence to go out and do this, and to try other new things. I'm also now involved in a new service user steering group at Birmingham City University. I feel more confident to put forward and share my ideas in these more formal group settings, because of the informal work that I have done with M.C.

Our project is special because of the music and creativity that we all have and create together. It includes such a wide mix of people and life experiences, and yet we can all come together and create amazing music and songs. Sometimes as solo artists and sometimes through working in small groups and making songs through collaboration with other people.

If Musical Connections no longer existed, I would miss the buzz of the music, and the opportunity to create music and songs. I would also miss the friendship and support of the group. I think the main way M.C. helps me is through giving me the opportunity to express my thoughts and feelings without having the struggle of verbally saying them. It gives me a very unique opportunity to overcome the physical limits of my disability and explore what I can do musically and lyrically with writing songs. My one word description of the project is: '*fantastic*'.

**Statement from Lynn Chapman, HQ's P.A.:**

Due to being part of Musical Connections, I would say HQ is a lot more confident in a group situation. She will use her communication aid and get her point across. She is now much more willing to say to the group, "*hang on a minute*" and then type something to share with people, such as a comment on the music or an idea for lyrics. It takes courage to do that. When you have limited speech, some people assume that you have a learning difficulty or have nothing to say.

At Musical Connections people listen to HQ and ask her things. This has greatly improved her confidence.

**Changes mapped:**

I asked HQ to look at the baseline questions we have used with new members (self-assessed on a scale of 1 to 10). She was also part of a trial of this approach we used in 2015 for tracking longer term members, so was familiar with the methodology. After scoring each question for 2017, I asked her to think back to before the current funding round, to the time when the project had to be put on hold, and provide a retrospective score.

HQ was clear that she had made substantial improvements (by at least three points out of ten) in all six of the confidence outcomes we measure, with the strongest changes being shown in response to the statements, 'I feel valued and accepted' (plus five points) and 'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests' (plus six points).

Taking responses from the trial data we collected in 2015, we were able to look at whether HQ had met or achieved her personal Five Ways To Wellbeing goals. She has met three goals and exceeded her "get active one":

*"Being involved with Musical Connections has helped my confidence to join in with other activities, such as my voluntary work at Birmingham City University."*

She has also been able to identify a new wellbeing goal for herself for which Musical Connections provides significant support:

*“Taking the time to listen and know people.”*

**Project Artistic Director Pete Churchill’s Comments:**

HQ has undoubtedly become a lynchpin of the Musical Connections community. Despite very pronounced communication difficulties, her total integration with the group over the years that she has been a member has been a joy to watch. In the early days of her involvement, great thought needed to be put into ways of including her fully in sessions, but it is a mark of how far we have all come, and how she has grown into the project, that now no particular provision needs to be made beyond the obvious access and appropriate technology issues being thought through. This is inclusion at work in a very real way.

HQ is not handled with kid gloves and is simply a member of M.C. together with everyone else. Her creative contributions are sometimes incorporated and sometimes not, just like everyone else. She displays a self-confidence and a security of knowing that she is as accepted, valued and listened to as much as anyone else in the group. Her ongoing attendance at sessions is confirmation to us that M.C. is as appropriate and meaningful for those experiencing isolation through physical disability as it is for those with poor mental health.

**Evaluator’s Comments:**

HQ is a passionate advocate for Musical Connections who clearly thrives on the creative and social interaction it brings her. HQ also loves to dance and has commented to me before that she would like to see more dance and movement incorporated into future Musical Connections activities. The project also gives HQ an outlet for her skills in reflection and giving feedback and in helping to develop the project for other members.

It is clear that the new communication aid has enabled her to take an even more proactive role in the life of the project. However, it is noticeable that both she and her p.a. [personal assistant] Lynn view the aid and the project as contributing in partnership to her increased confidence and life opportunities. The aid has given her the ability to communicate more readily, but the project has given her the opportunity to put this into practice and hone her skills, to the point where she can now undertake voluntary work.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Case Studies of Two Representatives taken on in Year 1 of Funding**

*Written by the Evaluation Consultant*

### **Year 1: Member RH**

**Context:**

RH joined the project in 2013, the first year of the current funding round. He worked 1-1 with artist and Music Support Worker, Steve Ison. The following is a quotation from Steve’s initial case study of summer 2014.

RH is a friendly yet slightly nervous individual who is a mental health service user. RH has also experienced homelessness in the past and is a member of the *Choir With No Name Birmingham*, a community choir aimed at those who are homeless or those who have experienced homelessness. RH was signposted to Musical Connections via the choir. I think Musical Connections has made him feel more accepted and expanded his world.

### **RH’s Personal Musical Connections Story (May 2017):**

The part of the experience I enjoy most is the singing: it makes me come alive. I came in one day and I was feeling very low. After doing the group session I felt a lot better. I came away with my head held up high, because of the singing. I would recommend a friend to talk to someone about M.C. and try to get involved. In one word, it's '*fantastic*'.

M.C. has helped me to write seven songs of my own: I never thought I would be able to. My first summer concert was great. I wrote and performed my song 'Josie Wales'. I wasn't expecting everyone to like it, but everyone talked about it for the next couple of weeks. If I couldn't go to M.C. anymore, the people - artists and members, are what I would miss the most. At last year's concert we all sang with member BC on his song *Musical Connection*. It was very enjoyable to sing alongside him.

On a Tuesday afternoon I also attend a group called 'Drama For Wellbeing' at Mac. I think the two projects are a good combination.

This has all had a good impact on my own health: Coming to M.C. has changed my life around. I didn't know what M.C. could really do back when Pete told me I had been given a place. Steve (my mentor) told me about it and it has made a big difference. I would encourage people to talk to their GPs about it.

**Statement from Rachel Green, Artist-Tutor mac Birmingham, Community Vibe:**

Sometimes RH finds it difficult to interact, due to his diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Musical Connections has helped him meet new people and form new relationships. He enjoyed creating his song 'Josie Wales' in particular. Singing helps his mental health and stops him from feeling isolated. He got what he needed [in year 1] and since then it has had a very positive impact on his confidence and social integration.

**Changes mapped:**

We asked RH to review the first data he provided in baselines at the start of his first year of the Musical Connections project. He feels he has increased all his scores for the confidence outcomes (each scored out of ten) since 2013. Four of the statements have received radically higher scores: 'I can achieve what I want to' - plus three points; 'I find it easy to work with other people and I can compromise' - plus four points; 'I find it easy to sing/play in front of people and express myself through music' - plus five points, and 'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests' - plus seven points.

In terms of personal wellbeing goals, RH felt he had exceeded these goals and also met one more. He was particularly keen to tell me about how much he had gained from learning to write songs of his own (especially the much celebrated '*Josie Wales*').

RH expressed great satisfaction with the project and with his own ability to have met his goals and improved his outcome scores.

**Project Artist Steve Ison's Comments:**

I've known RH since 2013 when he first joined the project. I loved his enthusiasm for music and the creative process and how much he obviously enjoyed the group sessions. The song 'Josie Wales' written at one of our 1-to-1 sessions from RH's lyric, really boosted his self-esteem and confidence, being performed with him singing many times at different mental health and M.C. organised events. He loved the fact so many different people remembered it and requested it to be played, also feeding back what a great song they thought it was.

Partly through our 1-1 sessions and the sense of community he got from M.C. Group sessions, RH's developed the confidence personally and in his singing to sing with 2 different community choirs and become an active volunteer and service user at 'Arts All Over The Place', another

creative mental health based organisation which has strong links with M.C. and which we've helped support many times over the last few years.

RH has also made a lot of new friends from his involvement, regularly attending M.C. social events and meeting others outside of these as well. He dated another member who he met through the project, YS, for about 18 months too.

As his involvement with other organisations and M.C. shows, RH loves to feel valued and accepted as part of a wider community and his involvement with Musical Connections has helped him very much in this way, adding a sense of support and purpose to his life.

### **Evaluator's Comments:**

RH is someone who often speaks in short, considered phrases, and is less voluble in discussing the benefits of the project than some other interviewees. My own impression though is that he values the project as highly as someone who might choose to say so at greater length. He showed this in our interview by being focused and keen to answer any question I could ask him and waiting patiently for further prompts to draw his answers out.

There is a definite change in tone between RH's initial baselines and his first year end revisit, which is far more positive. For example, regarding the 'connect with others' goal, his initial response was, "*I struggle to make new friends,*" whereas at the year-end he said, "*I am very good with teamwork, [I] throw ideas out.*"

Then once again in the longer term, another improvement in scores and a measured tone can be seen in this summer's feedback. So reflecting on the 'connect' goal, he told me, "*I've met the goal of making new connections.*" Again, with the 'get active' goal, as Steve Ison points out in the initial case study, RH's first response was, "*I need a kick up the backside to be active.*" At the end of Year 1 (2014) he said, "*I have gone to most M.C. group sessions. I got on with the job.*" This summer he affirmed, "*I got stuck in!*"

As RH puts it:

*"Making music makes me feel proud".*

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Year 1: Member VS**

### **Context:**

VS joined the project in 2013, the first year of the current funding round. This is a series of excerpts from artist Nicola McAteer's original case study of summer 2014.

When VS started the project she was very introverted. This was evident in one-to-one sessions and group sessions. In her one-to-one sessions, she would often sit throughout without taking her coat or bag off, showing anxious behaviour and only ever speaking when asked a question and often saying, '*whatever you think...*'

As the project began to get going, her mood and body language changed and she became more at ease with the sessions and her surroundings. Even by her second session (14<sup>th</sup> October) she was showing signs of being more comfortable, eager and having lyrics printed and ready for me. The music making gave space to just play and not necessarily to have to talk much if she didn't wish to. She started to realise that nothing was expected of her, which was an initial concern at the beginning. After only a few sessions she was much more relaxed about attending the sessions...

This improvement in her engagement with others was seen in group sessions where she would often be chatting to other members prior to the start and she began organising collaborations outside of the project with other members. She has become good friends with many existing members. She states that she now wants to,

*“Work on my personal weaknesses to have a full life.”*

VS is a self-taught distinctive singer-songwriter; she studied poetry and literature for many years and learnt the guitar. Despite this strong creative foundation, prior to Musical Connections, she had never collaborated with any other musicians in order to write or perform her own or other people’s music.

### **VS’s Personal Musical Connections Story (May 2017):**

I find travelling on public transport very difficult and it makes me question myself. When I come to M.C. I leave my problems at the centre’s entrance and open myself up to the day. I remember a particular warm up we did with Paul [project artist] on a group session - clapping and stamping helped me to let go and express myself. I also value Nicola’s [project artist] mindfulness exercises. My description of Musical Connections in one word would be, **‘positive’**.

I have been involved a lot and have become more confident. Musical Connections has given me something very unique and also very rare. I frequently think of my MC experience as an *“opportunity of a lifetime.”* But not knowing what is going to happen to the project... [VS shrugged and indicated that this made her experience stress]. I always perform better at rehearsal because the formality of the day can be a bit consuming, although performing is what I enjoy most about the project. My illness makes me drained - but I still get up and do it.

I am so passionate about working with other musicians via M.C. I really loved the potential of working with member RHi - I loved the song we made together. It wasn’t all about the individual; it was group orientated. If M.C. wasn’t around, I would miss the company most.

I am not so doubtful about things as I was before the project. I now do open mic at The Spotted Dog on a regular basis - to get me out. I am also part of the *Choir With No Name*: you feel an achievement when you sing at Birmingham Town Hall, never having imagined you would find yourself there!

MC in many ways has given my life an artistic sustenance that nothing else can currently give: I am given the opportunity to rise to the occasion. It has helped my journey through some of the most difficult objects faced on an unpredictable path. I enjoy the freedom it releases in music making and it also encourages you to extinguish doubt. This is at times very satisfying when low self-esteem and lack of confidence brings you down. I suppose it changes my routine and brings me out of my shell. I am not so insular about music or myself. I have learned to talk about myself and not be stifled by secrecy. In health terms, I am in a better place than I was before: people around me have said good things about this.

I don’t think I would ever have had these opportunities [*singing with Choir With No Name, open mic nights, songwriting with others*] without M.C. I dreamed of these things but didn’t think this was a reality I could grasp.

