

Practice-sharing case study

Music with young people at risk of poor outcomes & The development of a music leader



Barney Witts of The Music Works has been running weekly music sessions with a group of students at risk of poor educational outcomes at Sir William Romney, a mainstream secondary school. This case study looks at how the work came about and what's been learned in terms of his development as an emerging music leader, and developing practice in a mainstream school.



About this case study

This case study has been written to share practice and prompt reflection, discussion and development of musical inclusion work. It has been written for music practitioners working with children in challenging circumstances, as well as funders and project leads/managers, as part of the legacy of Swindon Wiltshire and Gloucestershire's [Musical Inclusion](#) programme (see also last page).

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The story of the project

"There are no other programmes like this in the county. The South West and Gloucestershire is an area with one of the widest gaps nationally with regards to the achievement of students registered for free school meals. There is a demand for intervention and support programmes that will raise the achievement of these students."

Steven Mackay, Headteacher, Sir William Romney School

Sir William Romney School is a small rural secondary academy in Gloucestershire. It's located in a lower super output area (area of 650 households or less) that is in the top 20 per cent most deprived in the county. Students joining the school have attainment levels that are significantly below the national average, although 'value added' achievement at GCSE in 2014 was in the top 20 per cent of schools nationally. The school attributes this success to high teaching standards, and to the value it places on building self-esteem and confidence.

The group that Barney has been working with consists of young people aged 14-16 who may be at risk of exclusion/poor attendance, have barriers to learning relating to their emotional management, and/or have low self-esteem. The aim has been to build self-esteem, resilience and ultimately motivation and achievement, through a student-led approach to music.

Starting with something specific that the school needed

According to Barney, initial contact between the school and The Music Works was not about working with vulnerable students: "Originally we were asked to do an afterschool club in the school studio, because the teachers weren't confident in using the equipment. It didn't go ahead, but I kept in touch with the school, and ended up helping their students to record for their GCSEs over 10-12 week period.

"After that, the head asked me to go in and work on parents evenings to show prospective students around the studio. And in the meantime, one of their governors asked me to work with her son privately, giving him music lessons. So I've been building that relationship for quite a long time. I kept in touch by email all along and made sure they knew I was available."

Barney was able to fill a gap in terms of music technology skills, which he sees as a problem for many schools: "Many schools, like Sir William Romney, have high spec professional recording studios,

but teachers just don't know how to use the equipment. They don't have the time to do the training, let alone get more familiar with it."

Funding through Youth Music's Musical Inclusion programme (as part of the Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire 'SWAG' programme) then gave The Music Works the opportunity to offer a programme for students who were at risk of poor outcomes or exclusion, one of The Music Works and Barney's areas of specialism. "Some of them were in danger of dropping out of school. They were often getting suspended and getting into trouble. Many had unstable home lives, which was having a negative impact on their lives as a whole. The school wanted them to experience something positive in school, something they could relate to."

Most of the students chosen had a passion for music – particularly urban music – but some had never made music before. Two were taking GCSE music, but were not motivated in lessons and struggling with the work.

The pros and cons of lone-working and managing a project

Malaki Patterson was the overall project manager, who acted as an informal mentor/sounding board for Barney during the project. Barney also fulfilled some of that role, liaising with teachers and getting to know the needs of the school and students: "We felt he was ready to step into that role," said Malaki. "He was going to be lone-working, and that needed more responsibility, but we felt he was at a stage where he was able to handle that."

Although Barney believes that co-working is preferable in these settings (see p5), Malaki feels that the being largely responsible for the project has helped Barney's development: "It's been important that he hasn't just been seen as the person who goes in, does delivery, and goes out again, with me doing the schools liaison and planning. You need to have that relationship with the school when you're delivering in these situations. Barney has really come on as a facilitator because he's had to liaise with the teachers on a day to day basis. Before, he'd go in and deliver and come out. On this project he's been responsible for everything. Now he's built up a good rapport with the teachers, they share information about the students and how they are on a day-to-day basis."

