



Stuart McDonald and a music mentee

Brief description of the work

Roses Theatre's 'Voice It' programme takes place at Tewkesbury School each Friday after school. Young people develop their voices, learn solo and harmony skills, microphone techniques, and rock, pop, rap and MCing skills. As part of its musical inclusion programme it funds places for vulnerable young people referred by the school or other agencies. Gloucestershire Music Makers works in a range of settings (including Hospital Education, Alternative Schools provision and Special Schools with EBD pupils) through its Musical Inclusion programme, providing one-to-one or small group sessions driven by young people's interests.

Who's involved

Voice It! is run by Roses Theatre in partnership with Tewkesbury Music Centre which is part of Gloucestershire Music, the county's music education service. Both this, and **Gloucestershire Music Makers' inclusion work**, is part of the **Music Inclusion Strategy** of [Make Music Gloucestershire](#), the county's music education hub.

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 to **improve musical and non-musical outcomes**.

The musical inclusion work is supported by [Youth Music](#) as part of their *Musical Inclusion* module. Read more about the [musical inclusion partnership work](#) in Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.

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Stuart's story

A small investment in supporting a young musician to develop music mentoring skills has reaped benefits for young people in challenging circumstances, and for the musician himself.

Two years ago, Stuart McDonald, now aged 22, was unemployed and wasn't sure how he'd make a future in music. He's now in demand as a freelance music practitioner and music mentor, helping young people experiencing challenges in their lives to re-engage in education and improve their confidence and self-esteem. He's also finding a parallel career in the music industry through the connections he's made in music mentoring.

An informal progression route

Like many other musicians working in the field of musical inclusion, Stuart's music education did not follow a formal music education route. Rather than learning through one-to-one instrumental lessons and schools music ensembles/orchestras, he was self-taught from an early age, and largely through the rest of his life.

"At nine years old, I just picked up my brother's guitar and started teaching myself." says Stuart. "I took lessons in the first few years of secondary school, just to make sure I wasn't missing anything. I gave up lessons and started teaching myself again, including other instruments like drums, piano and keyboard. I didn't really get involved in music through school because until A-levels, none of the stuff they offered appealed to me."

Stuart took GCSE music, and stayed on for sixth form to study A-level music technology and BTEC music performance, but didn't feel the usual routes into a music career were right for him. He spent a brief spell at University studying music but dropped out because he didn't respond to the more academic style of learning.

The forming of a music mentor

Stuart first came across music mentoring when he was in the sixth form. Through a youth club he was attending, he visited [Studio 340](#), run as part of CCP (County Community Projects) in Cheltenham - which works with young people with multiple and complex needs. At the time, music mentor Malaki Patterson, was working with a number of young people there, and Stuart asked if he could help. *"I wasn't really aware of this type of work, at the time,"* Stuart continues. *"I was just thinking about being famous, being in a band, industry stuff."*



He began helping out at CCP, very informally at first, and with projects that Malaki was working on within and outside CCP, including through Gloucestershire Music Makers, (a charity working with young people facing barriers in life and learning) . Through this, he met Sarah Blowers, at the time working for Fairgame theatre company, but who was eventually to become Take Part participation director at Roses Theatre.

Sarah invited Stuart to volunteer for Fairgame as the sound engineer for a series of alcohol awareness workshops with a rapper in schools in the Midlands. She says: *"I noticed that he was one of those musicians who was thoroughly musical: he could improvise and work out how to play a song just on hearing it."*

Stuart kept in touch with Malaki and Sarah after leaving school and starting university to study music – but he realised that this route wasn't right for him. *"I stuck it for a while but it really wasn't for me,"* says Stuart. *"So then I worked one day a week at a DIY store, still trying to piece together how to make a living from music."*

Training to become a music leader

Eight months later, Sarah was working in her new role at Roses Theatre, and running a group vocal programme for young people called 'Voice It'. She was keen to bring in urban music, music technology, and knew Stuart could help.