MC has the ability to change lives in many ways. It has gone beyond the constant challenges presented to it. I feel this has become the driving force behind its identity: a reason to explore music. Its signature is diversity. It has given me the opportunity to grow as a musician. I would like to recommend it and also continue now and in the future.



**Statement from Sally Debiage, Choir Manager, Choir With No Name:**

I have known VS for two and a half years and have seen her blossom in this time in terms of her self-belief and confidence. Her involvement with Musical Connections has played a significant part in this. VS has been given the opportunity to develop her creativity in a way that totally suits her.

She is comfortable in her surroundings, creating music with a diverse bunch of people that she feels are like minded, which enables her to flourish. VS struggles at times with day to day life, yet the difficulties she faces disappear in this caring, encouraging environment.

**Changes mapped:**

We asked VS to review the first data she provided in baselines [self-assessed on a scale of 1 to 10] in the autumn of 2013. VS concluded she had made positive progress on all sections of the outcomes baseline, with the greatest degree of change pertaining to 'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests' which she scored at plus three points.

Regarding personal wellbeing goals, VS was of the opinion that she was still working towards her own high standard for connecting with others, "*there is always room to grow*", but that acknowledged, her narrative is full of examples of times when she has been able to do this. She felt she had met her goal of giving to others by sharing music.

VS identified two additional ongoing aims for herself:

- 1 Open myself to learning: music is a feeling not a measurement.
- 2 Being aware of other people's needs - you can be somewhere and not really there.

**Project Artist Paul Carroll's Comments:**

When VS joined I saw that her introverted nature could be a hindrance to joining in appropriately. Now, after four years of what is probably the highest attendance of any member ever, she is a musician who is called upon regularly to support and collaborate with other members.

When I first met her I thought that VS was out and about at music events all the time but when we talked I found out that she did very little that wasn't related to Musical Connections and the Choir With No Name.

Even today she does not find taking part in the project easy. Partly because of her mental health and partly because of the high standards she sets for herself each event is a challenge for her. However, it is a challenge she welcomes in the name of self-development and, like the rest of us musicians, she has not yet achieved her goals and is always trying to improve.

VS understands what we are trying to achieve in delivering Musical Connections and trusts our processes entirely. Because of this she will join in at every opportunity, writing newsletter articles each month, attending social events, playing drums and singing in newer members' one-to-one sessions. In turn, participants like VS become the life blood of the project, which take it beyond anything we could deliver purely as music leaders. She does not hold others to the high standards she places on herself and is a most complimentary and giving collaborator. The quality and selflessness of her involvement enhances the experiences of other members at music sessions and her bravery, musicianship and focus inspires them and, to be perfectly honest, me also.

**Evaluator's Comments:**

From talking to VS it is clear that she sees personal development in a different way to some of our participants, and values being in an ongoing state of growth, learning and change:

*"I am going around the circle again, this time with more knowledge..."*

As a philosophical individual, this results in hard data which scores relatively low at times in comparison to her verbal description of her participation, because she is ideologically working towards greater personal fulfilment, and so will never feel she has 'achieved' an objective, and that she could always do more and add further aims.

It should be underlined however that VS is a great advocate of the Musical Connections project, and has certainly made the most of her many opportunities: she contributes a column to the project newsletter each month, is assiduous in seeking out opportunities to write and perform with other members, and has taken up a number of other arts activities towards which the project has signposted her.

*"It just inspires you to be more open to life and aspects of life".*

VS embodies the benefits of being active in the wider M.C. network and will clearly thrive and grow through continued membership, should the project be able to continue.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Case Studies of Two Representatives taken on in Year 2 of Funding** *Written by the Evaluation Consultant*

### **Year 2: Member AS**

#### **Context:**

(Adapted from the first year case study of summer 2016, written by artist Nicola McAteer).

AS is a young woman with a long history of mental health problems. She is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and has been sectioned many times since moving to the UK from Jamaica when she was 15 years old. This caused her to miss out on a lot of secondary education and miss her GCSEs. At the start of the project she was living with her mother and her two young daughters. She now lives alone with her two daughters.

AS has a strong musical background in gospel music through the church and her family. She had a really musical childhood, learning to sing Creole folk songs in primary school in Jamaica and spending entire weekends playing music. She absolutely loves music.

AS was introduced to Musical Connections through her support worker (see below) who picked up a leaflet at a day centre. AS applied in 2014 but deferred her place due to becoming very ill and having a family dispute which caused her to be forced out of her home. She opted for voluntary hospital care as would have been sectioned anyway and her two daughters went into care for this period. AS then accepted her place in 2015 shortly after being discharged from hospital, being rehoused and having a legal battle to get her children back.

#### **AS's Personal Musical Connections Story (May 2017):**

I really enjoy pushing my voice to do more. My main experience of the project has been singing and working with Nicola (project artist) 1-1 and telling her what I like in her playing; having a say and directing, although I have also worked with Paul and Steve (other project artists) playing instruments. I attended a group session and have performed in concerts. I would like to try to attend more group sessions and open mics. Everyone is great. I would miss singing and the good artists if it didn't exist anymore. In one word: for me Musical Connections is like **'starlight'**.

Writing my last song with Nicola felt free. There was a free flow to writing the lyrics. I did not use a poem to help [the process], I just spoke about the past and then wrote: it made me happy that I could think of lyrics off the top of my head and then write a song. I like writing a story. You can sing and talk about amazing things. You can write cheerful things rather than sad things and then find yourself happy - because you are singing about something happy.

My kids like it when I sing and perform. It makes them happy to see their Mummy happy.

I enjoyed singing in the 2016 concert and everyone loved my song. It was hard though, as that day I had a busy morning, rushing about and didn't feel myself. But I still made it and sang!

M.C. has had an effect on my health: I am happier as singing makes me happy. I enjoy writing my songs, I feel great and want to do more. I am given peace of mind that I can write down what I have been through. Now it cheers me up to talk and laugh about the past, whereas years ago I would have cried. With my social life, M.C. has helped a little. I talk to people about my songs and share my life in a positive way. Singing relaxes me and makes me able to talk. As a result of being involved in M.C. I attend Brainstorm and sing there.

It is still a struggle to go to new places. I go out more generally although coming to the centre is the hardest thing for me to do. It helps with my college coursework. Mental health wise, M.C. helps you to be truly who you are and find laughter and joy deep down. I don't just focus on the bad things, which I have done with other projects and other support. It is positive.

**Statement from AS's former support worker Lorraine Rodgers, Aspects Care (2016):** *(NB AS is very isolated and since Ms Rodgers was made redundant, her main source of contact with other adults is via M.C. This statement is therefore an edited version of the one which was used for her year-end case study.)*

Musical Connections has reduced AS's social isolation, it has enabled her to mix with other people which is a huge achievement for her. Before joining Musical Connections her only connection was with her children. AS was at a real low point of her life just before coming to the project, she had been in voluntary hospital care for her bipolar disorder and had been heavily sedated to the point where she wasn't able to walk or talk. She had a huge legal battle to gain custody of her children back after this period of being ill. Being involved in Musical Connections has been vital for her recovery from this difficult period.

The fact she even got the bus there to attend these sessions is amazing. AS used to live a 10 minute walk to Tesco's and would always get a taxi. She only ever got a taxi to go places. It is amazing she gets on a bus on her own to go to these music sessions.

AS is happiest when she is singing, when her mood drops the first thing she does it put her headphones on and sing. It has enhanced her family life and AS find it's really important for her children to embrace music and 'feel the rhythm'. Musical Connections has nurtured what she's got and it's incredible what she has achieved.

#### **Changes mapped:**

AS reviewed her 2015-16 baselines and felt that she had made improvements in her project outcome scores in all cases with the exception of, 'I feel valued and accepted', which she again scored at the highest level of 10 [on a scale of 1 to 10]. The most significant gain was a shift of plus 4 points for, 'I find it easy to work with other people and I can compromise.'

In terms of wellbeing goals supported through the project, AS felt she had met and then exceeded her own goal of connecting with others *"through meeting others who are in to music."* At the end of her first year her comment was, *"I have achieved my goal with this"*, and now she adds that she has gone further: *"I sing at open mic [events]."*

AS has set herself a further goal to, *“attend group sessions if child care can be sorted.”*

**Project Artist Nicola McAteer’s Comments:**

It has been fantastic to see how far AS has progressed in her life since joining Musical Connections. When I met her she had very recently had another period of severe mental ill health which had resulted in her children going into care. AS has been so enthusiastic and motivated in her involvement with Musical Connections and pursuing a healthy artistic outlet. This has no doubt had a ripple effect on her whole life, encouraging her to study English at college and to write more poetry. She has now completed her 2nd year at M.C. despite having almost no support at present due to losing her key worker Lorraine last summer, 2016, and her only relative, her mom, is currently in Jamaica long term.

AS is managing all aspects of her health and wellbeing the best I have seen. She still attends college twice a week, she regularly sings with her daughters and encourages them to write poetry also. She has also attended a women's music class that I run separately to Musical Connections and, whilst there, was a big inspiration for other women. AS recently attended and performed at Brainstorm, an open mic social evening aimed at mental health service users. AS was really excited by this, dressed up for the occasion, performed with the most confidence I've ever seen and brought her daughters along, who all had a wonderful evening.

It is incredible to see a young single mother with long term mental health issues managing her life in such a positive way and making huge steps forward to enhance her life prospects.

**Evaluator’s Comments:**

AS’s experience of Musical Connections provides a clear picture of the changes a 1-1, satisfying connection with an artist (in this case Nicola McAteer) can bring about. AS has been able to use her own creativity to improve her mood and to communicate her thoughts and emotions in a positive way, both with audiences and with her children. It is very good news indeed to hear that she attended Nicola’s music class and made such a positive impression on other women. This is clear evidence of both successful signposting from the project and improved life chances for AS. As she says:

*“I feel like once I can do music, I can do anything.”*

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

**Year 2: Member BB**

**Context:**

(Adapted from original case study, project year 2014-15).

BB applied for Musical Connections after meeting another lady at her church who was an existing member of the project. BB didn’t know this other lady very well but after singing in church she was approached by KJ and recommended to apply for the project. BB lives alone and retired on ‘health grounds’ from her job at the council over 10 years ago following a long period off sick with depression. Since retiring from work, her mental health deteriorated and has suffered isolation. When she started the project she was attending church on Sundays, and went to a monthly bipolar support group.

By session 4 BB’s need to discuss her health problems had significantly decreased from session 1 but she did open up about her thyroid problems which had an effect on her voice. I had noticed a ‘gravelly’ sound to her voice in previous session and it made sense when she discussed the damage to her vocal chords. She adores singing and felt after discovering music

again through the project she was keen to look after her voice. We decided to bring some vocal exercises into the session to see if this would help warm her voice up. By her 6<sup>th</sup> session BB already felt her breathing stamina was better, singing was easier and very relaxing for her overall anxiety and she no longer had a constant cough. Again this was having a dramatic impact on her overall wellbeing.

At session 10 her vocal developments were proved as she was able to record her own higher pitch harmonies. When BB started the project her vocal range was a-g around middle c, but during this recording session she was reaching a c above middle c. This is clear evidence of BB's lung capacity improving and breathing stamina both developments counteract her thyroid problems, confidence and physical symptoms of anxiety.

**BB's Personal Musical Connections Story (amalgamated from 2 interviews, in March and May 2017):**

My single word description for M.C. is *'Unity'*. I love writing songs and singing and I would really miss music and friends if the project couldn't be funded. I hope it gets more funding: I'm praying for it.

I was very happy to come when Pete (Artistic Director) contacted me but also very daunted. The first time I came to a group session I could not manage to stay for the whole time: so many new people!

Meeting and working with Nicola (project artist) was the turnaround. It was great to work woman to woman and Pete was very sensitive in arranging that. I was much shyer back then but Nicola was really reassuring. Once you get into a session it's ok: you realise you don't have to be nervous.

Despite having a difficult day today I am here at the group session (March 17)! In the past I would probably have crumbled! I have noticed that, when we are asked to think about our confidence levels before and after the group session, I feel more confident at the end.

