

Autism Innovation Fund - Classical Expressions

Knowsley Adult Disability Service

Project Evaluation Report

Overview of Project Aims

The Classical Expressions project has been very successful and most of the planned initial intentions of the project have been delivered, with a plan in place to ensure that all elements of the project are provided as part of the services ongoing commitment to the project and succession and sustainability plans.

The project was initially aimed at providing support for six service users but through careful planning of time and resources we were able to extend the offer to a further two service users taking the participants up to eight. The two additional participants had additional and complex support needs and we felt that it was important that the opportunity was made available to service users with a wide range of support needs.

Each participant had the opportunity to contribute to their own one page profile at the beginning of the project. This provided important information for the cellist, who would be meeting the participant for the first time, and it was a good way for her to get to know individuals and know what their gifts and talents were and what was important to and for them within the sessions.

Due to delays with funding, the start of the project was delayed, as a result of this the opportunity we had lined up for participants to gain 'work related skills' from shadowing staff who were planning a community event with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was missed, however this remains a commitment and we will continue to explore alternative opportunities beyond the end of the project.

At the start of the project all participants were assessed using the Spectrum star with a review at the midpoint and a planned reassessment at the end of the project. Many of the participants have been able to demonstrate individual breakthroughs - increased confidence & communication skills – in some cases learning a new language (French) and writing musical scores and songs, turn taking, working as part of a team.

A wide range of musical instruments were purchased as part of this project which included: chimes & shakers, ukulele, small harp and a Theremin which provided more choice and control for each participant.

All of the participants were given a journal at the first session and they were able to keep their own diary and record of each session.

Three participants have been working towards an Explorer award linked to the Art Awards programme. It was hoped that all participants could be supported towards

this award but there is an upper age limit for the programme which limited registration for this award.

The project has also provided opportunities for the participants and their families to attend a number of different community base performances, including theatre and musical events. It has introduced a new genre of classical music to the service users which has been extremely well received.

Outcomes

Over the course of the ten week project 80 one to one intensive interaction sessions were provided by the professional cellist, who was supported by a dedicated arts and heritage facilitator and the participant's key worker.

Each session consisted of a 45 minute 1:1 interaction where the participant had choice and control of the direction of the session and an exploration of vocalisation, touch, humour and musical instruments. Intensive interaction has empowered participants to express themselves through words and music

All sessions were recorded using an I-pad and flip cameras and a DVD has been produced for each individual charting their progress during each session, which culminated in an individual and group sharing session and celebration event at the end of the project.

Through journals, participants demonstrated a variety of art based skills and developed creativity. They were able to discuss what and who inspired them and managed to do some brief research on the internet to relate to Georgina and the project. They were also able to do problem solving through quizzes and other activities

Staff confidence improved along with building up their own repertoire. Staff became more aware of how to engage with the participants and have been able to share their new skills and knowledge with colleagues within the day service.

The project has provided opportunities for the participants to attend the theatre and musical performances as a family unit with parents / carers and siblings, whilst the initial take up of this offer was limited at the beginning of the project there has been an increased take up towards the end of the project - a wide range of events have been provided and as part of the ongoing legacy of the project further opportunities will continue to be offered in the future:

- Bluecoat Arts Centre - Young DADA Ensemble
- Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - DADA Staff-Benda-Bilili
- Brindley Theatre - Oliver

- Everyman Theatre - A Midsummer Nights Dream
- The Tithe Barn - Harp & Cello Recital
- The Playhouse Theatre - The Huducker Proxy

Feedback from parents has been excellent:

- DJ - Mum says he is really chatty when he comes home after his music sessions, loves talking about the project and tells her what he has been doing. Last week he was waiting for Gerry to pick him up with the door open and was excited to eager to get there
- KR - Dad says Kenny is coming home in a great mood and telling them about his sessions and is always looking forward to Tuesday's
- LF - Is talking to people at home and in Kirkby base. She is telling them about her experiences at the sessions. She was going to Emma's house for tea and Tuesday for fish fingers and smiley faces and was really excited
- CM - Wasn't in a good mood last week and had spent the weekend and early part of the week alone in his room, not wanting to socialise. After the session he was much calmer and in a better mood, even socialising with other service users in the Bistro
- MC - Mum says he really looks forward to the sessions, and knows he has had a good time as he comes out of the sessions in a great mood with a beaming smile

The project outcomes were linked to the five steps to health and wellbeing:

- **Connect Be Active Be Curious Learn Give**

Each participant made a strong **CONNECTION** with Georgina the professional cellist, some were wary at the start of the programme but soon became confident in the environment and begin a process of self expression that was unique for each individual.

All participants were able to take an **ACTIVE** role and participation in the 1:1 intensive interaction sessions, for two of the service users with complex and additional support needs they used the sessions to relax and respond positively to the softer sounds of the instruments, they enjoyed the rhythm of the music and different instruments. A participant who was hyper sensitive to sound and touch was able to remain in her session for the full hour and developed a strong relationship with the cellist. Other participants were able to develop their own strategies for engaging in the sessions through humour, learning French phrases to communicate with the cellist. Each session was individualised and participants were able to choose their own instruments and find their own comfort zone within the sessions

and were given opportunities and freedom to express themselves with amazing results: improved vocalisation and conversations, increased confidence, writing own musical score and songs, learning to play a range of instruments.

