

Impact Report

Musical Beacons Bristol

Year 2: April 2022 – March 2023



Overview

The Musical Beacons Bristol programme was shaped in response to the extensive period of consultation in 2021. We established a fortnightly Saturday model, providing group sessions and individual family sessions. We began sessions in February 2022, initially enrolling 10 families and holding a waiting list of a further 9 families. We offered a combination of group sessions and individual family sessions. We gave each family a set of Musical Beacons activity cards, as a resource to support their music making at home.

During Year 1 we discovered that there was a significant interest in the individual family sessions from parents/carers who felt that their child would not be able to access group sessions due to the complexity of their needs. In response to this we adapted the structure of the programme to provide a balance of group sessions and individual sessions, making sure we reached the maximum number of families. With additional funding, we further increased the number of individual family sessions from September 2022, reaching more families with children with complex needs. We were able to provide sessions for all the families on our waiting list.

In total, in Year 2 we delivered:

- 36 group sessions
- 52 individual family sessions
- 1 celebration event

The pattern of delivery allowed each family to attend either a group or an individual session monthly during term-time. We also held a cancellation system, so that if one family cancelled, the slot was offered to the whole list. This enabled some families to access additional 1-1 sessions alongside their attendance at group sessions.

Reach Figures

We engaged 15 families, including 23 adults and 28 children. Of the 28 children, 11 were disabled children aged 6-11, and 6 were disabled children aged 4-5. The children had a range of needs and barriers, including learning disability, autism, Down's Syndrome and blindness.

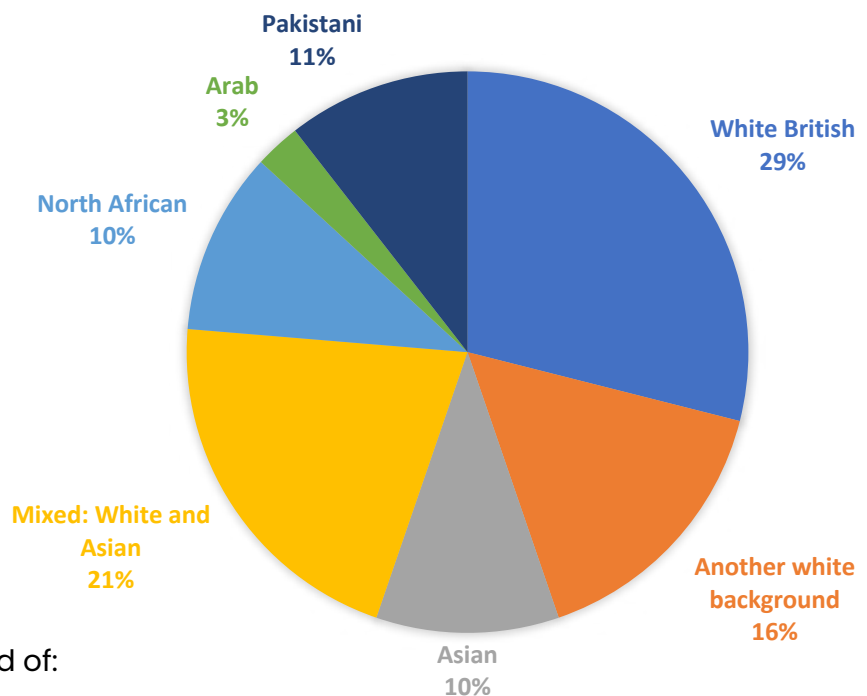
12 families engaged on a regular basis, with this number including 5 disabled children aged 4-5, and 8 disabled children aged 6-11. An additional 4 families from Bristol Beacon's Flow Creative programme attended the summer celebration event.

Diversity

We received ethnicity data from 38 people (adults and children), which showed a range of backgrounds:

Of the adults who responded:

- 2 identified as Hindu
- 2 identified as Muslim
- 1 identified as bisexual
- 4 reported low socio-economic background
- 1 identified as disabled



Staff

In Year 2 the staff team consisted of:

- 1 Programme Lead/Soundcastle Co-Director, responsible for facilitation of sessions as well as management of the programme.
- 4 Music Facilitators
- 1 Trainee Music Facilitator, (previously a volunteer, moved into a paid trainee role in September 2022)
- 1 Project Coordinator (until March 2022)
- Additional support from 2 Soundcastle Co-Directors (Development/Finance)

Diversity information has been collected from the team who were directly involved in delivery: Programme Lead, Music Facilitators and Trainee.

Of this team of 6:

- 2 identify as disabled
- 4 have lived experience of long-term physical or mental ill health
- 2 identify as Mixed heritage – White & Asian.