Each time I have written a song I have managed to complete it more quickly. It took the whole twelve sessions for me to get the first one how I wanted it but this last song I have written only took three sessions! The residency was an eye opener: it was challenging but lovely.

In the January 2017 concert we knew we would have the digital piano, so we rehearsed with this which was good. I liked harmonising with Nicola and people clapped. I liked that Jameela (volunteer) filmed our performance.

Singing lightens your heart and gets into your core. It keeps me relaxed. Lyric writing helps me: when I write Gospel music it is in my comfort zone. Nicola came with me to help me sing my song at my church and since then I have sung my songs on my own too. Another thing I enjoyed was singing at Brainstorm and I am going to try and go along again.

This is the only music project I have ever done. I have done CBT [cognitive behaviour therapy] but this is better - it is more interesting because of the fact that it is music.

Since being part of the project I have been discharged from Northcroft Hospital and my CPN [community psychiatric nurse] (in September 2016). Musical Connections has definitely helped me with this. I no longer need to go along to a service user support group: I would say Musical Connections has become my support group. My social life outside the project has improved too.

I also think it is because I have worked in all four of the artist's groups and with lots of different M.C. members. Everyone has their own gift. The whole project is incredible and electrifying!

It has been an inspiration coming to Musical Connections. I would like to thank all the artists and volunteers.

**Statement from Keith Richards, Minister:**

When I first met BB she was somewhat withdrawn and easily upset. You couldn't get her to go up and sing in church, she didn't deal with the pressure too well. She is an intelligent person and she needs to be encouraged.

Now for her to write songs and sing them is real progress. She seems really keen to learn and very good at it. Everyone is behind her at the Church. She has taken pleasure in Musical Connections and speaks highly of it. Her confidence has grown tremendously from when I first met her. She speaks out now and she has come out of her shell, so to speak.

**Changes mapped:**

BB was clear that her scores for all six confidence measures had improved since the autumn of 2014 when she completed her first baselines. Three measures have each increased by four points (out of ten) and her score for 'I can achieve what I want to' has risen by five points, to the maximum of ten.

In terms of the wellbeing goals, BB has shown an interest in this process in particular and in tracking her growth. She feels she has met her goal of connecting with others more, moving from a feeling of being isolated in autumn 2014, to feeling less nervous in group situations by the end of that year. By May 2017 she says:

*"I feel easier now speaking to people. In a previous year I couldn't be in an all-male group but have done this recently."*

She has exceeded her goal to keep learning, moving from, *"I have never been near a cello"* at the outset to *"writing own songs and playing instruments"* currently. She has met her two other goals, and has set a new one to help with her performance and vocal health:

*"[To learn to] sing from the diaphragm."*

**Project Artist Nicola McAteer's Comments:**

BB's enthusiasm and motivation for being involved in the project has always been strong and we have seen her reduce her need for medical treatment and consultancy led care for her bipolar. Over the last 3 years since she joined as a member, I have seen her transform her social life and social confidence which has absolutely given her a more balanced, happy life. A significant key point is how much more comfortable BB is around working with men: her issue with this was noticeable at the beginning as men massively outnumber women on the M.C. project. Now BB doesn't comment if she is out in an all-male group, she puts herself forward consistently to be a main singer who contributes lots of lyrics.

She really looks forward to social occasions and has made good friendships with other female M.C. members who she's had coffee meet ups with. She has also made big steps in sorting out big financial plans, such as her home, pension and will, and seems to have taken all these steps in her stride with ease rather than the severe anxiety she would show in year one when she mentioned her financial issues. She regularly writes poetry and songs and has started performing at church without support from an M.C. artist such as myself. Most importantly she's appears happy and content and very much managing her life.

**Evaluator's Comments:**

BB has gained hugely from being a member of M.C. and, interestingly, tells us she has also found the reflection and evaluation process to be therapeutic: helping her to notice the gains in wellbeing and confidence she has made over the past three years. It is clear from talking to BB that she ascribes most of the positive changes in her life to being part of the Musical Connections project:

*“Music is important to me and has become my coping mechanism. It has had a positive impact on my life.”*

In the longer term, her ongoing deep connection with artist Nicola, developed through the initial 1-1 sessions, has led definitely to greater ease and participation in group activities. This is reflected in the increased confidence, enjoyment and musical skill which has been noticed by Mr Richards and his congregation.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Case Studies of Two Representatives taken on in Year 3 of Funding** *Written by the Evaluation Consultant*

### **Year 3: Member PL**

December 17 update: PL also has completed a video case study highlighting the impact that the project has had on her life. Please see: <https://tinyurl.com/PaulsMCStory>

#### **Context:**

(Adapted from the first year case study of summer 2016, written by Artistic Director Pete Churchill)

PL joined the project in autumn 2015. He originally applied to join Musical Connections after his Occupational Therapist had told him about it. He is a rapper who has previously written and recorded songs where others have largely provided the backing tracks. He was keen to be involved and to have the opportunity to create more music as well as having the opportunity to link in with others.

PL is an extremely shy young man and finds social interaction with others a challenge. However, he set himself the goal of mixing with others on the project, and would often express determination that he was going to get involved in group sessions saying things like, ‘I know I need to’. PL did achieve this goal though in fact it took most of the MC year before he attended his first group session (in April 2016). Having plucked up the courage to come he admitted considering leaving:

*“Initially I was unsure, but it was OK. I’m glad I stayed.”*

Alongside PL’s shyness is a tendency to question the worth of what he does. The work in his first collaboration was a tangible corrective to this through the constant affirmation the group gave him as to the quality of his lyrics and rapping. The song he performed with this group at the end of year concert ‘Fly Away’ was picked out by many as the highlight of the evening and the two tracks of his on the CD are similarly often commented on as to their power. One of these ‘Lord Help Me’ is perhaps the most eloquent and moving description of depression that I have ever come across. PL was keen that it should help others in their struggles with mental health. Though many other M.C. members only really became aware of PL towards the end of the project year, when he finally took the plunge to get more involved, he had no end of positives from them about what he does.

### **PL's Personal Musical Connections Story (May 2017):**

If the project wasn't around, I would miss the people most. I enjoy collaborating. I have done group sessions and also collaborative sessions with Pete [Artistic Director], Nicola [project artist] and other members. I am also thinking about whether I might go to one of Steve's songwriting sessions. I can think of two bands I was in for performances: the first in 2016 (with a member, volunteer Katie and Artistic Director Pete) and 2017 (this time with three members, plus Nicola, and Pete).

Before M.C. I didn't see it as possible to get a job but now this is a goal of mine and I have started looking. My confidence has improved; I am happier and want to go on a holiday. I put this down to having gone to so many events through M.C. - I am just getting out more. The first group session I ever came to, I was anxious when I got there, especially about how many people were going to be there. Everyone was welcoming and then it was ok.

Being in M.C. has improved my confidence and helped my mental health. Writing about mental health issues in songwriting has been helpful. Before I joined it was much worse. Socially: I have been to loads of music events in the last year. Through MC I have met so many musicians and now have lots of things to go to and attend.

I like writing music. It's like an escape from stuff on your mind. I start from lyric writing, then add the music. Most of the time I feel surprised and it makes me happy. I went along to another organisation several times but it wasn't for me. There was nothing that interested me in the same way as Musical Connections. With M.C. I get to meet and make connections with a variety of people.

One of my biggest challenges was performing at the Mac gig in the summer of 2016. The good parts: the people I worked with on the song. Not so good: I didn't think my performance was that great. I just wanted to walk off stage, but I didn't. I'm glad I finished it: I felt I overcome a barrier by getting through it.

In one word, Musical Connections is '*amazing*'.

### **Statement from PL's Uncle:**

Since he started getting involved, I can say that there was something different. He started out cynical but once he saw how everyone connected and worked on other people's pieces he changed. Musical Connections is a very clever format. He made a connection through music: being creative is what he loves.

It's not just about this performance [we spoke at the summer 2017 gig] but it's about the journey. PL has trouble with depression but this has given him confidence and something to focus on. His worries can eat up half a day but M.C. created a spark, a focus and he is upbeat. He is mixing and working with other people: making conversation and creating.

The team that support him on the project are fantastic. Inspirational. It's like they have said, "Here are the keys, the space is yours: go create something."

### **Changes mapped:**

We asked PL to review the first data he provided in baselines at the start of his first year of the Musical Connections project [self-assessed on a scale of 1 to 10]. He was able to identify improvements to his scores for agreeing with all the outcome statements except for, 'I find it easy to sing/play in front of others and express myself through music.' This had stayed at the same, lowest level. For the other five statements, PL was able to detect changes, most noticeably an increase of five points for the statement, 'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests' and an increase of three points for, 'I can achieve what I want to.'



In terms of personal wellbeing goals, PL feels he has exceeded his original stated goal connecting with others by *“hopefully meeting them at group sessions.”* At the end of his first year he had begun to do this and to move further into writing and performing with others, and now feels he has genuinely made *“connections and collaborations with new people.”* He also noted in autumn 2015 that his ability to keep learning would be improved by gaining greater confidence. His 2017 comment: *“I feel more confident than I was at the beginning.”* There is also a discernible increase in this over his *“Little bit of an improvement”* comment at the end of his initial year. He also feels he has met his goal of being more active as the project has helped him to, *“Do more and be more motivated.”*

PL has also set himself two new long term goals and the second of them is a major vision statement:

- 1 Give to others through collaborations
- 2 Get a job involving making music

**Project Artistic Director Pete Churchill’s Comments:**

I’ve had the privilege of working with PL for two years now. As the baseline and accompanying comments show, his starting point was one of extreme shyness, lack of confidence and low self-esteem. PL made progress in all these areas during the first year of his involvement with the project. However, if he had withdrawn from M.C. at that point, its lasting benefits for him would have been limited, in my opinion.

It is the fact that he built on the foundation he made during that first year that has really started to have a profound effect on PL, particularly in terms of his integration with others. It wasn’t until the final group session last year that he plucked up courage to confront his anxieties and attend. Having crossed that line, though, his attendance at group sessions this year has become the norm, and he regularly attends and sometimes performs at Brainstorm [open mic night] as well. PL’s greater ease socially and enjoyment of the company of others is very evident as an observer, as is his increased confidence as a performer. It is testament to the nature of a longer term project such as M.C. that such a change can be seen in over the course of time.

**Evaluator’s Comments:**

As a person dealing with extreme shyness, PL regards singing and playing in front of an audience or peer group as his biggest challenge, and one which he is still working to ameliorate. It is significant that despite this, he continues to contribute to project group activities and even to push himself to take part in performances. The fact that the M.C. network allows him the space to make progress at a pace suitable for him is noteworthy here.

The recent performance at the end of his second year of membership marked a considerable step up in his skills, and his collaboration with a fellow member has produced a song that artist Paul Carroll rightly describes as *“incredible.”* It was both beautifully structured and profoundly moving to hear the two men rap and sing about their shared experience of being fatherless.

Musical Connections provides a nurturing environment for PL to be able to continue to develop his confidence and performative skills, and move through more barriers to self-expression and recognition for his undoubted abilities.

Looking at his responses, his performance and the data he has contributed, he would appear to be making steady progress towards this. I would also note that there is a palpable difference in his ability to engage with other members and staff: when I first met him in summer 2016 he was too shy to make eye contact with me (or others in the room that day). At the concert he

initiated a conversation, coming up to me with a smile and saying, “*Hello Kate.*” I mention this in particular as it is hard to quantify this particular change from written baseline evidence.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

### **Year 3: Member FS**

#### **Context:**

(Adapted from original case study, project year 2014-15 by artist coordinator Paul Carroll).

FS heard about Musical Connections through the Creative Support day service and came with an interest in learning all kinds of instruments, particularly drums, guitar and keyboard. Apart from Creative Support and Musical Connections, he wasn't aware of any other musical opportunities that would provide him with the support he needed to benefit fully.

FS usually left one-to-ones happy but it was when his song started taking shape and he could see that it was good and that he was improving at singing that he really began to leave with a buzz.

He preferred the one-to-ones to the group sessions but still achieved what he wanted to in groups, saying, “*it's good to be with people with the same interests.*” FS joined in instrumentally in group songwriting tasks and sometimes sang along. In the early stages, due to his hard-to-read body language in group sessions, staff were concerned that FS might drop out of the project. I continued to remind him when sessions were and it turned out he actually looked forward to sessions, he just had other appointments sometimes.

