

Opening doors in music and learning with young people outside the mainstream: Gloucestershire Music Makers' work in Pupil Referral Units Case study: Charlie



Brief description of the work

Gloucestershire Music Makers (GlosMM) have been running weekly small group and one-to-one music mentoring sessions for young people who attend three pupil referral units¹ (PRUs) in Gloucestershire. The aim is to engage young people and build their confidence in learning.

Who's involved

This particular programme of work began in November 2012, and is part of the Music Inclusion Strategy of [Make Music Gloucestershire](#), the county's music education hub, which is led by Gloucestershire Music, the county's music education service. It is funded by Make Music Gloucestershire; [Youth Music](#), as part of the Hub's partnership with Swindon and Wiltshire (referred to as SWAG) in a Musical Inclusion programme; and by Gloucester and Forest of Dean **Pupil Referral Services**.

The aim of the Strategy is to address gaps in music opportunities for young people in challenging circumstances who may miss out on music education, and to work with partners outside of music education to improve musical and non-musical outcomes for children and young people.

¹ A pupil referral unit (PRU) is a type of school that offers short-term alternative education for young people who are excluded from school or not attending school for other reasons. Many of the children attending PRUs will have emotional and behavioral difficulties and some have special educational needs. The PRU will provide an environment where they can learn in smaller groups or one-to-one, through learning tailored to their needs. It will help them cope with difficulties they are having with learning, after which they may then be gradually introduced back into mainstream or special schools. Some attend a PRU part-time as well as attending a mainstream school.

The quotes in this document were captured during a visit to one of the units. The photos were taken during previous work in another unit and performances as part of a showcase of county-wide work. An updated version of this document will be produced during 2013, as an overview of progress and outcomes over a longer period.

Case study: Charlie

About Charlie

Charlie² is a 13-year old (in year 9 of school) who's been excluded from school and has been attending a Pupil Referral Unit for a year. Gloucestershire Music Makers (GlosMM) have been working with Charlie ever since she came to the Unit.

When Charlie came to the PRU, she had very little experience of singing. She attended one of GlosMM's sessions at the Unit with a friend, and since then, she has been taking part in weekly one-to-one music mentoring sessions, has sung on stage as part of a Gloucestershire Music Makers showcase and another local showcase, and is working towards a Bronze Arts Award.

Charlie: *"I started Arts Award in November. I didn't have a clue what it was. It's better than doing nothing, at least it's something."*

Music leader 2: *"One of the things you said, was that you wanted to show people, that you could actually achieve something, like the staff here, and people that didn't believe in you."*

Charlie: *"Yeah."*

Whereas the music leader's experience of Charlie tends to be that she occasionally doesn't want to work: *"She'll say, I'm tired, I don't want to work, can we leave it until tomorrow?"*, Charlie's behaviour outside of music sessions is often challenging, including swearing, and climbing or hiding behind furniture in order to avoid working, and occasional physical violence.

Music leader: *"Charlie said at one stage, you're one of the few teachers that believes in me. It's easy to believe in her because she has good skills. But the early stages of that were here having a go at a song, saying it was all wrong and [over-reacting]."*

Through her music work, Charlie has shown an ability to apply herself and achieve high standards:

Music leader: *"There was a song she sang early on, she [got very frustrated] over that, said she could never sing it ... it was because there were two notes that were too low for her range. I explained [that the notes were too low for her range] and that with the backing tracks, we could put them up a couple of keys ... We had to keep doing that phrase, persisting until she could get those two notes ... and when it came to recording*

the songs in the studio, without me around and with no teachers present, she struggled with those two notes and so she insisted on re-recording it 6 times. She chose to get it right and she had the confidence to use her own ears. I'd been consistently telling her that she can spot stuff. She has a strong perfectionist streak. I see that in her graphics, and her idea of what's good has changed since she worked with [the other music leader]."

As part of the Award, she's been putting together a portfolio of work which has involved her in reading (a biography of her musical hero), writing, designing and presenting (a critique/analysis of a performance she attended, along with other information about her musical hero). These are all notable achievements, as Charlie dislikes reading and writing and will try to avoid both.