Time for briefing and debriefing, and getting to know students and teachers

One of the things that Malaki believes has helped is the extra time that Barney's spent on the school site, during his lunch breaks: "In future, I think we'd build that into the project, it's been really helpful." One week he would have his lunch with staff; the next week he'd have lunch with the students and that gave him the opportunity to deepen his understanding of the students, what they might be struggling with, and how to engage them.

Feedback time was built in from the beginning. For each three hour session, there was 30 minutes to an hour of reporting back time (to Malaki or talking to the headteacher or Mikala Batley, Inclusion Support Worker) – and this was critical. Young

people who may be struggling with their learning, emotions, or behaviour in school lessons, are able to access support in the 'Behaviour for Learning' room. It was Mikala who identified young people who might benefit from music work, and as Barney says, was pivotal in selling the idea to them.

Being realistic about outcomes, particularly for older students

There have been many deep and positive outcomes from the project (see Snapshot of the project, page 5): attendance has improved, staff report that the students seem more confident and happier in themselves, which they believe will help their learning, and some of the young people have started to make music in their own time out of school. Barney feels this is significant: "They now have something to turn to outside of school when they're feeling lost or need something to do, it gives them an alternative to negative behaviours and activities."

But one of the main outcomes of the work – that behaviour would start to improve, at least directly after the sessions – has not been achieved so far (after 13 weeks). "I was quite dubious of that happening," says Barney. "It's only 40 minutes a week, and these are young people who've had years of trying not to learn."

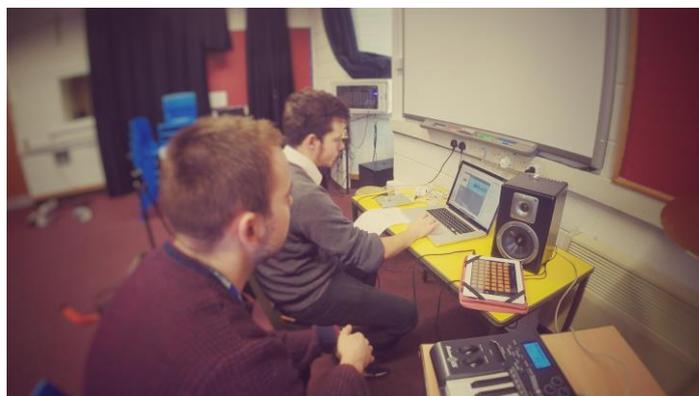
"It's frustrating, because I see a different side to these guys. In the sessions, they're model students. Even the one with severe ADHD will concentrate and listen to me. I know they have the potential."

For Mikala Batley, immediate improvements in behaviour were less important than other outcomes: "I know it's made a massive difference in self-esteem and confidence, and although that's difficult to measure, that's what's most important for them. They're now bringing pieces of music in that they've created and proudly showing teachers, and that's really powerful. What I see is that it's making them feel they're good at something and they're worthwhile as people. That will have a knock on effect. The aim was to enable these students to 'hook into' the school community and connect in a much more positive way with school."

The fact that the school has since extended the programme beyond the initial two terms, and paid closer to the full cost (some funding was still available) shows the value it places on the work. The school has also applied for government funding to research effective practice through music, in improving outcomes for young people.

Catching young people earlier

Catching young people earlier in mainstream education is something that Barney would like to see in the next phase of development: "I think it's an ongoing battle in all the places I work. This work is something that needs to be put in place a lot earlier. These guys are in year 10 and 11, it's too late now, they're already institutionalised in this mode of behaviour at school, it probably wasn't there in year 7. If we could get the work ingrained into mainstream schools we might have fewer young people ending up in Alternative Provision Schools or with behavioural problems."