In September 2022, all staff took part in a company-wide CPD day to share learning across Musical Beacons programmes, and to develop facilitation skills.

Evaluation

Musical Beacons aims to increase confidence, reduce isolation and increase wellbeing. We asked families and partner organisations to respond to a survey at each year end, and held additional interviews for parent feedback. Facilitators held a shared reflection meeting after every session, and a final evaluation meeting at the end of the programme. This data has been collated and analysed to understand the impact of Musical Beacons.

7 families and 2 staff from partner organisations responded to the survey asking them to reflect on changes in children's and families' confidence, connectedness and wellbeing as a result of attending Musical Beacons. 100% of responses stated that Musical Beacons had made a positive impact in all three areas.

Increased Confidence

The most significant impact of the Musical Beacons programme was an increase in confidence. All families said that the programme had increased their confidence, and 6 out of 7 families said that their confidence had increased a large amount.

For children, there were clear increases in their confidence in making music. Facilitators and parents saw how their musical skills developed, as well as their expression, curiosity of exploration and their willingness and ability to take the lead in activities. Facilitators described how over time, children's joy and delight grew, replacing former anxiety.

*"Musical Beacons has provided a space where Sienna can freely express herself without fear of judgement."
(Parent/Carer)*

"Daniel – journey from being shy, to playing games which were fun and also safe, then he developed to having an extended in-the-moment, expressive, uninhibited improvisation. Really powerful, unlocked his self-expression. He is naturally shy, but at the piano he was very confident leading, playing with intention and communication, assertively leading." (Facilitator notes)

"my ASD Daughter . . is far more relaxed and confident in taking part with the group activities. . . with one or two of the activities she loves taking over..." (Parent/Carer)

"It has allowed them to be more confident in the ability to be creative with sound, both with their own bodies and also instruments" (Partner)

Parents also described how this confidence transferred to other areas of the children's lives, including their general sense of self-esteem, and their engagement in school life and other activities.

"Daniel is more outgoing and willing to try new things, like telling a poem in front of the class." (Parent/Carer)

"Help my children to be more free attending other activities. No shame for dancing or playing instruments" (Parent/Carer)

"Both the children and the families of the children have shown increased confidence to attend and access a provision outside of school" (Partner)

One parent described how they were impressed by the development in the level of focus shown by her child. They told us that in a previous year their daughter had to sit on the bench during the school play as it was too overwhelming for her to be involved. This year she was able to perform in the play and memorise her lines, they attributed this to her attendance at Musical Beacons.

Facilitators described the significant shift that they observed in the parents and the children who attended regularly. Often parents seemed anxious in their first sessions, concerned about their child's behaviour, and how that would be perceived. Over time they became more relaxed, realising that this was a place of acceptance and celebration of their child's contributions. As the parents relaxed and became more involved and playful themselves, the children's ownership of the space also increased.

"Imogen - taking charge of the sessions, leading everything, singing everything" (Facilitator notes)

Reduced Isolation

All families told us that Musical Beacons had reduced their isolation/increased their connectedness. We were aware from the consultation that families faced huge barriers to accessing any sort of activities outside school due to the needs of their children. Many of the families were extremely isolated. Musical Beacons has had a positive impact on connectedness in two main ways:

- Improving connection and bonding within families
- Providing a social space where families can connect with each other.

Facilitators described how sessions enabled lots of small but significant moments of connection between parents, children and siblings. They observed moments of intimacy, and communication beyond words through activities based on turn-taking and musical dialogue. They described the developing connection of one child and her father. When they first attended, they were quite separate from each other, with the child confidently engaging and the father stepping back more. Gradually they became closer, interacting musically together and enjoying moments of physical closeness within their music-making. Facilitators also noticed "Parents pride in seeing their kids shine in ways that they might not have the chance to do day by day". Parents also told us how they felt more connected through the sessions.

"it helps us to connect as a family.. before she always like stepped back and looking at us. . and now she's part of it and she's got inputs"
(Parent/Carer)

"Over the time my son has now improved a lot connecting each other, when he listen through music. He has even his own song called "snack time".
(Parent/Carer)

The social space, and having a place to go with their family seemed to be a hugely important aspect of the programme for most families. Through the consultation we found out that having sessions at the weekend was the biggest need, and this seems to be connected to the general need for having a non-judgemental place to enjoy quality time as family. One family told us that they couldn't get their daughter to leave the house for anything else, due to her complex needs and extreme anxiety, but she was excited and willing to go to Musical Beacons. Other parents and partners also commented on the social and community aspects of the programme.