FS performed in the Summer Concert at *mac*. His song went really well, impressing his support staff from Creative Support, members of the BSMHFT Community engagement staff and Musical Connections staff.

He has bought himself a small guitar that is easy for him to pick up and play regularly at home and I hope he will come to group sessions in the future.

#### **FS's Personal Musical Connections Story (May 2017):**

Musical Connections is a brilliant project. I enjoy the whole process of making a song: writing it, singing it, performing it and putting it on a CD.

No matter how I feel when I arrive, happy or sad, I always feel cheerful when I leave. It is down to being with people with the same interests. Listening to others play and sing and what we have written, and the others cheering on the performers, this makes me happy. I would miss the socialising most if the project stopped.

[Since my first year] I have attended the group sessions and song writing sessions, the concerts and the residency. However I can't drive at the moment so find it hard to attend extra things in different venues and in the evening, such as Brainstorm [mental health focused open mic night]. In the group sessions we all get together, all contribute and choose what we would like to play. We all perform to others.

I enjoyed performing my song 'Badness Don't Pay' at the summer concert. Before the concert I sang it without the words but I wasn't confident enough to do that in the concert. It was good to get feedback from the audience.

The impact M.C. has had on my social life: I interact with people and talk more freely through being with people. I have more friends and we visit each other. It has helped me be more active in the community. In health terms: I'm cheerful and learning more things. Being with people and [knowing] I can perform and sing, this gives me a goal I can achieve.

[If I hadn't been involved] I wouldn't have bought guitars and been driven to learn to play them. I want to be like others who can play them. I feel like I need to dedicate my time to practising and reading my music books to learn more. For example, I have bought books to help me learn more chords. It gives me inspiration to write more songs. I like having the extra information from the specialist group sessions [these focus on specific learning about elements of music less familiar to particular members, e.g. singing technique or music theory] - I keep the sheets in a folder so I can refer back to them. I can also be a volunteer. I always listen to music as it helps make me feel cheerful. Making music myself helps as I am performing in front of others and so making them happy. The people in M.C. are special. My one word description of Musical Connections is '**family**'.

#### **Statement from FS's Aunt:**

I've noticed such a big improvement in his confidence since belonging to M.C. Years ago he would hardly speak. He would open the door when I went to visit but then not say a word to me. Now it's, "*Oh Auntie, come in. What are you up too?*" Big changes.

It's doing a lot for him because before he had no friends and wasn't going out. He lost his Mom 31 years ago and he was so close to her. Then he lost his Dad twenty years ago. It left him in shock and he had no counselling to help, so he withdrew into himself.

With M.C. he has made a big breakthrough: doing the music is so motivating and he gave me a CD with his music on! He's so proud! He's made a big difference, through music and meeting new friends.

#### **Changes mapped:**

FS has improved all his six confidence outcomes [self-assessed on a scale of 1 to 10] since joining the project and has significantly improved four of them. 'I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests' has risen by six points, as has 'I am able to do things as well as other people'. 'I can achieve what I want to' has risen by five points and 'I find it easy to work with other people and I can compromise' by four points.

FS's thirst for musical knowledge means that his highest priority regarding the wellbeing goals is around 'keep learning'. He has exceeded his initial expectations, moving from "*I will be learning about how to play music and instruments*" at the outset, to "*It has helped me get more understanding of the keyboard*" by the end of year 1, but then progressing this summer to,

*"Really learning to play guitar/bass and play keyboard better. Dedicating more time to reading the books I have."*

He has set a new wellbeing goal to help with his learning and concentration:

*"Try and sleep more: I struggle to concentrate and take things in as I don't sleep very well."*

#### **Project Artist Paul Carroll's Comments:**

I am so pleased how FS has got more and more involved with Musical Connections. With music as the common interest he was able to come from quite isolated circumstances and interact with other people. He is a good example of someone who is more socially connected due to longer term involvement in the project. As a beginner in music he is also a great example of how the project can artistically engage all levels of experience and ability.

The creation, recording and performance of FS's own song was an achievable goal, which he felt so proud to complete. This motivated him further to carry on taking part and so to continue to benefit and deepen his social opportunities. Now he says he is in touch with others outside of Musical Connections sessions. The project has also motivated him to take responsibility for his own learning on guitar and keyboard at home and I have seen him grow more confident in group music-making situations.

#### **Evaluator's Comments:**

FS has clearly made a lot of progress since his first year and has truly engaged with the project in all its facets. He is a great example of someone who has benefitted from the more sustained relationships, inspiration and motivation this long term network is able to provide. In talking with FS, I am very aware of the value of his improved social interaction within the project, over the last two years in particular, and of the focus the artistic activity has brought to his life.

Kate Buttolph, Evaluation Consultant, June 2017

## **Case Studies from Year 4 of Funding**

*This year of delivery has only just been completed, thus case studies are included in the end of year report submitted to the Big Lottery Fund.*

### **Impact Feedback from Healthcare Professionals**

In a questionnaire we submitted to the healthcare agencies that are currently referring their clients on to Musical Connections, 100% respondents felt Musical Connections benefitted their clients: increasing confidence and expression; developing musical, personal and life skills.

As well as asking project members about their experience of Musical Connections, we also ask health professionals who are supporting members to give us their assessment of the impact of this activity on their clients to feed this into our annual case studies. A selection of quotes from across the duration of the Reaching Communities grant follows:

#### **Feedback from, Jordanna Holton, former Support Worker at Creative Support.**

*“Musical Connections offered (member BC) the opportunity to express himself through his craft, which they have nurtured and allowed to blossom, which has spilled over into his feelings of confidence and self-belief. BC recently contacted me at my new place of work to ask if I could “tell his story” to Musical Connections - his voice was full of confidence, and he was speaking to me of upcoming personal plans that he had begun to work on at the start of the year. The fact he made the phone call on his own initiative is a testament to how far he has come from the days where we would sit together to try and encourage him to phone his GP! To hear that he is moving onward and upward and aspiring to significant life events is a monumental step forward from when I first met him. I can confidently say that Musical Connections gave BC the platform he needed to lift himself from the grips of his previous difficulties, allowing him to begin to sever the ties of poor mental health and move forward in his life in a way that was not only supported, but sustainable.*

*Musical Connections gives people a voice that is often hidden or buried until they discover the power of music (and the arts as a whole). The passion that goes into*

*the project by its organisers, staff and volunteers is wholly reflected by the individuals who benefit from its service, who grow so significantly during this 12 month period that the benefits are almost immeasurable. Seeing BC come to life through music has been a privilege and a pleasure, and I am so grateful that Musical Connections is there to help those most in need."*

**Feedback from Lorraine Rodgers**, Aspects Care (who had worked with this member for 2.5 years). See also AS case study.

*AS has started two college courses (Maths and English) and this is because she now has the confidence to do it, Musical Connections has really empowered her.*

*I felt incredibly privileged that AS gave a copy of the Musical Connections CD to me. I knew how much it meant to her."*

Lorraine also attended (member AS's) performance at the mac and had this to say:

*"The performance was absolutely amazing, she would never have been able to even contemplate that before. It's like seeing AS come to life. If I never achieve anything else in my professional career, it's ok. Seeing AS perform like that is a peak in my career. It feels amazing to know that I have had some part of the creation of that."*

Lorraine has been a support worker for 25 years, therefore her last statement really resonates the profound positive impact Musical Connections has had on this member's life.

**Feedback from Bowen Whiteoak**, Support Worker at Midland Heart

*"In regards to the impact the Musical Connections programme had on (member JT) it has been a very positive one. He was always excited when he knew you were coming by and was eager to share with me his progress. He was especially elated to write, record and perform his own song. For a while he seemed reluctant to join in the group sessions but with support from his alcohol worker, myself and the Musical Connections programme he was able to attend and enjoy those sessions as well. I put him forward for the programme thinking that he would gain some independence and confidence and I was happy to see that come to fruition."*

**Feedback from Anita Rea**, Occupational Therapist at Reaside Medium Secure Mental Health Clinic

*"For (member ME), it's been an interest he really enjoyed. It's given him the opportunity to go out of the clinic and to be involved in a social group. It's also provided a consistency and structure to his life that's something he needed. From our perspective, it's more than just the music sessions – it's about community transition – things like route planning, using buses, practising road safety. He got so confident in all these aspects that he ended up putting us (the staff) right a few times! On the occasion that I accompanied ME to one of his sessions you could see in his face how much he was enjoying it. It was great to see him playing the drums – normally he's very slow at responding verbally, but here he was really quick and alert – a completely different ME!"*

**Feedback from Trevor Lil**, Mental Health Support Worker

*"I've seen a big change in (member CW) during the time he's taken part in Musical Connections. I think he got quite a lot out of it. I've only got praise for Musical Connections and I'm keen for CW to carry it on. He never had any structure to his week before other than what happened at home so the project was great in getting him out and about and working on his confidence to meet other people. That's why we've got another referral on the waiting list, because of the benefits we've seen for CW..."*

17 referral agencies responded to our consultation with potential referral agencies for our new project application (see next section). 71% had previously referred clients to the project; 100% stated that they weren't aware of any other similar projects across Birmingham and Solihull.

## Meeting Local Needs

### Local Evidence

We can tell that Musical Connections is meeting a local need because the project is consistently over-subscribed with new applicants currently having to wait 2 years before gaining a place on the project. This waiting time is a concern for us we are planning to address this issue with new outreach activity (see recommendations section). The project has an excellent reputation within its referral agencies, including agencies providing mental health support and advice (Mind, Rethink, Bipolar support groups, BSMHFT, Creative Support, etc.), agencies supporting people with specific health conditions (Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, etc.) and organisations supporting vulnerable adults facing specific challenges such as alcohol dependence/homelessness, etc., (Crisis, Aquarius, etc.), agencies supporting independent living (Midland Heart, BITA Pathways, etc.) and other arts organisations experience in working with our client groups (Choir with No Name, Community Vibe, etc.). The project is embedded within the community and undertakes considerable partnership work with other organisations to support a wider impact.

The DCMS Taking Part survey (15/16, Q4), evidences nationally that adults with a long-standing illness/disability have significantly lower arts engagement than those without. 72% of Musical Connections project members are mental health service users. Poor mental health is a significant problem across Birmingham and Solihull, with NHS comparison data showing our 4 CCGs fared badly against the English benchmarks for: numbers reporting a long term mental health condition; numbers of people with a serious mental illness; numbers of Employment Support Allowance claimants for mental and behavioural disorders; prevalence of depression and anxiety (see table below). Only 23.2% of those with a mental illness or learning disability in Birmingham are in employment, compared to 40.1% in England (2016Q1 data, Crisis Care Profile, Public Health England). In addition, 18.4% of the Birmingham population report that they have a long term health problem or disability that limits their day to day activities, compared to the 17.6% England benchmark.

Table Showing Evidence of Need Data (as researched 6.7.17)

Evidence	Source	Birmingham Cross City CCG	Birmingham South & Central CCG	Sandwell & West Birmingham CCG	Solihull CCG	English benchmark
Initial assessment, mental health overall rating	My NHS, data for better services, 15/16 ratings	Greatest need for improvement	Greatest need for improvement	Needs improvement	Needs improvement	
Long term mental health problems (GP patient survey): % of respondents aged 18+	Common Mental Health Disorder data 15/16 (Public Health England)	6.2%	6.6%	5.7%	6%	5.2%
Depression and anxiety prevalence (GP patient survey):	Public Health England,	14.6%	15.4%	14.2%	14.5	12.7%

% of respondents aged 18+	15/16QOF data					
No. of people in contact with adult mental health services in employment	Five Year Forward View Dashboard, May 17, Q3 2016/17 data	3% and declining	2.2% and declining	1.6% and declining	5.2% and declining	All below objective in FYFV implementation plan
Severe mental health illness recorded prevalence: % of practice register, all ages	Severe Mental Illness JNSA (QOF 15/16)	1.13%				0.90%
ESA claimants for mental and behavioural disorders per 1000 population	Mental Health and Wellbeing data, JNSA 2016	36.7				27.5
% population reporting they have a long term health problem or disability that limits their day to day activities	Mental Health and Wellbeing data, JNSA 2011	18.4%				17.6%
% those with a mental illness or learning disability in employment	2016Q1 data, Crisis Care Profile, Public Health England	23.2%				40.1%

Limited opportunities to work and develop hobbies can cause loneliness and social isolation, which is harmful to health. Research shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad, 2015). Social networks and friendships not only have an impact on reducing the risk of mortality or developing certain diseases, but they also help individuals to recover when they do fall ill (Marmot, 2010). Our evaluations and case studies consistently evidence that Musical Connections does fantastic work in connecting vulnerable adults to others with shared interests and experiences, providing a support network whilst also building a whole range of transferrable and personal skills.