All of the participants in their own individual ways were **CURIOS** about the sessions and were willing to try something new, a typical reaction was to be cautious and slightly dubious about going into a new environment, but participants overcame this and fully participated in the sessions and explored new ways to communicate and have fun.

Through the use of personal journals participants demonstrated a variety of art based skills, and developed their creative styles in an environment where they had the time and space to **LEARN** through participation in the project . They were able to learn to take control of their sessions and developed a wide range of skills and confidence: turn taking, leading sessions, problem solving and working together as part of a team.

The final session of the project was a celebration event that was to **GIVE** all participant the chance to share their new skills and was initially planned as a short sharing session with each participant being invited to present a one or two minute demonstration of their newly developed musical skills. Due to the enthusiasm and generosity of all participants who planned a musical sharing event where each person performed three unique compositions that lasted over an hour. Each participant provided peer support to each other and produced an excellent and very engaging event to an invited audience of service users, parents and carers and staff.

The project and celebration event provided parents, carers and staff much more awareness about the personalities, skills and talents of the person that they support, the mother of a 25 year old participant commented that ‘ I didn’t know that my son was so outgoing’ - this was after watching him mix his own dance tracks on an I-pad application, playing a Theremin, singing and dancing during his celebration performance.

A final celebration event and premiere of the DVD has been arranged for all participants and their families for 8th September 2015.

Overall the project was able to provide improved personal and social wellbeing of the participants through participation in a creative cultural programme of activity. All participants will be encouraged to have a sustained engagement in arts and wellbeing activities after this project through the day services wide range of cultural and heritage programmes.

Challenges Overcome

The project proved that some people with Autism are able to ‘step out’ of their comfort zones.

Through careful planning participants were prepared for the brief break in their usual routines, and managed to accommodate the changes and looked forward to the sessions and also enjoyed discussing the sessions with friends and family during the week.

Some participants started the project by choosing to be non verbal and ended up singing and communicating through laughter and humour.

Anxiety levels reduced when the service users realised they were ‘in charge’ of the session, and knew the format the session would take each week.

Learning how to multi task – singing and playing instruments and dancing and a sense of accomplishment and achievement through praise and appreciation.

Participants feeling more confident to interact with others at their bases as they enjoyed the attention and high level of interaction during the sessions

Concentration improved as participants became ‘more’ focused as the sessions progressed

Trust in others was established, making physical and eye contact were there had been none before. Allowing others further into their own personal space, allowing Georgina to push boundaries

Confidence in own expectations and ability to choose what instruments they preferred and were needed to create the sounds they wanted to make

Initiating sessions through choice of instruments and words for songs

Sharing parts of their lives eg what they had done with family/friends leading up to the session

Learning to take turns (with Georgina and during performance) and the value of teamwork, sharing their work with others

Confidence to visit public venues to see theatre/music performances

Legacy - How people with Autism have been helped and supported

From the outset of the project a person centred approach was taken and this was an important factor in the success of the project. Through careful planning each of the participants were able to go on their own personal journey during the course of the sessions and it was a privilege to watch them grow and develop and begin to communicate in their own unique ways. By giving each individual time and space to

understand and adapt to a new environment they were able to grow in confidence and were able to express themselves fully.

Following the successful use of the Spectrum Star for the duration of this project the star will now be made available for all service users with autism who attend the day service - this will be completed for existing service user by the end of 2015 and will be a feature for all new transitions into the service.

The introduction of a contemporary instrument (Theremin) was a huge success and made the art of making music more accessible and fun. Learning that something as simple as the use of a microphone to project the voice can be a useful tool to enable a usually non verbal service user to express themselves and speech development through singing, mirroring or call and response

Service users and staff have developed new skills in the use of technology through downloading Apps onto I-Pads and being able to record their own music. There are plans to develop a peer support programme by supporting one of the participants to be able to train other service users in the art of making their own music.

Support staff have been up-skilled as a result of the project and have learnt new ways to engage with service users who have autism, and the project has reinforced the importance of intensive interaction sessions, giving service user's time and space to express themselves.

Sustainability

A programme has been put in place to train staff in using art and music in more creative and useful way, enabling them to build and develop skills which can be used in supporting our service users and assisting them in developing their skills and creativity.

A core team has been put together to ensure the high quality of future art projects

We are looking into the logistics of setting up a dedicated music room in one of the bases, where instruments are available for groups to book in to and develop their own projects

Music is to be included in other forms of therapy used in the service, eg Aroma and touch sessions

We will endeavour to create opportunities to work alongside musicians and to be able to shadow council staff working within the arts and heritage service to gain valuable employment skills and experiences

Working towards Arts Awards or equivalent for service users over the age of 25 years old which will be introduced throughout the service

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