"By meeting families of children with special educational needs, Sienna has integrated into a loving community where she's not out singled or left to think she's different." (Parent/Carer)

"Inclusive safe nurturing environment. No judgement when your child goes nuts. Everyone in same boat."
(Parent/carers)

"Regularly attending, with the same group of families means we're getting to meet up with other people who are in a similar situation to ourselves" (Parent/carers)

"The children and families of this setting have benefitted from the opportunity to meet and connect with new people in the community." (Partner)

"Some of our most isolated families have been able to access a new service, outside of the school." (Partner)

"It has encouraged families who are normally reluctant to access groups because of the needs of their children as they are able to come as just a family unit, the family has an opportunity to connect" (Partner)

"A small group of families who are some of our most isolated families have been able to access a new service, outside of the school" (Partner)

Wellbeing

All families told us that Musical Beacons improved their wellbeing, and 5 out of 7 families told us that it had increased their wellbeing a large amount. 1 family who completed the survey twice showed that their wellbeing increased more over time. Feedback from the families mainly focussed on the experience of being in the sessions themselves, and how this impacted on the wellbeing of both themselves and their children. They described the benefits of music-making and of being together as a family.

"Starting coming to Musical Beacons gives family a nice, calming and interactive time. Learn together and be happy as a family with music." (Parent/carer)

(The sessions) "benefit Imogen so much and she's so calm after them." (Parent/carer)

"Being able to participate in a musical activity that's fun and safe for all concerned is a great way to make us all feel a little better." (Parent/Carer)

"Something you do together and make you to feel better" (Parent/carer)

"Families have come to school in the days following Musical Beacons sessions and commented on how positive the experience has been for their children." (Partner)

"As a family we've really been enjoying the sessions especially the last one that the dad would join as well." (Parent/carer)

"Music is therapy" (Parent/carer)

"One of the parents voiced that it was relaxing for them." (Facilitator notes)

Facilitators reflected on the level of trust that was developed within the sessions, and how this supported the increase in wellbeing:

"At the beginning, it's all uncertainty for everyone. And then things settle, enables the creativity to emerge. Takes time but is a magical process. The biggest change happens further down the line. There is so much vulnerability in creating, and using voices. Forming the acceptance of anything is what creates the trust. You can only get that from people by showing them – you can say whatever you want about it being fine, but it only becomes comfortable when you show them and they see your reactions." (Facilitator notes)

Parents and partners also commented on the wellbeing impact that came from the wider shared experience as a family. Spending the time creating together at Musical Beacons gave them something special in common, which influenced their interaction at home.

"Being happy inside family and heard each other makes more relax and understanding family helping wellbeing of family" (Parent/carer)

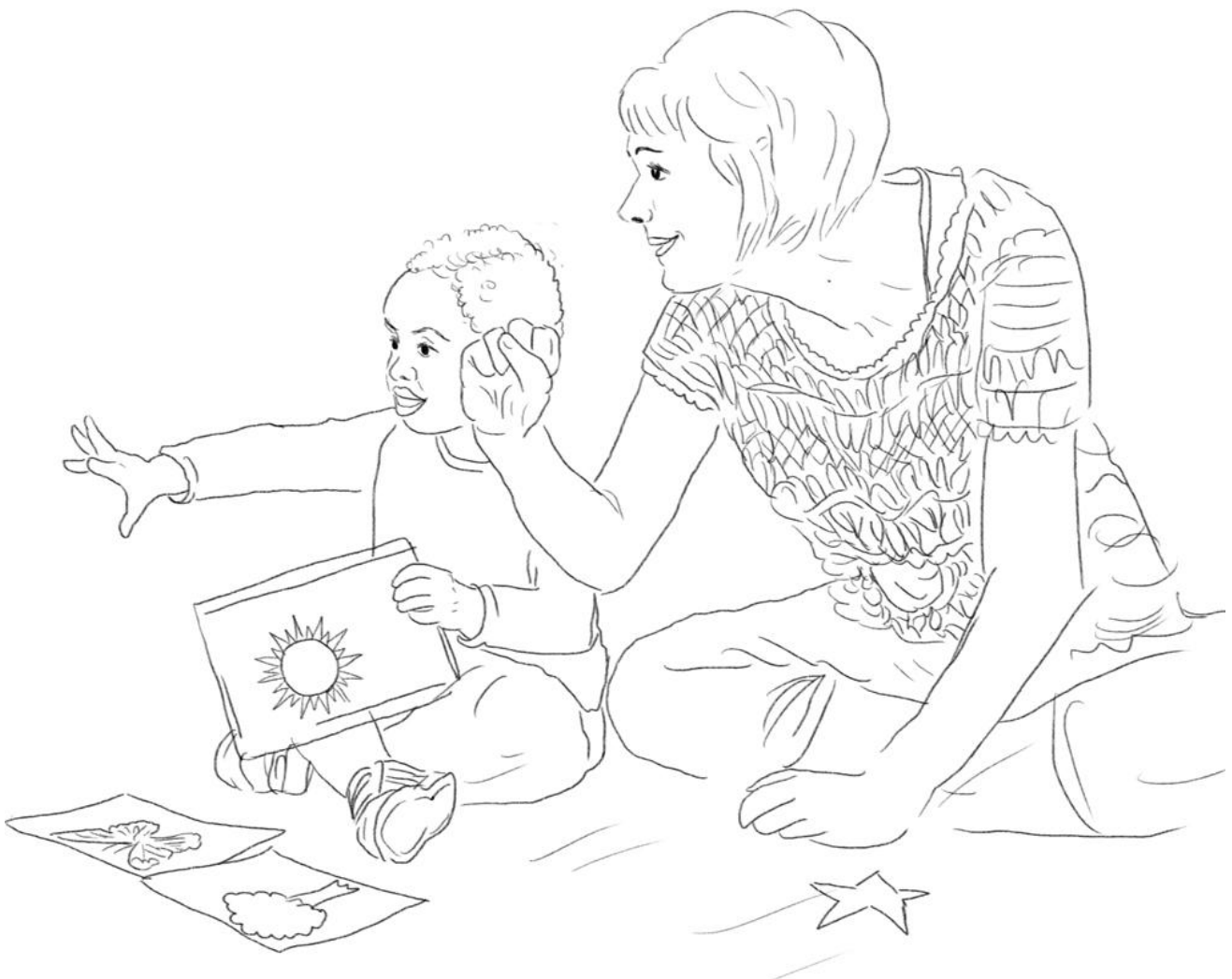
"she'll often ask me in the evening when she's got her quiet time ... before she goes to bed ... to put classical music and she's got certain tunes now she likes ... and she wants to share as a family ... she's really put it into her routine now ... sometimes she just wants to dance with me" (Parent/carer)