The 'Mental Health in the West Midlands Combined Authority' (WMCA) report (University of Birmingham, report for the West Midlands Mental Health Commission, Jan 17) states the significant costs of poor mental health to the WMCA, with the aggregate economic and social cost equivalent to around £3,100 per head of the population. It recognises that new health and wellbeing hubs being developed are an important strand in helping people access appropriate support as early as possible and recommends that these should be complemented by initiatives to engage with socially disadvantaged groups, as Musical Connections does. It also suggests that the short-term nature of 3<sup>rd</sup> sector funding jeopardises activity, highlighting concerns that Local Authority austerity measures are putting initiatives promoting good mental health at risk.

Musical Connections directly addresses the following priorities/strategies:

- Birmingham Health & Wellbeing Strategy's outcome (2013) to increase the independence of people with severe mental health problems
- Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust's (BSMHFT) 'New Dawn'(2015) model for adult MH services & 2014-19 Strategic Plan, through inclusive provision in new integrated community hubs focusing on prevention, wellbeing & recovery, plus expanded peer opportunities for people with lived experience.

- Birmingham South Central CCG's, 'Our Plans for the Future 15/16', priority to offer emotional wellbeing & resilience support for people to cope better with physical & mental problems; providing early intervention activity, addressing problems before escalation.
- the Birmingham and Solihull Sustainability and Transformation Plan produced by local NHS and government leaders in Oct 2016, 'enabling people with MH conditions to find and/or retain education, employment or training' from a baseline of 4.9% (Birmingham), 9.7% (Solihull) to a target of 8.9% (min Birmingham), 9.9% (min Solihull) by 2020/21, with a greater focus on community interventions and health and wellbeing as a whole.
- The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health (Mental Health Taskforce, Feb 2016), the government's Jan 17 response to its recommendations and the associated 'One Year On' report (Feb 2017) and 'Crossing Boundaries (MH Foundation, 2013) through early intervention/community activities; an integrated approach, promoting good Mental Health/preventing poor mental health; helping people live better lives as part of the government's vision for a 'shared society'. It also funds Mental Health First Aid training for our workforce and supports participant progression, improving engagement, work and health outcomes for disabled people.
- anti-stigma initiatives such as Time For Change and Heads Together.

Musical Connections addresses several points from the Mental Health Foundation's 'Surviving or Thriving' (The State of the UK's Mental Health) Report for mental health awareness week 2017, specifically helping build community resilience, helping people manage their own mental health and achieving many of the 10 ways to look after your mental health, such as: helping people talk about their feelings, keeping people active, keeping people in touch by building connections and friendships, encouraging people to accept who they are and do something they are good at. Finally, the project is committed to further evaluation to help build an evidence-base for this work, as per the recommendation of a government 10 year strategy for mental health research. The project also supports the 'shared society' initiative, focusing on building resilience and an early intervention approach, strengthening connections and community bonds, and works alongside the desire to provide more community-based care and support.

### **Potential Beneficiary Evidence**

*Collected from isolated, vulnerable and/or disabled adults not currently benefiting from Musical Connections*

Consultation with 79 potential beneficiaries for our stage 2 application showed only 16.2% were in employment and only 5.4% were accessing training. 78% felt their physical or mental health affected their ability to develop life skills; 72% felt their physical or mental health affected their ability to develop their hobbies, and 71% their ability to make friends. 66% also felt that there weren't any opportunities or support available to help them bridge the gap to mainstream activities; 85% said the project addressed a gap in provision.

Barriers faced in regards to accessing provision included a lack of self-confidence (73%), not knowing anyone (62%), no support (39%), a fear of facing prejudice or discrimination (38%) and activities not being accessible (22%). On asking about the difference that they felt Musical Connections might make to them, 91% felt that the project could help to build their confidence; 90% felt it could allow them to express themselves; 87% felt that it could help them make new friends and 85% felt that the project would get them out of the house. 84%



said that Musical Connections could build their social skills; 83% their musical skills and 77% said it could give them new personal skills. 97% potentially want to join the project.

### **Referral Agencies**

Surveys/consultations with 17 referral/potential stakeholder organisations reaching 7390+ clients, confirm local need for a targeted accessible project like Musical Connections, with 100% stating that the project addressed a gap in provision and that the project could meet the needs/interests of an average 29% of their current clients (e.g., 2143 potential participants). Referral agencies confirmed our data from potential beneficiaries, stating that the main barriers that service users faced in accessing other provision included: a lack of self-confidence (100%), not knowing anyone (88%), cost (88%), fear of encountering prejudice or discrimination (71%) and activities not being accessible (53%).

100% of current referral agencies felt that the project made a positive difference to their clients. Local healthcare and referral agencies state they are referring their clients on to Musical Connections because they believe that the project can: improve confidence (100%); help people express themselves better (100%), help people develop personal and life skills (100%) help people develop new musical skills (100%); help people develop new social skills (94%); open up new opportunities for clients (94%), increase aspirations (82%); get people out of the house (82%) and help clients make new friends (82%). These changes are important in terms of building resilience and improving the life chances of isolated and vulnerable adults with specific needs.

### **Current Waiting List/ Service Demand**

At the moment we have a 2 year waiting list to join the project, despite no promotion or specific recruitment activity over the last year due to the BIG grant finishing. This is because, in the current model, we can take only 12 new members onto the project each year. Funding and resource issues for the NHS and mental health services have continued to reduce the support available to vulnerable adults across the life of the current grant, with less support in the community available, closure of community day centres and a changing remit of those still running, making them less accessible for some. This has created more demand for Musical Connections.

*“Our managers are not as passionate about music as some people are, which is a shame because, for example, we have a music studio waiting to be used. The organisation is insular. Currently, we are only able to work with volunteers rather than paid musicians.”*

Jessica Holland and Sabina Bealt, Creative Support. (Quote from face-to-face consultation with the Musical Connections Evaluation Consultant, June 2017)

Consultation with current referral agencies has also identified a suspected increase in demand for Musical Connections due to a new focus on community based provision as a result of the ‘New Dawn’ model of integrated care in Birmingham and Solihull, with integrated community mental health hubs focusing on prevention, wellbeing and recovery, plus a desire for expanded peer opportunities for people with lived experience, which our project provides.

*“The current climate of public sector efficiencies makes it very challenging for us to find the money to deliver projects ourselves. This is very sad: clinical services cannot support recovery - they only do interventions. Recovery must happen in communities so therefore I foresee increasing demand for projects like Musical Connections: partnership working is the key. We support Quench Arts to get the backing to continue delivering meaningful activity and to look beyond the illness.”*

Lakhvir Rellon, Director of Community Engagement, BSMHFT [current grantholder].  
(Quote from face-to-face consultation with the Musical Connections Evaluation Consultant, June 2017)

*“There are changes that are affecting resources which means that there can be less support available for people in the community - a lot of the community day centres have been closed or have changed their remit making them less accessible for some.”*

Jayne Eaton, Clinical Psychologist/ Team Manager Bipolar Disorder Service (MDS)

In addition, several agencies have highlighted that there is likely to be a need for enhanced provision due to the new Reach Out initiative, a partnership between BSMHFT, South Staffs and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and St Andrew’s Healthcare, developing community networks and individualised wrap-around community services for people leaving secure care, ensuring people have meaningful ways to spend their days and integrate into their communities. The project has already had several successful examples of supporting members in the transition from secure services to being discharged into the local community and has provided a useful support network and consistent activity in a supportive environment to help with this change. The Reach Out project will thus increase demand for community services such as Musical Connections so that more people can leave secure care quicker, with the right support and engagement opportunities around them.

*“Development of enhanced provision with the Reach Out model could increase demand for community services.”*

Michael Loughrey, Occupational Therapist, BSMHFT

As can be seen in the statements from colleagues within the participant case studies above, Musical Connections is highly valued within the mental health and vulnerable adult support networks and has a significantly wider impact beyond its current membership. For example, through the Music Support Worker role, group music activities have been provided for mental health services users at Creative Support venues, and our staff support a monthly open access open mic night called Brainstorm, targeted to mental health service users.

*“Musical Connections has been a welcome form of treatment (in addition to my medication) as it provides a different social and physical interaction which no one else is providing and is warmly supported by all of its members.”*

PF (member)

## **What Worked Well**

### **Project Longevity and Ongoing Support**

Musical Connections was created in 1996 and has really grown in regards to what it can offer its members. The project is now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year and its longevity is a huge benefit in itself, both in regards to having a successfully refined and honed model with strong evidence of achieving positive outcomes but also in regards to having the partnerships and wider connections to support a lasting impact. We are able to provide a consistent routine of activities year on year with a longstanding, highly experienced artistic team. This enables the project community to become familiar to project members and for the artistic team to get to know how to best support each member within sessions. This in turn creates a naturally warm, relaxed and very supportive environment for new members to enter in to. Each year the project takes on just 12 new members, each project artist working with 3 new members. This small intake each year thus also helps to ensure that every member has a quality experience with their needs well met and ensures that the overall group dynamic is well-managed and supported. Many members tell us that the one of the strengths of the project, and a key difference to other programmes, is that they can continue to access the project on an ongoing basis and dip in and out of activities beyond their first year, as and when they need it. This is particularly important for people managing longstanding health/mental health

conditions where they may experience periods of being well and then periods of ill health. This open door policy is only made possible because of the longevity of the project and the fact that every member is well-known to the staff team, and it means that the activity can benefit a project member many times over. This continuity is integral to the success of Musical Connections in reaching very isolated and vulnerable adults who, in many cases, do not feel able to access any other activities or services.

*“People need time to build confidence in 121 sessions before accessing group sessions then progressing to performing, volunteering and mainstream opportunities. It takes time to make a difference. Managing my health is an ongoing thing and no solution is permanent. It is important to have the project there for me in bad times.”* EC (member)

December 17 update: with funding from the Arts Council, activity with our current membership will be sustained through the Music Support Worker role, who will work one day per week to engage current participants in bookable one-to-one and small group participatory music activity. The Music Support Worker has been employed on the project for over a decade and has built an excellent rapport and trust with Musical Connections members and is a highly skilled songwriter and music facilitator. No new members will be taken onto the project as per the core model detailed above, however with Arts Council support a new outreach delivery model will be trialled to engage greater numbers of isolated and vulnerable adults in participatory music provision, working from 5 hubs across Birmingham and Solihull. New participants will benefit from engagement in monthly project activity over 16 months.

### **Staff Skills**

The longstanding artistic team are highly experienced at working with project beneficiaries, many of whom have a range of health and/or mental health conditions and needs. They are highly skilled in supporting engagement and progression as relevant to each individual's interests and also able to adapt to working in different settings, including hostels, hospitals and secure forensic mental health units where required, understanding the need to engage with health professionals and carers. The artistic team have the musical and personal skills to engage with participants from a real range of social and cultural backgrounds with diverse individual health needs and have huge strengths in the flexibility they can offer as a team to cover every musical genre interest that participants may have.

*“Musical Connections is a fantastic project, to say all the staff are musicians, and not necessarily mental health trained, they are so welcoming and understanding of patients presenting problems, and treat every person, staff or patient, with the upmost respect. It is such a welcoming environment, when I have visited I personally felt so much better afterwards! It's brilliant having the lyric writing, and group music sessions alongside the 1:1 sessions.”*  
Gemma Venmore, Occupational Therapist, BSMHFT

*“What makes it work is the quality of the tutor-musicians involved. They are multi-talented, with very good interpersonal skills. This enables the creative process to be accessible to people from all backgrounds and abilities. The end product is of a notable professional standard and it is great to see individuals' enjoyment and improved confidence.”*  
Rachel Green, Community Vibe (referral agency/stakeholder)

The skills and experience of our artistic team is well recognised within the sector locally, with many partners/stakeholders keen to use their services to support their own provision/events. A good example of this working is shown with one of our member advisory group participants undertaking fundraising for a support organisation she is involved with to employ the Musical Connections artistic team as freelancers to deliver a project for disabled young people for 1Voice.