Observations from Mikala Batley, Inclusion Support Worker

What worked

Being adaptable and responsive: "Barney is very self-sufficient and experienced, he brings a wide range of equipment and he's always prepared. This means he can tailor the project to whoever is there, and adapt on the spot. That's been really important. He's always enquiring about and reflecting on the needs and situations of each student. And the students have said that they appreciate working with someone who's prepared to adapt. There were two students who wanted to work together, but they have a difficult relationship, and it would usually be frowned on. Barney allowed them to team up, and now they're working together in a positive way in their business studies class, they're able to focus and can be trusted more."

Working in small groups: "We split Barney's hours so that he could work in small groups. We never had all five young people working together, that wouldn't have worked for them, and for the equipment we have."

Communication with staff: "He'll check things out about a young person if he's unsure, or he's observed something, we have that open communication, and then he may respond to that with something they do in the session."

Working alone: "It's been a benefit that he doesn't have a member of school staff in the room. It doesn't matter how good you are, you're still seen as a teacher, and that affects how comfortable the students feel."

Giving positive feedback, letting students have control of their learning: "He gives people that fresh start every time they come through the door, showing he's pleased to see them, bigging them up, and most importantly empowering them to take control of their own learning. He gives them a framework but then lets them make choices about what they do and how they do it. I've tried to steal little snippets of what he's said, how he prompts and leads them, asks questions, and allows them to feel comfortable. He doesn't talk all the time, he's quite quiet, and he helps them to reflect too."

Being non-judgemental: *“Barney’s passionate about it, he cares about the kids he works with and he’s non-judgemental. He has the right amount of discipline but he’s not dictatorial.”*

What could be improved

More time built in for school staff: *“I would have liked to have more time at the end of every week or couple of weeks for feedback, what the learning was. We have informal conversations but because I’m so pushed for time, we don’t communicate as much as we should.”*

Dealing with non-attendance: *“We need to think about what to do if a student misses lots of sessions. This is usually because of something going on in their lives, not because they don’t want to attend. I could have filled that gap with another young person who could have benefited from it. We need to think about how we handle that – a stand-by list, or a warning that after three missed sessions they won’t be able to continue.”*

Snapshot of the project

- 20 x two- to three-hour sessions, weekly from September 2014 to March 2015
- One music leader, using music technology to enable students to create and record original tracks, often in urban genre
- School paid 25 per cent of costs, the rest came from Youth Music funding
- For the extension period, the school paid an increased percentage of costs

Overall outcomes

- **Exclusions:** The number of exclusions has reduced and two students at risk of exclusion haven’t increased their penalty points (although attendance hasn’t increased outside of the music day), and have invested in their own decks to make music at home
- **Attendance:** For four of the students, there’s been 100 per cent attendance at school on music session days, leading to improvements on other days
- **Behaviour:** Behaviour in the sessions is excellent and has also improved at school

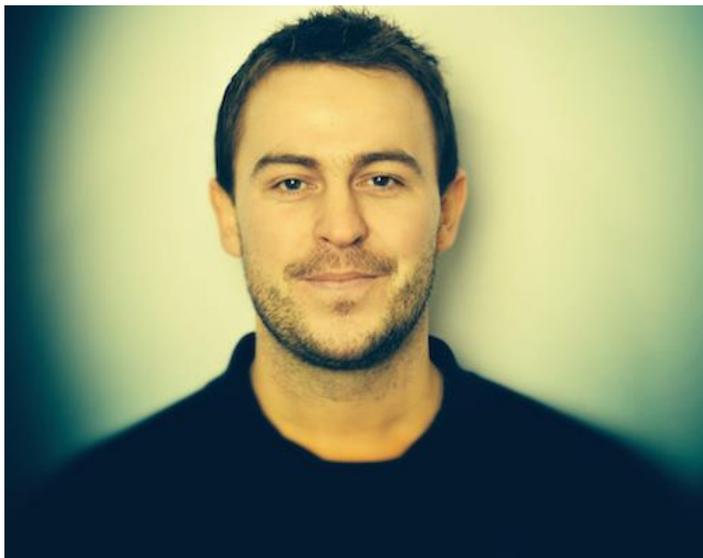
- **Confidence:** Students have reported that they feel more confident and have a higher sense of worth and self-esteem, they feel happier, more positive about themselves, motivated to achieve not just with the music but at school
- **Relationships:** All five students have built good relationships with Barney – most often they find building and sustaining relationships with adults in school difficult
- **Attainment:** All students are studying for Arts Awards and a number have increased their predicted grades. Teachers have reported an increase in confidence, resilience and motivation to learn leading to improvements in academic achievement

