

## **Youth Music - Communicate Through Sound Project** **Term 1 Winter 2023 Report**

Key

ML - Music Leader

***Aim: To improve communication skills and to help improve communication between the child and their wider family unit or social setting. All of the children taking part will have some form of communication delay/need.***

Group sessions for Term 1 were held in Beaconsfield Family Centre for 12 weeks. Families were recruited through social media, referrals from Portage (family centre), referrals from Marlow Opportunity Playgroup in Wooburn Moor (A SEND pre-school) and those families who had seen advertisements in local community areas.

7 children were regular attendees at the sessions with their family members and siblings:

4 x White British  
1 x White Polish  
2 x Black Caribbean

5 x Male  
2 x Female

All of the children had speech and language delay and varying needs such as:

Downs Syndrome (DS)  
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)  
Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)  
English as an additional language  
Global Developmental Delay (GDD)  
Visual Impairment (VI)

The theme for the term was 'All about Me' which included weekly sessions such as 'My Family' and 'What I like to do'. Each session followed the same musical structure that included:

- *Hello*: Using our voices to greet each other and make sounds
- *Warm Up*: Making sounds and using Makaton signs
- *Group Playing*: Playing untuned percussion or ukuleles with familiar sounds and words
- *Group Singing*: Various instruments including shakers, bells and chime bars to sing/ make sounds or communicate with

- Moving to Music: Moving with pom poms, dance ribbons, scarves and communicating with peers and family members
- Drumming: Playing with Djembes or claves to feel the beat and encourage vocal/ physical responses
- Listening: Playing chimes and triangles to tune in to quieter sounds and vocal responses
- Goodbye: Using our voices and sensory props to communicate with the group and each other that it's time for music to end

The children quickly became familiar with the structure and some of the children anticipated what was coming next as the weeks progressed.

Within the structure the ML would use a variety of instruments to evoke communication responses. These instrumental sounds accompanied by vocal sounds and Makaton signs allowed the children to quickly recognise the sound and communicate this with their peers, family members and ML.

For example the Cabassa was used to make the sound of a train and communication responses included:

Vocalising 'Train'  
 Vocalising 'Choo choo'  
 Vocalising 'o o'  
 Moving their bodies in motion  
 Makaton sign  
 Listening  
 Watching  
 Own interpretation vocalising or moving

Due to the varying needs of the children the ML had to adapt the curriculum to be inclusive and appropriate for each child. Some of the children liked to sit on the carpet, others wanted to be in a different space or move around for the entire session. This meant the session did not have a fixed place where the ML sat and the ML moved around with the children in order to engage them.

When the sessions first commenced family members appeared uncomfortable with this unfamiliar set up as most sessions in the public domain are static.

Families commented;  
 'Is it ok if he moves around'  
 'I feel like he's not listening as he won't sit still'  
 'Is it ok if she take's part with her brother?'  
 'Is it ok for her to dip in and out?'

The set up was unfamiliar to the families attending for the first few weeks as in the public domain sessions are static and children and families sit down for the duration of sessions (apart from when moving) and have a fixed space. Very quickly the families could see the benefit of moving around the space as the children became more comfortable, relaxed and could engage how they wanted to.

The children below made the following progress throughout the the 12 weeks.

### **Child J - ASD**

J for the first week stayed for 15mins, he was outwardly emotional and found the room, sounds and his peers overstimulating. Throughout the weeks J learnt that the space was safe, trusted the ML and began to interact with his peers. To ensure J felt safe the ML worked with his mum and we let him play for half of the session in the outside area and took him instruments to play with which we either gave to him or placed on the cars he was playing in. As it was raining the next week we said it was too wet to go outside but we introduced large toy cars for him to play with throughout. Finally J just had 2 small cars and 3 jungle animals for him to use during the sessions. This approach worked really well and for the last 4 sessions of the project J remained in the room for the entire session, played with instruments, gave eye contact, interacted with peers, vocalised many words and made sounds and initiated musical play.

J in particular liked to share his musical ideas when he was ready and felt able to interact with the activity. As an example if the ML sang 'Old MacDonald' J did not appear interested. However when the ML moved over to his area and pointed at one of his animals e.g. the elephant he would immediately be interested and make the elephant dance on the table. When the ML asked what animal next he would point or vocalise one of the other animals he was holding. He liked that he got to choose and that his ideas were being listened to.

### **Child G - ASD**

G attended session with her dad and kept close by him for the first part of the session. After she felt more comfortable G liked to move around the space but would always follow the ML and the activity in her own way and in her own time. G made a huge amount of vocal responses to songs such as naming animals, instruments, people etc. She also liked to make her own sounds that were mostly in sing song. G especially enjoyed the microphone and would vocalise words in response to common songs e.g. 'Wheels on the bus'. The ML left out words for G to fill the gaps and quickly changed the song to encourage more word play.

### **Child C - Awaiting diagnosis for possible ASD, ADHD and SLD**

C attended the session with her brother, mother and grandmother. C liked to participate mostly when her sibling was participating and would often be distracted when he was not joining in, in a 'conventional' way. Throughout the weeks C became more comfortable and would try new instruments, make sounds and a variety of words and signs without her brothers input. Mum commented that she had not really tried Makaton at home with her as didn't think it would help. During sessions C would regularly sign and use the word for quiet, loud, fast and slow. Mum was delighted with these responses and could see the benefit of having a visual cue to evoke language. C made huge progress throughout the weeks as her confidence grew which allowed her to communicate more effectively using words and signs to tell her family and the ML what she wanted.