The project prides itself on being a 'learning team': we always encourage members and stakeholders to let us know how we can improve our services and work and provide opportunities for this information to be passed on anonymously if required. We also like to know when things are going well and work hard to gain feedback from external agencies working with participants to gain a full picture of participant progress.

December 17 update: with funding from Arts Council, the highly experienced and skilled artistic team mentioned will be employed to lead and develop activity in new 5 outreach settings, based in the new integrated community mental health hubs across Birmingham and Solihull, formed as part of the 'New Dawn' model of mental health care for adults in the area. The Musical Connections Artistic Director will also lead 3 taster days in other areas across the regional to investigate potential expansion/partnership delivery further afield.

### **Project Structure**

The structure of the project is also very important for its success. The one-to-one sessions with new members allow artists to develop the confidence of participants, to build a rapport and a relationship of trust with them and to explore their musical tastes, enabling and supporting their individual artistic and emotional expression. All artists then co-deliver the project group sessions, so that project members always have their artist on hand to support as required. These group sessions add an important social dimension, as all members have the opportunity to build friendships and feel a sense of belonging to a community, which is so important to overall wellbeing. In addition, the group sessions allow members to develop social and team working skills, such as the ability to listen, to compromise and to work as a team. The Music Support Worker role provides additional songwriting and recording opportunities for members as well as offering members bookable one-to-one sessions beyond their first year of the programme. In addition, the Music Support Worker also supports ongoing musical collaborations between members, including the creation of small bands and assisting and encouraging members at external/mainstream performance opportunities.

The one-to-one sessions, group sessions and ongoing support through the Music Support Work are all important to the success of Musical Connections in achieving its aims. One-to-one sessions are not common in other music projects because of the cost incurred but are essential in order to build the confidence and skills of new members for them to be ready and willing to access group sessions, and to get to know the support needs of each member. Many other organisations do not deliver group sessions, partly due to the space and resources required but also because of the challenges when engaging groups of vulnerable adults with multiple needs and because of a lack of skilled artists to deliver such activities. These group sessions are essential for embedding each member into the Musical Connections community and support network, helping them interact with others and make friends whilst developing their social and team-working skills and building the confidence to allow eventual progression to mainstream provision. As already stated, the Music Support Worker role is essential for providing longstanding members with ongoing support on a one-to-one or small group basis as required, helping people build their resilience and also self-manage long-term health/mental health conditions. Member collaborations are an important factor in the success of Musical Connections. They are not only artistically fulfilling for members, they also facilitate strong bonds of friendship to form between members, particularly when they record their track for the CD or perform together at one of the performance opportunities provided by the project. This annual project CD is an important tangible outcome of the project for members, celebrating their achievements. It is also something that can be shared with their peers and family members, both experientially and as a physical recognition of their success. The CD recordings are always of a high quality, both in terms of the production value and the high level of musicianship and creativity demonstrated.

*“121 sessions give you personal space to be uninterrupted in your own work. Group sessions are more social.”* DW (member)

As part of the Evaluation Consultant’s brief, we asked for an analysis of which elements of the project activities/ processes have the most impact to help us plan for the future of the project. What our evaluations have consistently shown, however, is that different members respond differently to different elements of the programme depending on the nature of their condition and how they are feeling at that time. Some members felt more comfortable in group sessions, where the pressure wasn’t on them to provide creative ideas and suggestions and where they could gain inspiration from others; other members preferred the one-to-one sessions, where they could have sole control of the artistic output and individualised attention. What was discovered, however, was that the project’s ability to challenge each member to access all elements of the project really helped their progression and often it was the challenging elements which supported the most progression, as long as these challenges were given in small steps as appropriate to each individual.

December 17 update: we recognise that our current model of delivery, whilst incredibly successful, is very expensive to sustain, particularly in the current funding climate. Investment from the Arts Council will enable us to trial new, more sustainable, models of delivery through a new outreach programme and also will support strategic development of the project. Depending on the needs of each setting, a combination of one-to-one, small group and larger group participatory music sessions will take place, with a view to proving value to new partners to draw down funding for ongoing sustainability. Outreach activity in each hub will be delivered in partnership, with mental health professionals supporting artists in project sessions as required in kind, thereby providing added value and reducing delivery costs to the project.

### **Project Dynamics**

The project dynamics are excellent and there is a strong rapport between members, staff and volunteers, due in part because of the experience and consistency of the project team. The project coordinator does an excellent job in overseeing member engagement and in encouraging and supporting members to take on voluntary roles to help ensure that the project is user-led. Members are challenged in their musical participation and project engagement at a pace that is respectful of their needs and appropriate support is identified and given where this is required. However, the team work hard to build personal independence and confidence in decision making. The Music Support Worker role has been key in helping to build members’ confidence in regards to attending sessions and external opportunities, for example, offering supervision on public transport for the first few trips to group sessions; providing support and encouragement at any social/external opportunities and introducing members to other participants, and supporting member collaborations. Musical Connections members are always invited to the external musical performances and events that artists and volunteers are involved with outside of the project, which adds to the supportive sense of family and community and provides a real acceptance for all.

December 17 update: we envisage these dynamics continuing with our established project members, who will have the opportunity to contribute to our regional taster days through performances as well as discussing the impact of their involvement with services users in each location. With Arts Council support, the full project artistic team will be retained on the project, albeit with revised contracts reflecting the changes in delivery model. Our current membership will continue to be engaged through the Music Support Worker role and any bands established will be able to use our venue space to continue to rehearse for the monthly Brainstorm open mic night, supported by Musical Connections staff on a volunteer basis. We envisage that it will take a while to establish similar dynamics in each new outreach setting but will work with support staff and participants to achieve this, through setting artistic expectations and ‘ground rules’ with participants.

## **Measuring Outcomes**

Further embedding of monitoring and evaluation tools and processes throughout the Big Lottery grant is having a significant positive impact in the project being able to prove its value in achieving a host of wellbeing, health and social outcomes for members, well beyond the high quality musical outcomes associated with the project. Our project baseline tools are now well established within the project and create very useful statistics on a cohort level; our case studies created through the project show the impact of the project for every single new member completing their first project year, giving a true reflection of the personal impact for all involved. This data is incorporated throughout this report and continues to strengthen our ability to gain further support and funding for the project.

December 17 update: we will continue to use own evaluation framework for outreach projects and the regional pilot project, to evidence impact alongside musical documentation and outcomes (a sharing event and Soundcloud playlist).

## **Member Involvement**

Our project members are a real asset to the project and are actively engaged in steering and helping to run all elements of the project. We have an active members' advisory group and many members fulfilling volunteer roles on the project to help with its administration, evaluation, delivery and profile. Our monthly project newsletters are produced with the support of member editors and contributions and our project website was scripted and is updated by members with those skills and interests. This is a real strength of the project, with long-term and established members giving something back to the project and informally supporting others, enhancing the sense of community and providing the opportunity for members to contribute and gain feelings of worth. This element will be further developed through peer music support roles, should the project achieve further funding. Where possible, we work with members to contribute to the project with the existing skills they may have, whilst building new skills: one example of this is that a project member programmed the project website himself in a volunteer capacity and, with staff support, has led training for Musical Connections staff and other member volunteers to update content.

December 17 update: we will not be able to deliver such an extended peer support programme without BIG support in the future. However, members will continue to have representation on a project steering group, meeting bi-annually. In addition, members will be able to support regional taster sessions through performances and impact presentations as detailed above. Four member newsletters will be created through the Arts Council project and members will be able to add content as appropriate. The Musical Connections website will continue to be updated by a member volunteer.

## **Project Residential**

For the last phase of Big Lottery funding, the project has run an annual weekend residential trip, taking 12 members and their carers (where relevant) away from Friday-Sunday for a weekend of music-making. This opportunity has been offered in the first instance to members according to set priority criteria: members needing full time care support; members with part-time care support; any new members who would like to attend; longer-term members who haven't attended previously. Some members with full-time care needs have thus benefitted from several residencies. The weekend, though challenging for all, has been a fantastic opportunity for carers to participate and interact with project members in a new light, and for members to experience a trip away in the country, escaping their normal environments. Separate residency evaluations have been provided each year and feedback has consistently shown that members have been incredibly proud of their musical and personal achievements over these weekends; they feel a greater connection with other project members, staff and volunteers and were inspired to access other group and social aspects of the project, if they hadn't done so already.

Whilst this element of the project has been incredibly successful and is highly valued by those who have been able to attend and benefit, we recognise that it is an expensive element of the programme which benefits a small number of members each year and, together with our members' advisory group and stakeholders, we have taken the decision that this element of the programme will not be included in any future Big Lottery bid. 63% of members responding to our consultation on this agreed with the decision, but we recognise that many of those were members who hadn't benefitted from the residential. We have had to take this decision because it is too expensive to include in the new application to the Reaching Communities programme in addition to the new outreach activities and new small group activities, which 100% and 97% of members respectively were keen to introduce. These new elements will significantly widen our project impact and reach additional beneficiaries and will also help with building profile to gain future investment. However, we are committed to trying to secure additional alternative funding for a residential element to the programme in the future.

December 17 update: as explained above, a residential weekend will not be included in future developments of the project but, once a sustainable model for ongoing project delivery is established, it may be something that we fundraise for in the future as a stand-alone element.

### **Collaborations, Project Concerts and CD Documentation**

Production of an annual project CD has worked well as a focus for participants to work towards, providing something tangible for their hard work and giving an excellent sense of achievement. This, together with the project concerts, has provided an incentive to participants. The CD is always of high quality, with artwork provided by members. Due to the amount of work produced and the increasing membership of the project, a double CD is now created each year, which provides the opportunity for established members (as well as new members) to contribute tracks. This has, in turn, created a real interest in collaborative working between established members, supported by the Music Support Worker, which further enhances social skills, friendship groups and the formation of new bands. In fact, though not a main aim of the project, the majority of performances given in the annual CD launch concerts involved collaborations between members, supported by project artists, and this element will be built upon and formalised in our new project application through peer support roles. In addition, the process of recording for the project CD has given members new musical production skills and several members have gone on to further progress in this area and purchased their own software to support their music-making outside of the project.

Each year the project puts on 2 project concerts: an informal concert mid-year and an annual CD launch in the Midland Arts Centre theatre. The informal concert is a fantastic opportunity for new members to perform work in progress, to join in performances of pieces created in project group sessions and to see established members perform to a supportive audience of family, friends and stakeholder organisations. The end of year public concert launches the annual CD, which includes a musical track from each new member plus collaborations between established members. This concert at MAC is enhanced by partnership working, with a marketplace for organisations providing support/opportunities for vulnerable adults to promote their services to Musical Connections members and our audiences, supporting signposting and progression. Both concerts are very different in nature and settings but have a supportive atmosphere, with excellent audience feedback.

December 17 update: with support from the Arts Council, each outreach setting and the regional pilot project will host a sharing concert of work created through the programme, together with a signposting marketplace, supporting participants to sustain ongoing engagement in arts activity beyond the project. Each project will also work on a Soundcloud playlist (effectively a digital CD) which will be uploaded onto our social media sites to share and celebrate musical outcomes.

## **Partnership Working**

Links with other vulnerable adult support organisations and projects in the area are extremely strong, with organisations such as Arts All Over The Place, Community Vibe and the Choir with No Name booking Musical Connections members to perform for events, supporting clients to attend Musical Connections concerts and signposting, and utilising the services of Musical Connections staff to support their own events. Good partnership working means that all organisations can support participants in their progression as well as ensure that each person they are working with has access to the services, support and opportunities most suitable to their needs. As examples, several established Musical Connections members have become music volunteers for Creative Support, one has become a bursar for Arts All Over the Place; another member is a Peer Support Worker for 300 Voices.