Outcomes for individual students

- A student working at grade D in GCSE music is now **predicted to get an A**, due to the compositions he’s created and performed in the music sessions. Previously he refused to perform (and so was risking failing his GCSE), but has now performed, been filmed performing, and agreed to be part of an out-of-school music project
- One student who absconded frequently hasn’t had a single incident of **absconding** since the project started, and has also raised one grade in GCSE music. He is ahead of the GCSE class as his music pieces have been worked on in Barney’s sessions. His attendance has significantly increased
- One student has a particularly difficult home life and uses **music as an escape** when he’s there
- Three students have been **making their own composition pieces outside of school**, uploading them to websites, and showing them proudly to teachers in the school (something that Mikala said would never have happened with other work)
- One student at risk of exclusion only accrued five **penalty points** since getting involved in the music project. In the same time frame last year he had accrued 45 penalty points
- Two students are so passionate to carry on working with Barney they have written a **letter to the Headteacher** to request that they can continue



Barney's story: The development of a music leader



Barney's involvement in music arose because he was part of a musical family: his parents and sister played in Chalford Brass Band, and he grew up playing music, eventually learning to read music and 'play properly' as he says, when he joined the band aged seven, playing tuba.

"I can't remember a moment when I started playing music, it was just part of growing up. I didn't have one-to-one music lessons at school, although I tried for a while at secondary school and didn't like them", he says.

Things changed in his teenage years when he started to reject music: *"I didn't think it was cool anymore, and so I left. I didn't really make music out of school at all for a few years although I still really loved listening to it and I was studying music at GCSE and A-level."*

Feeling short-changed by music in school

During sixth form, Barney discovered an old computer in his school with music software on it (Qbase) and started teaching himself to use it. Similar to many of the young people he now works with, he didn't enjoy music in school, but loved hip-hop: "So I started making it using this computer – there was no chance to learn music production in my school. It really put GCSE and A-level music into perspective: I felt I'd been short-changed."

Eventually, he bought his own laptop and software and continued delving deeper into music production when he left school. After trying a variety of jobs, including spending two years on a civil engineering apprenticeship, he enrolled on a music production course at Gloucestershire College, working part time as a builder to make money. By this time he was also performing as a hip-hop artist and rapper, and had launched his own label.

At around that time, four years ago, his college lecturer

recommended that he contacted Malaki Patterson, one of the core team at Gloucestershire Music Makers (now The Music Works). Malaki was working at CCP (County Community Projects) in Cheltenham, an organisation that provides a range of services for young people, families and vulnerable adults who have multiple and complex needs. Barney had expressed an interest in working with young people through music, particularly hip-hop, which was also an area of interest for Malaki.

From that initial contact, Barney started voluntarily shadowing Malaki, eventually being employed for one day a week on the project. It was a steep learning curve, as the young people often presented highly challenging behaviour: "It was definitely a challenging place to work, but I learned a lot there."

Deciding to become a music leader

When his college course ended, Barney got a place on the University of Gloucestershire's Popular Music course and continued to stay in touch with Malaki over those three years. "It was a bit of a struggle knowing what I was going to do. I didn't know how I would make a living doing music with young people, I wasn't sure there would be enough work, and it was hard to make money initially."

Then two years ago, having left college, a number of opportunities came up through the informal network of arts and music leaders that Barney had become part of through The Music Works. "I started working for Roses Theatre, Tewkesbury, on its outreach programme, and then Malaki asked me if I wanted to work on the Summer Arts College, a 15-day intensive holiday arts course funded by the Youth Offending Service."