### ***Child A1- Down's Syndrome***

A1 attended the session with his mum and would actively participate throughout the weeks. A1 was already familiar with Makaton and would regularly sign and vocalise words. He started to put more words together to make himself better understood. This included: 'I play your guitar', 'It's A's turn now'. A1 would also sit with the ML guitar at the beginning and end of the session and copy the musical structure of sessions especially singing the hello and goodbye songs and 'Shake it off' by Taylor Swift. He would sing the words but also make breaks/pauses as the ML did in the session.

### ***Child A2 - ASD***

A2 attended sessions with his sister and mum, A often wore snugs (headphones) as he was sensitive to new sounds. A would dip in and out of sessions and walk around the room in a circular manner. However after a few weeks he would come up to the ML and play his instrument making sounds and with a happy expression. When the song finished every time he would throw his instrument on the ground and become agitated until the next song commenced. The cycle would start once more. A clearly was communicating that he understood the activity had finished but he found it hard to process and so had a physical response.

### ***Child Z - ASD***

Z attended the session with his mum or dad. Z initially was very responsive to musical exploration and would regularly make sounds and use almost full sentences for certain tasks. As the weeks progressed Z attended playgroup in the morning and was very tired when he came to session. This impacted on his responses but nonetheless he communicated with mum, dad and the ML using signs, sounds and words to make himself understood.

### ***Child G - GDD, VI and NR2F1 gene mutation***

G attended sessions with his mum or his dad. G communicated through sound making but mostly through physical responses. Whenever he heard a familiar tag to a song he would crouch and rock his body forward and backwards enjoying the rhythm. G enjoyed playing the chimes and the drums but tended to reject instruments after a few turns favouring a return to moving his body in response. When the music stopped he would stop and look towards where the ML was playing and wait, he would make sounds if the pause was too long and once the music started again so would his rhythmic movements.

Throughout the project it was interesting to observe the parents/wider family unit of the children engage in conversation and strike up friendships outside of the project. Much of the discussion focussed on how to get help or where to get help from due to delays in services offered mostly due to the pandemic and funding cuts. It appears families have largely been left to 'get on with it' as waiting lists for a diagnosis, support and treatment are taking in excess of 12months. The families all commented how this project is very much needed and that the costs of finding such sessions in the public domain are high and often not appropriate for their children's needs. This project has allowed them to meet in a safe space where their children are listened to, respected and worked with in order for them to fulfil their potential.

## **What we have learnt so far**

*We would like to learn from Communicate Through Sound two year project:*

- 1. What changes and impact our curriculum has on children displaying communication difficulties and document any differences or similarities that may be shown between different groups of children.*

Children with ASD need the freedom to move around the space, initiate a musical activity and be given the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas and for these to be acted upon by the ML.

Makaton provides a visual cue that encourages forming new words and is a useful tool for those children who already use Makaton and for those that are new to signing to give them a further way of communicating.

Supporting each child to communicate how they want to and within their needs. This needs time and space and for the ML to step back and not try to steer the activity in a more conventional way.

- 2. What range of skills a music leader needs in order to work with children with varying needs who display communication delay.*

Patience - allowing plenty of time for children to respond.

Adaptability - push the curriculum in a new direction if the child or children move it in a different way.

A solid range of resources to support different needs - Lots of sound makers for the children to try and make common sounds/words with.

A curriculum that supports varying needs - different ways of repeating the same activity within each child's capability. Ensure each child can succeed and not fail.

To go with and listen to each child's response and accept that it may be different from the one the ML was looking for.

Praise - Rewarding children with praise has a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

- 3. What format CreateED's curriculum moves in, in order to work with early years children with communication difficulties and how is this influenced and adapted by the children and their families input?*

Families commented that these sessions would also be valuable in their child's day care setting where the child is independent and can experience music with their peers as well as sessions with the family unit. It would be interesting to note how each child reacts in a family session and then in a mirrored daycare session and to note any similarities and differences.

Feedback from parents:

'We're sad that our sessions have ended as I think J has got a lot out of it. Regular routine, being part of a class and his speech has come on a lot too. He's asking for more things and repeating words back daily and is saying new words then randomly saying at home too. He also likes to sing songs and occasionally will sing words'.

'We really have enjoyed your class and I think it has really helped C. The sessions are great and its so very helpful that you allow siblings to be included too'.

***CreateED's events will be held in various venues across Buckinghamshire that provide an accessible environment for children & families to enjoy musical experiences together. Live musical experiences will help to strengthen communication skills by experiencing music together as a wider but inclusive community, develop social interactions and friendships and provide an opportunity to enjoy, be joyful and celebrate music together.***

We held our first community live music event. This was performed by Matt Bond and the Good Time Boys who play rock n roll classics. As this was in December the band played a mixture of Christmas songs and Rock n Roll.

The event was well attended with 80 tickets sold. The audience was made up of (i) families from the 'Communicate through sound project' (ii) families referred from family centres (iii) families whose children attend local SEND provision either pre-school, nurseries or primary schools (iv) children and young people from South Bucks Down's Syndrome Group (v) children and young people with additional needs who the ML had worked with on other projects.

It was fantastic to see so many families from across the community coming together to share in live music. We had so many positive comments from the families attending and the children sang, danced, signed and played with instruments and props with their family members and also with new friends who they made on the day. The concert was a huge success and everyone who attended left with a positive feeling and a smile.

Quote from member of the CreateED Advisory Board

"The CreateED Christmas concert was a really joyful party, with lots of dancing and singing and really engaged children who clearly loved the energy and atmosphere being created by the live band. We had a great time!"