December 17 update: by being able to sustain elements of the project and support ongoing engagement with current beneficiaries, as well as new engagements with a wider audience through outreach projects, our strong partnership connections will be retained. With Arts Council support we will also focus on developing new partners local to each outreach hub and regional pilot area. These partnerships will help to ensure that we reach those who are currently not taking part in any artistic activity and also support sustainability plans for the project in each location. Arts Council support will enable us to research and investigate new relationships with health commissioners and localised support agencies, to investigate new models of delivery and funding.

## **Supporting Progression/ Professional Development**

Progression is supported at every level of the project. Project members have been successfully supported into a range of volunteer roles on the project with some, as detailed above, progressing to external voluntary/paid roles. However, the project has also supported the development of its staff. A new music leader was taken onto the project at the start of our Reaching Communities grant with very little music technology skills and, through mentoring support from the rest of the team, is now able to record her participants' tracks for the CD. All project artists state that they have improved their skills in music production over the life of the grant and all have benefitted from the opportunities to undertake training and development opportunities as relevant to their professional development. As a result, one staff member has completed the internationally recognised Music Without Borders training. In addition, the project has supported the ongoing development of committed volunteers, as detailed above. 4 Musical Connections volunteers have progressed to paid trainee positions with Quench Arts.

December 17 update: with Arts Council support, progression and personal development will continue to be offered through our use of the 'Do, Review, Improve' (Youth Music's quality framework) for an annual programme of peer observation and reflection. In addition, we will provide opportunities for 5 developing music leaders through shadow roles attached to the outreach programme, with mentoring support. We will also run 2 training sessions for music facilitators wanting to learn more about our artistic approach and wishing to build their confidence and skills in working artistically within the mental health sector.

## ***What We Could Do Better***

### **Waiting List Time/ Greater Reach**

One of the main concerns for the project at the moment is the length of time potential members have to wait on the project waiting list before we are able to work with them. We understand that the quicker we are able to work with vulnerable and isolated adults in need, the less likely their situation is to deteriorate and the quicker their lives can be improved. However, we also recognise that one of the strengths of the project is the fact that growth



has been well-managed and we feel that taking on an increased number of members per year could put a significant strain on the project dynamics and the size and support available in group sessions. We therefore feel that we need to do more to reach a wider number of vulnerable adults and provide more opportunities for support, without affecting members' experiences on the main project. Our solution is suggested in recommendation 1.

### **Recommendation 1:**

To establish a series of outreach projects across Birmingham and Solihull, based within the new integrated community mental health hubs, to reach more vulnerable and isolated adults with specific needs in Birmingham at the early intervention stage, in order to reduce pressure on the main project waiting list. Each project will have monthly group sessions to help people make connections in their local area through music-making. Working with providers in the local hubs, participants will be targeted for recruitment to ensure those most in need benefit, and to support consistent attendance wherever possible, in order to help us track impact and progression. Research regarding this recommendation has shown that 71% of current referral agencies would be interested in hosting project outreach activity, even taking account of the fact that some are based in secure units where this would not be possible.

This recommendation also addresses an issue that the project in its current format has had in that we have had several participants involved in the project from secure/forensic units, where applicants have a real need for the input. However, taking these participants onto the project has an inherent risk to achieving project outcomes as these participants are unable to access the group and concert elements of the programme without progressing to community leave and/or appropriate staff being on hand to supervise them. In some cases there have been real successes where the project has supported an extremely effective rehabilitation of the patient out of the setting and into the community; in other cases challenges with staffing ratios and/or issues with release hours have affected participants' abilities to access elements of the programme. This will be addressed by offering a specific bespoke outreach project to a secure setting each year, with collaborative work between patients.

December 17 update: the outreach projects based in the integrated community mental health hubs detailed above will be able to be delivered with Arts Council support. We feel that developing a partnership with these hubs will give us the best opportunity for attracting localised funding to sustain artistic activity for participants who otherwise wouldn't engage in the arts. Activity within medium secure/forensic units is not currently covered within the delivery plan for our Arts Council application however a further bespoke project may be an unexpected outcome of the development work undertaken by Directors through this grant.

### **Managing Growth**

The project continues to grow, taking on 12 new members each year alongside its established membership. With such a long established project, this has some inherent challenges in regards to managing the size of group sessions and making them as unthreatening as possible for new members attending their first group session. When working with a large group of vulnerable adults, each person with specific needs, it takes some thought and planning to manage the dynamics between different members and ensure that the experience is as positive as possible for everyone involved. Our project structure and detailed member knowledge supports this process extremely well, as do our experienced staff and volunteer team (with carer supervision where necessary), however the management of group sessions in regards to size and dynamics is something that the project will need to consistently review as the project grows. This point is addressed in recommendation 2. This issue works alongside that of supporting the progression of longstanding members.

### **Recommendation 2:**

To establish a series of smaller group sessions for new members, to help build their confidence and skills before they access the main project group sessions, which can now have 30 members in attendance. We proposed that that each new member should be supported by their project artist in attending a small 'band' for 3 sessions at the end of their first year. This 'band' would be formed of longer-term members acting as peer support musicians. This way every new member would be supported to interact with a small group of established project members in a managed setting, whilst building their group and team-working skills and establishing relationships which will help their transition to accessing full group sessions.

The project will continue to review numbers at group sessions to ensure that they are manageable. Should size become an issue, the project will consider project changes including: increasing the number of group sessions; targeting access to each session to specific members; a booking system. The project continues to keep a look-out for venue accommodation with a larger main room to host group sessions but accessible and affordable venues with disabled parking, 4 breakout rooms, an office, studio and permanent equipment storage facilities are extremely difficult to find in central Birmingham.

December 17 update: with the planned new outreach model of delivery, numbers within each session will be managed through having monthly activity based in 5 different locations across Birmingham and Solihull, with participants accessing activity based in the hub most local to their home. Though project opportunities will be openly advertised to our target audience, participants will need to book onto the project so that numbers and attendance are recorded and so that we can ensure that we can best support their needs for artistic engagement.

Though our current 124 participants will still participate in weekly activities run by our Music Support Worker from our venue base at the Afro-Caribbean Millennium Centre, their engagement will be on a one-to-one and small group session basis, booked via appointment.

### **Supporting Progression**

Member progression within the project is generally well-supported through a range of member volunteer roles as appropriate to each member's interests and skills. In addition, through the Music Support Worker role, monthly Brainstorm open mic nights and other partnership activities, members are supported to attend external events and performance opportunities both within the mental health sector but also, as appropriate, to access mainstream opportunities. However, the project recognises that it could do more to support the ongoing progression of established members into external volunteering, education, work experience and employment opportunities, as well as into regular mainstream participatory arts provision. Recent member consultation has shown that 70% of members responding are interested in further progression to mainstream music opportunities; 67% in work experience/volunteering/employment in the mental health sector, so established members obviously have a desire for this level of progression, provided it is well-supported and not enforced. Within the current grant, there has not been the staff capacity and provision to provide this level of progression support but this will be addressed should the project achieve further funding. Supporting longstanding members with their progression in this way will help manage the size of group sessions as the project grows. This issue is addressed in recommendation 3.

### **Recommendation 3:**

To establish a range of partners who can support established members to progress to mainstream education, participation, volunteering, work experience and employment opportunities, where this is appropriate for members. The next phase of the project should investigate formal partnerships with BSMHFT's WAVE (work experience, apprenticeships,

volunteering and employment project) and MASH (Mentoring and Advocacy Support Hub) projects, and similar, which have a remit to provide opportunities for vulnerable adults. In addition, the project should continue to provide an annual signposting marketplace for members and other vulnerable adults, where organisations and projects offering relevant support and opportunities can advertise their services and promote their offer. Project consultation showed that 82% of current project referral agencies believe their clients would be interested and attend this signposting opportunity (some can't as they are secure units), so this is obviously of interest and value beyond the project membership.

December 17 update: with Arts Council support, progression will be focused on developing participants' musical skills, confidence and understanding and in supporting them to develop ensemble skills. Participants will write their own group tracks for personal expression, working to then record and perform their work. Whilst volunteering/employment outcomes will not be a focus of our new programme, we will endeavour to work with partners and help signpost our participants to their progression and support opportunities as appropriate. The partners will also be able to promote their work through our signposting marketplace events.

### **Enhancing Profile**

Understandably, with the length of the current waiting list, the project has been wary of undertaking significant recruitment advertising but could do more to profile its successes and achievements beyond its current network of stakeholders. Recent recognition for the project from the National Positive Practice Awards and from the National Lottery Good Causes Awards has helped here, as well as the Musical Connections Symposium held on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017. However, the project could do more to highlight its model and the strength and value of its work, especially to a more senior and strategic audience within the NHS and health and wellbeing sectors, including mental health commissioners. The planned additional outreach projects in local communities will help with project profile but the project recognises that it could do more to share its learning and successes across the region, to help gain wider profile and support and also to investigate project expansion and or replication in other areas of need. In addition, Musical Connections groups performing at community events could do more to highlight the fact that they were formed and are supported through the project as this, in turn, would help address mental health stigma and further promote the project. These issues are addressed in recommendations 4, 5 and 6.

### **Recommendation 4:**

To establish a series of regular visits/taster sessions with senior staff and service user representatives within other regional mental health trusts across the West Midlands region in order to share the project model, learning and impact and investigate potential expansion or replication of the project. The project should use its contacts within Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust to help foster relationships with senior staff and commissioners through BSMHFT's involvement in the Reach Out and MERIT project partnerships. MERIT is the Mental Health Alliance for Excellence, Resilience, Innovation and Training, an alliance of four local mental health trusts (BSMHFT, Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust) that is developing a new care model to transform the way acute and urgent mental health services are provided across their combined area. The partnership is also exploring different models of rehabilitation and recovery and sharing best practice, being more responsive to local communities. Reach Out is a partnership of mental health care providers in the wider West Midlands region developing a new and innovative model of care for adults in secure mental health services. The three core partners (BSMHFT, South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and St Andrew's Healthcare) have come together to develop a new model, introducing a more personalised service and providing comprehensive and responsive support in the community. This will focus on aiding recovery, enabling earlier discharge from hospital and reducing the likelihood of being readmitted. As well as clinical care, the new service will

provide practical support, community activities, social networks and employment advice. The activities and support that Musical Connections offers will be of interest to partners involved in both initiatives and could potential help better profile the impact of the project and aid future commissioning.

December 17 update: Arts Council support will enable us to research regional interest in our work and to identify 3 areas across the region to host taster days. Taster days will involve strategic conversations about how the artistic project could help support health and wellbeing outcomes, presentations from previous participants as 'experts by experience', musical performances from current participants, and a taster workshop for local service users and staff. One regional location able to commit 50% match funding will also host an ongoing pilot participatory music project, to build a further partnership relationship. On completion of each regional taster, Quench Arts will follow up to discuss whether each area would support ongoing partnership delivery of activities and/or offer development support on a consultancy basis to local organisations wishing to develop this area of work.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

94% of project referral agencies stated on consultation that they would be interested in attending an annual arts and health learning network event for like-minded organisations, sharing project models, learning and research and discussing potential collaborations. Creative Health (the West Midlands Network for Arts, Health and Wellbeing) have highlighted that this area is a gap in their provision which they would support. The project should thus consider the establishment of an annual learning event, with a small budget for speakers to present relevant research and facilitate discussions to share learning, as well using this event to disseminate the annual Musical Connections impact report. This will be a fantastic platform for referral agencies to hear about the opportunities available for their clients and to gain insight into the evidence-base for supporting this work. It will also enable the arts and health sector to learn from each other and to build quality in provision, evaluation and research. In addition, it will support greater partnership and collaborative work for potential future funding and commissioning opportunities.

December 17 update: with Arts Council support a bi-annual project steering group will be held, with invitations extended to those able to offer specific support and expertise per meeting as required. If, within our development conversations, we find that demand for an arts and health learning network still exists, we will investigate the potential of delivering this network on a break even basis.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

As the project grows, staff, volunteers and participants could do more to advocate for the project, particularly at public events. Staff should work with the member advisory group to formulate some key messages to be communicated at every public and external event or performance involving Musical Connections and perhaps also consider a range of marketing materials and, potentially T-shirt branding to help promote and gain recognition for the project. This could also have anti-stigma benefits. The project should also consider approaching mainstream press for coverage of key events and to celebrate successes.