Over the years, in his spare time, Barney had been developing another set of skills in film-making (in order to promote his music), and was able to use these during the course, not only capturing participants' views but also passing on video skills.

"After that Summer Arts College I realised I could make a living from this. Over those three weeks I definitely felt like I'd co-delivered the course with Malaki. We had discussions where he said, I couldn't have done it without you, and that gave me the confidence to do it properly as a freelancer."

Four years on, Barney is now in demand both as a music leader and film-maker, working with The Music Works as part of their team of freelancers, and independently for a range of arts organisations.

What have you learned about developing your practice?

Stable, ongoing work takes time to build:

"It's hard to get to the point where you're making a living. After the summer course I wasn't making a living for another eight months, I went to work in a factory two or three days a week for another year while I was trying to get my music work going. I was really gutted. I wanted to do the work, I was ready, and everyone was talking about the work and saying we made such a difference, and so not to get

any work after was really disappointing. I didn't know anything about how the funding works – I still don't."

Shadowing and co-working is essential, but formal training would help:

"A lot of the way I've learned has been informal, shadowing Malaki. I picked up the way he approaches sessions, and the way his is with the young people, and I've spoken to him about it afterwards – it's definitely been learning on the job. And then I progressed into leading my own sessions.

"I've been working with Liz Terry in Stroud Alternative Provision School, and that's been challenging work, but the co-working model really helps, and there needs to be more of that. Even if we don't deliver sessions together, working in the same school, meeting up between sessions and talking, that works better than when you're on your own."

As part of the three-county SWAG programme, he attended a training course delivered by Mark Bick through The Music Works, although he felt this came too late for him: "I do feel there's been a lack of training early on. It would have been better if the course had happened earlier in my work. Looking back on the situations I was in, with the education centre and stuff, that was a tough situation to be in. I was lucky that I didn't make a beginner's mistake that could have had outcomes. For other practitioners starting out I think there needs to be more formal training, they need more support alongside the shadowing. It would be great if Malaki could make what he does into a day-long introductory training course, Liz too."

Mentoring and networking help to avoid isolation and improve practice:

Through the SWAG work, Barney has also been mentored by Ruth Jones, a freelance youth arts consultant, project manager and trainer. "That's been good as well. We talked through what sort of work I'm doing and she's given me pointers on how to make it better, things like how to get feedback from students. Also how to organise my time as a freelancer, and how to decide where my time is best spent – in terms of outcomes you want to achieve – and not just taking on any job. A lot of freelancers are put into a positions where they feel like they're not in control, it's hard if you haven't got that support."

Working as a freelancer can be isolating, and Barney feels it's important to build in time to meet with colleagues, as part of the work: "Working with other practitioners, formal training days, and mentoring – the combination of those three, is really helpful. But so is meeting regularly as a team – for example all the freelancers working for The Music Works – and more widely, with the people I work with in other settings."

About The Music Works

The Music Works (formerly Gloucestershire Music Makers) runs workshops, education programmes, and community based drop-in sessions, ranging from songwriting and music production to instrument and vocal tuition, in a variety of settings across Gloucestershire. Much of its work involves working with young people in challenging circumstances including young offenders, those not in education or employment, looked after children, disabled young people, and those at risk of exclusion from school or low attainment.

About Musical Inclusion

Musical Inclusion is a central part of the strategy for [Make Music Gloucestershire](#), the county's music education hub. The work involves delivery of music activities with a range of partners, strategic working to ensure integration of musically inclusive practice in work with children and young people, and workforce development to ensure quality of provision. This particular project (and a number of other projects in Alternative School Provision and Hospital Education) was supported by funding from Youth Music through its Musical Inclusion programme, administered through a partnership between three music education hubs – Swindon, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire (SWAG). SWAG was one of 26 Musical Inclusion projects across England, tasked with ensuring that children in challenging circumstances were able to access music-making opportunities through music education hubs.

Find out more

Musical Inclusion:

<http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/learning/musical-inclusion>

The Music Works:

www.themusicworks.org.uk

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