"When we started Voice It, I brought Stuart in as a volunteer, and then offered him work as an assistant, and things developed from there. When we gained funding from Youth Music for Musical Inclusion work, part of which was

to encourage new 'breakthrough' music leaders, Stuart was an obvious candidate."

Stuart was given a paid position as a trainee music mentor and his training and development was through shadowing Sarah at work, and brief sessions before and after Voice It sessions. During these, they would discuss what had happened, and Sarah would give him support and guidance.

Sarah says: "We started to give him more and more responsibility – and he flourished, he even pro-actively researched a Festival that the young people could perform at, organised extra rehearsals and arranged transport."

It became clear that Stuart's commitment to the work went beyond 'doing a job', and he was keen to learn.

Stuart says: "I'd ask lots of questions about the practice, how do you do this when you're working with a young person, what's the ideal outcome, how do you evaluate each session ... as opposed to the musical side of it which I was confident with."

Stuart believes that his early difficulties with an academic style of learning has helped him in his music mentoring work:

"Not everyone learns in the same way, so where some people learn academically, some people need to get hands on, observe, shadow people, and build their instincts. I can't sight-read, and my own experience in school was that at the time, it neglected the creative, fun stuff – and for many of the young people we work with, they feel the same about music and about school in general. Not only do they have their own problems, but school offers them only one way of engaging in learning."

Stuart continued to thrive and develop in the role, and soon was offered more work and training with the other Musical Inclusion programme in the county, run by Gloucestershire Music Makers (see box out).

Since then he's continued to work with both organisations, including a project working with people who've experienced domestic abuse, which is funded by the County Council, and as a composer for a music theatre project. He's also working with a fellow music mentor as a co-writer and producer; and has been introduced by Malaki to industry contacts who he's now working with as a producer and session musician.

How Stuart helped Jim with the blues

Stuart's first one-to-one mentee came through Gloucestershire Music Makers. Sarah Blowers, Take Part participation Director at Roses Theatre at the time, says: "The CEO Mark Bick phoned me and said, 'I've got a young man who'd really benefit from some help with the guitar, Stuart would be ideal, can he help?' "

Jim (not his real name) was an 18-year-old guitarist who was passionate about jazz music but had got stuck and lost confidence in developing his skills. He struggled with anxiety and having dropped out of school and with no prospects of a job or training, was becoming increasingly socially isolated and depressed.

Having completed a Gloucestershire Music Makers one-day mentoring training course, Stuart worked with Jim through weekly one hour mentoring sessions over six weeks. During this time Stuart was supported by both Sarah and Malaki – shadowing their work, and driving his own learning about musical inclusion practice.

Collaborating as musicians

As Stuart found out, the work was less about teaching a pupil in a traditional way, or supporting a vulnerable young person in a way that perhaps a counsellor or key worker might, and more about collaborating as musicians:

"He was really into jazz, knew all about the history, was trying to play in that style – but he had nowhere to go with it. He also wanted to do some recording, but again, didn't know where to start. It was more about jamming with another guitarist and using the skills I'd learned by teaching myself. One thing a lot of guitarists struggle with, is improvising, but by teaching myself, I'd found things that would help and I passed them on to him."

A ripple effect

Jim progressed musically, in his confidence, and in beginning to take up opportunities and make connections with people who could support him. He took part in a week-long songwriting and recording course organised by Gloucestershire Music Makers and the Prince's Trust, and has volunteered for CCP, and Roses.

Sarah says: "At the same time, I'd invited Stuart to work with our Youth Theatre company. So I invited him to join one of our sessions, and he said 'I think this guy I'm working with would enjoy this' ... and invited Jim. There's been this ripple effect ... it turned out Jim was into jazz, so we found out more about jazz music ... the more we said 'why don't you think about this?' the more Stuart came back with ideas."