December 17 update: we will work with current participants when planning the regional taster performances/presentations to ensure that they are confident in getting across key messages. In addition, over the next 18 months we plan to hold 5 fundraising gigs to help support the Music Support Worker role and will ensure that all performers put across a consistent message about the value of arts engagement and also how projects such as ours are needed to fulfil everyone's entitlement to access the arts.

### **Gaining Further Funding Support**

Musical Connections is very grateful for the 10 years of funding that it has achieved to date from the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme. This funding has given the project stability and the confidence to grow in membership, offering ongoing support to some of the most vulnerable adults in our local communities and we are extremely proud of the outcomes that we have achieved for members. Over the current grant BSMHFT has faced significant cuts in funding and staffing, restricting options for attracting alternative/ additional project funding. Additionally, the project has found barriers in achieving other sources of financial support because of the nature of its work. For example, it can be dismissed by arts funders because of its focus on social outcomes and high quality processes (rather than product) for smaller numbers; whilst it faces some scepticism from NHS and health commissioners who don't yet see the value of music-making as a tool to build resilience and support recovery, something which Quench Arts are hoping to address through our advocacy work. These challenges, together with our project successes and encouragement from our grants officer, inspired us to apply to BIG again for ongoing funding supporting a significant development of the programme through outreach provision. However, whilst there continues to be a growing need and demand for mental health support locally, with many new referrals to mental health services daily, we recognise that we cannot have an ongoing sole reliance on BIG funding in the future. Some of the issues in achieving health-related funding for the project are gradually subsiding. For example, challenges with commissioning because Musical Connections beneficiaries do not all fit into one single commissioning category, being vulnerable and isolated due to different conditions may now reduce through the new focus on integrated community mental health hubs and parity of esteem for mental health. Diversifying our fundraising streams for Musical Connections is a priority that links with recommendations regarding profile and strategic development. There is not an overnight solution but a greater focus on this area, together with a national change of climate and greater focus on mental health funding, will strengthen our chances.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

The project should ensure that the larger focus on advocacy and sharing of learning/ outcomes as detailed above will also be focused on gaining further investments and on the development of relationships with commissioners. Within any new funding applications the project should consider formalising partnership agreements to include increasing match funding contributions for new outreach activity across the lifetime of the grant, planning for local sustainability of this delivery. This will allow the project to prove its worth at an initial relatively low risk to outreach hosts, whilst ensuring that they understand the costs and resources involved and value the work.

December 17 update: this work is now absolutely essential, as we now know that the project will not be supported by BIG in the future. Whilst we recognise that previous funding for the project has largely been provided for social outcomes, we also have a real belief in the quality of our artistic outcomes, processes and facilitators – without this quality we wouldn't have such high levels of ongoing engagement from participants and such positive feedback from concerts and events. Our artistic engagement is long-term, providing ongoing participatory music opportunities and supporting a lifelong engagement with the arts. Arts Council support will enable us to reach a far larger audience of participants who would otherwise not access arts opportunities and will also enable us to work on a sustainability strategy to support this work in the future.

#### **Enhancing Member Engagement**

Musical Connections is an established and well-managed project with strengths in providing a high level of service-user engagement in project development and delivery. We recognise that some members will dip in and out of the project after their initial year on the programme, depending on their health and recovery needs. We have mechanisms in place to support members within their 2<sup>nd</sup> year who may be struggling to attend group sessions, and are planning further support as the project grows, through new small group activities supported

by peers, to ensure that the main group session sizes aren't overwhelming for new recruits. Our evaluation and tracking of members on their 1<sup>st</sup> year of the programme has significantly improved over the lifetime of this grant and the project now has established and embedded baseline tools and ongoing reflection activities to measure progress, alongside case studies for every new member finishing their first year. However, the project could do more to monitor and track the longer term impact of the project for established members and new members recruited who engage for multiple years. In addition, it should undertake consistent follow-up activities with all members who stop accessing activities in order to determine and record any positive outcomes (employment/education, etc.), support needs or project feedback/learning. This is achieved to an extent through the Music Support Worker and Artistic Director roles, but could be more consistent. This is addressed in recommendation 8.

In addition, over the duration of the recent grant Musical Connections member volunteers have created a new project website ([www.musicalconnections.info](http://www.musicalconnections.info)) which acts as a central point of information and recordings for members online. This is a real benefit to members who have computer facilities outside of sessions. The project should consider the ongoing development of this website and other social media to support member liaison. This is addressed in recommendation 9.

### **Recommendation 8:**

The Musical Connections team should consider incorporating some longer term tracking of established members over their full engagement in the project, with case studies alongside, to document the longer term impact of engagement. This may include identifying a small focus group of members recruited each year to revisit on an annual basis for ongoing tracking, baseline revisiting and feedback. In addition, with appropriate approval and consideration of the vulnerabilities of members, Musical Connections could consider making some video case studies on the impact of the project for members, to better express and explain the difference that the project makes, which would be useful for ongoing communication and project profiling online. Finally, the staff team should build into their planning and evaluation time a quarterly check on member attendance and identify members who haven't attended within that time to follow up. This should ensure that the database is always up to date and that positive progression is effectively documented, and help re-engage any members who need some additional attention.

December 17 update: 3 video case studies about the impact of the project have been produced. Please see:

- <https://tinyurl.com/HelensMCStory>
- <https://tinyurl.com/GarysMCStory>
- <https://tinyurl.com/PaulsMCStory>

A quarterly check on current member engagement with the Music Support Worker will be undertaken as part of any ongoing activity.

### **Recommendation 9:**

The project should consider the ongoing development of its website, with regular content updates and should also investigate the potential for a closed member forum, monitored by staff as appropriate. It should work with the current team of member volunteers and recruit and train other member volunteers to contribute to regular social media updates.

December 17 update: The current Musical Connections website will be maintained by our current member volunteer, with project staff trained as admins to upload content both on the website and social media pages.

## **Balancing Membership**

One of the strengths of the project is the diversity of its membership, with members from very different social and cultural backgrounds with different health conditions/diagnoses and different levels of musical experience. Our research has shown that there are few other projects in our area that work with vulnerable adults who have a range of needs and 85% of potential beneficiaries (vulnerable adults not currently accessing the project) who completed our research survey felt that there was a gap in provision where you meet a mixture of people with different needs. Musical Connections members continually state that this is a strength of the project and feel that it adds to the sense of community and acceptance. Over the last 4.5 years the Musical Connections project has been run by BSMHFT as grantholder, so a natural focus has been given to promotion within the mental health sector. The project should continue to ensure that project membership remains diverse and that it remains open and attractive to those with physical disabilities, sensory impairments and those with long - term health conditions. In addition, it should continue to provide bespoke activity with medium secure forensic units with a view to supporting patient rehabilitation, particularly for those patients nearly ready to gain community leave, where the project could support an effective transition.

**Recommendation 10:**

The project team should continue to disseminate recruitment materials to a full range of referral agencies and further develop contacts and partnerships with organisations which support potential beneficiaries with specific health conditions. With appropriate funding resources, it could run one outreach project per year focused on a specific health condition in order to build up staff skills and knowledge in working with this client-group within the main project, whilst also building a profile in order to support recruitment project from these networks.

Again, with appropriate funding resources, the project should also continue its relationship with medium secure/forensic mental health units and offer a bespoke outreach project to one unit per year, with a view to supporting patient rehabilitation and recovery and transition to community leave, where this is appropriate.

December 17 update: we do not envisage any changes to the recruitment focus detailed above, with integrated community mental health managers well aware of the close links between physical and mental health. Whilst delivery cost of bespoke projects targeted to specific health conditions is not currently included within our application to the Arts Council, their support will enable capacity for research, development and fundraising for new projects and may therefore result in bespoke projects with targeted beneficiary groups as an unexpected outcome.

**Academic Validation**

Whilst the project evaluation and impact measurement is strong, Musical Connections could investigate the potential of an academic evaluation with research validation that would produce an independent analysis of the effectiveness of the project. Since our stage 1 application, there have been some discussions held with the Centre for Health and Development (CHAD) at Staffordshire University (<http://www.chadresearch.co.uk/>) to develop a small-scale piece of intense research examining the role of Musical Connections in relation to addressing health inequalities and how engagement in Musical Connections supports participants in making positive lifestyle choices. Should this research go ahead, the findings of the study would reach a wider audience of professionals working in public health through CHAD's seminar series as well as through attendance at public health events and in written publications.

**Recommendation 10:**

Should further funding be granted for the project then discussions with CHAD should be formalised into an external evaluation and research agreement, with creation of a full research brief and focus as agreed in collaboration with BIG.

December 17 update: academic validation will not be a focus of work covered through Arts Council funding. However, we will remain in contact with CHAD with a view to developing a stronger relationship for future work and we are open to working with their research team should they find any internal funding to support the research.

### **Recommendations from the Evaluation Consultant's Report:**

This report was largely written before the Evaluation Consultant's report was received. We are confident that recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5b, 6, 7, 8 and 11 (regarding further improvement and refinement of evaluation practice) will be achievable from this report should further funding be granted, as there will be significantly more time assigned to Quench Arts Directors to support the project evaluation and data collation. This will also provide further time for supporting artists and volunteers in their evaluation tasks (recommendation 9). Changes to the structure of group sessions (recommendation 4 and 5) will be considered and investigated with the team in future planning. Recommendation 3 related to app development to capture baseline information is an exciting suggestion that will be investigated: there may be tools available that can be used at very little cost and this is something that we may investigate with further BIG support. Recommendation 10 and 12 have already been considered by the project: the team will try to negotiate an extra room and/or use of corridor walls for ongoing reflection with our venue hosts should a future grant be awarded; conversations have already taken place with CHAD (see above) around a potential bespoke piece of academic research on the project.

December 17 update: all recommendations detailed above that are relevant to the ongoing Music Support Worker delivery and new outreach and regional programmes will be taken on board. A digital app to capture baseline information is currently not a priority for the project as many of our current participants do not have their own smart phones. However, we will set some time aside to investigate whether there are any cost-neutral digital tools that could support and analyse data collection for the future.

## **Conclusion**

**Updated Dec 17**

Reviewing the quantitative and qualitative evidence above, there is no doubt that the Musical Connections project has a profound and positive impact on the health, wellbeing, participation and engagement of its members. Evidence shows that the programme has helped participants develop their personal, social, artistic and life skills, giving members better life-chances and supporting their musical, personal and social progression. There have been some excellent individual case studies showing how the project has supported some very vulnerable and isolated participants in managing their recovery and becoming fully active members of their communities, and participants, staff, volunteers and stakeholders speak highly of the project. Over its duration, the project has refined its structure, processes and practice into an incredibly successful and effective model, with much user involvement and a strong artistic and staff team.

Moving forward the project will no longer be supported by BIG funding. Whilst this is a significant disappointment considering the reputation, evidence of impact and case studies that we have built up through the work, it does present an opportunity for reflection and development. Quench Arts are committed to this area of our work. Our adult wellbeing



strand of work has significantly grown year-on-year, due to demand and increased membership, to the extent that the project model was beginning to show signs of strain with group and songwriting sessions becoming over-subscribed and demand for ongoing one-to-one support significantly exceeding capacity. Therefore, we are currently seeking funding from the Arts Council to undertake research and development to help us sustain and expand our creative music wellbeing programmes to ensure that isolated and vulnerable adults have access to high quality participatory music provision across the West Midlands. We have identified ways in which we can reach increased numbers of beneficiaries at an earlier stage, through new additional outreach work, hopefully addressing demand and waiting list time for the main programme. We are also investigating the potential to utilise our skills and expertise regionally. The team are committed to doing more to profile the success of the project and to share its learning, and recognise that further partnership development and strategic work will support the essential need to diversify funding streams in the future.

*For further information and/or copies of annual project evaluation reports please contact Quench Arts on [info@quench-arts.co.uk](mailto:info@quench-arts.co.uk)*

[www.quench-arts.co.uk](http://www.quench-arts.co.uk)  
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