She's learned how to pass on her skills, reflect on and analyse her work, and to create meticulous design work – aided by the positive feedback that is a fundamental part of the music leaders' skills and training:

Music leader 2: *"Good, accurate feedback skills are essential in this work, as is emotional intelligence, properly attending to the person you're working with, and seeing yourselves as co-learners. I'm learning how to teach them all the time, just as they're finding out how to learn from me."*

Music leader 1: *"Through Arts Award, she had to teach someone a skill ... we found she's a very patient teacher ... What was really good was, I did it a bit wrong, and Charlie was able to go back and identify exactly what was wrong and show me what to do ... We've also discovered she has a superb eye for design ... she wanted to do three versions of her PowerPoint presentation before she was satisfied with it, and each one took it up to another level of excellence. We were determined it wouldn't be a case of 'that'll do', weren't we Charlie?"*

Music leader 2: *"I was watching and afterwards you were telling me you were panicking, but it didn't look like it, you managed not to show it."*

When asked about the music leaders' abilities, Charlie, says:

"Well if I do something wrong, or if I don't want to do something, they'll [the music leaders] persuade me to do something. I don't know how, they just manage it! Yes, it's a good thing!"

² Names have been changed to protect the identity of this young person.

She continues: "I don't really get on with teachers ... [the music leaders³] respect me and I respect them ... I find you just don't get that with teachers."

Music leader 1: "It's harder work [than mainstream lessons], because it's one-to-one, we push that bit harder, we're striving for excellence all the time. I do worry sometimes that I'm pushing too hard and I'll ask if I am but so far she's risen to all the challenges. She may be tired when she first comes in but then she'll be so focused, it's been an absolute pleasure."

Charlie's musical journey hasn't been completely smooth, as one of the music leaders describes:

"We went through a thing where one day she refused to do work for a whole hour. I came in the next week, and said look, I want you to continue, I'll be honest, it looks good for my organisation and for me, but also, I think it'll be good for you. And you said you'll do it. But if you really don't want to do it and it's going to make my life and your life hell for the next month and you really don't want to do it, lets forget it, save ourselves the pain ... She asked if she could think about it, and sat there in silence for at least 5 minutes, and then said, I'll do it."

Charlie is now hoping to move back into mainstream school, and has been discussing future pathways with her music mentor, including BTEC music, graphics or dance.

Insights into the approach

Learning to learn

The outcomes that the team – and the Pupil Referral Service – are aiming for are engagement, learning skills and confidence. As Mark Bick, CEO of Gloucestershire Music Makers, and one of the music leaders involved in the programme of work across the county, explains:

"A lot of these young people have got into poor learning habits ... When they come across a difficulty, they will have an emotional reaction. I always try to approach it by identifying what's positive. I'll say, one, I'm glad you care about it

³ Charlie presented the PowerPoint to the writer of this case study, and clearly took great pride in the standard of presentation, checking at one point with the music leader "Does that make sense?", stopping to point out that she'd put a slide in the incorrect order, and saying "I should have written down the comments from the teachers", the music leader reassuring her that she had done. My observation was that Charlie spoke to both music leaders with respect but very much as collaborators (or 'co-learners', as one describes the relationship), acting together to make sure the learning and work is of a high standard.

being right or wrong, that shows you care about music and two, you obviously have musical ears because you can hear something wrong, so three, let's find out what's wrong so we can put it right."

"[Young people in challenging circumstances often] get very skilled at avoiding work. My theory is often there's one or two reasons why they're behind other young people in their learning ... So rather than look a fool at not being able to do something, they form elaborate tactics to try to avoid it, and once they've got into that spiral, and they're better at avoidance tactics than work, they put all their energy into that."

Feedback

"Good, accurate feedback skills are essential, you have to identify the positive, without being dishonest, and then keep reinforcing it. An [emotional outburst about something not being right] in itself doesn't sound very good, but usually there are two good things in there 1) [they can] hear something's wrong 2) they care. And that's bewildering for some people, to find something positive in that. And that often gets people thinking about it."

Attending

Another key skill for the music leader is 'attending', as Mark describes it: "The primary thing is the skill of properly attending to the person you're working with, really attending to their body language and being willing to allow empathy, but balanced empathy. That attending, and caring yourself, that emotional engagement is important."

Co-learning

"Then there's that attitude of being co-learners. I've said to Charlie, and the primary age kids we work with: I'm learning to teach you, and you're learning to learn from me, and this isn't easy, either of us can get it wrong. And that's a different attitude. It's actually the reality as a teacher, you're always trying to learn, and the students are trying to adapt to a particular teacher ...{ but it isn't necessarily talked about]."

For more information, contact:

Gloucestershire Music Makers

Mark Bick, CEO

Tel: 01594 836418

Mob: 07815 459468

Email: mark@glosmm.org.uk Web: www.glosmm.org.uk