"SEN families spending time together out of the house is very precious and the benefits to the families wellbeing should not be underestimated. Family members can learn ways to communicate with their child or sibling in a fun yet supported environment is extremely important" (Partner)

Case studies

Susie – Aged 6 – Autistic and with limited verbal communication.

Susie attended group and 1-1 Musical Beacons sessions with her father, averaging monthly, for a 1 year period. From the first session Susie demonstrated a huge enjoyment of music and a confidence in taking part in the activities – she enjoyed being the leader and showing facilitators when to start and stop the music. She was fixated on this one activity, and found it difficult to switch activity, or engage with playing the instruments. Over the course of attending sessions, Susie began to develop her interaction and leadership – conducting the pace, dynamic and mood of the music. She began to make up her own words to songs and explore moments of intense connection exploring instruments alongside her father and facilitators. Facilitators noticed how her confidence and creativity grew with each session, as well as her awareness of and connection with others around her. Her parents noted that she had previously been a child who tended to keep to herself and were impressed at her love of taking centre stage and leading the group in musical activities. They told us how this confidence had transferred into other areas of her life, how she had begun singing and dancing spontaneously. They told us that the school had noticed her improved musical confidence. “After each session, there’s definitely been a marked change in her confidence. She’s always been a child that sings where before it was often quite quiet, she’ll now belt out a song, and break into dance a lot more. . . her school have been noticing the increase in singing and involvement in musical activities in school.”



Tarik – aged 9 – Autistic with limited speech and interaction.

Tarik attended individual family sessions monthly for one year. He attended with his mother and sister (aged 5) with his father and grandparents attending one session each. In the first session, Tarik appeared distressed and distracted was hard to engage. He had intense moments of beating a drum and wailing, which seemed to be a common behaviour for him. In following sessions he repeated this behaviour, but his mood changed and he seemed to enjoy the sound that he was producing from the instruments. He began to respond to the hello and goodbye songs in the session, concentrating on the words and the signs and listening intently. After several sessions Tarik began singing spontaneously, and over the course of many sessions he created his own song, singing about the food that he liked to eat, and later the games he enjoyed in the playground. He focussed on singing for periods up to 10 to 15 minutes, letting facilitators know when his song was “finished”. He began to explore the instruments with curiosity, finding quiet and loud sounds. He now appeared happy and relaxed in the sessions, smiling and laughing. His mother told us how learning together as a family has helped them to connect, relax and understand each other, and how they had started to make music at home together as well.



SOUNDCASTLE

<https://musicalbeacons.soundcastle.co.uk>



For further information about Musical Beacons or Soundcastle's work more widely please contact:

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With thanks to our Musical Beacons Partners and Funders