The cost, and the impact

"I've found the most valuable training is the weekly reflective sessions," says Stuart. "I get to ask questions, talk to someone who has more experience about specific things that I'm finding difficult or want to improve, and reflect on

how I can make changes to improve my practice and make a difference to the mentee's work with me."

Both Roses and Gloucestershire Music Makers agree that the most effective, and cost-effective, way to train a young music leader is "on the job", through a process of volunteering, assisting, and finally being helped to develop as an independent practitioner - supported throughout through a continuing mentoring relationship with an experienced music leader.

Costs vary according to the young person's abilities, skills and personal qualities, but a 'typical' breakdown of costs for a young music leader aged 18 or over would be:

Term 1: Volunteering stage £150

To cover staff time for recruitment checks, induction training and supervision etc during volunteer's first term or more of work.

Term 2: Assisting stage £420

Cost is based on minimum of one term of weekly sessions: payment for the volunteer per session plus additional time from mentor for before or end-of-session support/reflection. (Most people undertake from 3 to 8 different bits of work at this stage together with key pieces of training including child protection).

Term 3: Independent stage £420

Based on one term of weekly sessions: payment for the volunteer per session plus additional time from mentor for before or end-of session support/reflection usually by phone.

Often there will have been other opportunities for assisting between Term 2 and Term 3, eg as part of a larger group of music leaders on a summer school and additional "in house" training – often funded through project budgets.

Further development stage £1k - £4k

This can involve further specific training according to the young person's needs, ranging from workshops such as South West Music School's 'Ways into workshops' or more longer term courses, mentoring or CPD.

"We now have an effective music leader who's working with a range of organisations in the county and beyond to support young people in challenging circumstances," says Sarah Blowers. "The investment that we've collectively made in him has gone far beyond the Musical Inclusion programme".

The skills required

Sarah Blowers, previously Take Part Director for Roses Theatre describes some of the qualities of a good music mentor:

Innate musicianship: *"Because of Stuart's innate skills as a musician, he can immediately respond to whatever a young person suggests, develop harmony, compose the music, play it back to them, and start to build texture. Many music tutors wouldn't be able or willing to do that. It's not what they're used to from their teachers, but this also allows them to see the nuts and bolts of how music works."*

Young-people led and flexible: *"Good music mentors are flexible and responsive: Stuart starts with what the young person is into*

so they're immediately engaged ... You have to be flexible with these young people: you might go in with a plan but there may be something in one of their lives, or perhaps different ideas or challenges, that mean it doesn't work out, you have to be able to adapt very quickly."

Able to encourage and inspire young people to work towards goals: Encouraging young people to set goals and work towards them is an important part of the work. *"We always have very clear goals – it may be working on a duet, solo or group song, or towards a performance at a Festival ... that was always really important for them."*

Being able to reflect, learn and adapt: *"As part of our CPD, we all have reflective sessions every other week – that's how we learn."*

Giving positive and constructive feedback: *"The issue with all these young people is confidence and esteem, and we're building on that all the time."*

Further insights into the approach

The work that Stuart is developing is part of a wider, highly-skilled approach to music learning, sometimes described as 'musical inclusion' or an aspect of 'community music' work. Its principles are based around active and creative participation in music, equality of opportunity and the importance of social as well as musical outcomes.

Key organisations involved in supporting and developing practitioners are [Sound Sense](#), the community music association, and [Youth Music](#), the national children's charity.

One-to-one music mentoring – the initial method used with Jim – has developed out of these approaches and has been the subject of recent funded programmes and research.

Music mentoring uses music as *"a common ground and shared interest to develop a relationship with a mentee in order to support them in making significant changes in knowledge, behaviour and thinking"*. The aim of our programme is to help participants to discover their musical potential, develop their confidence and begin to explore the difference that music can make in their lives – in their personal and musical development.

For more information see: **Move on Up – an evaluation of youth music mentoring**
<http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/research/move>

Contact us to find out more about our support for young music leaders:

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