



MUSICAL BEACONS

Impact Report

2024-2025

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

- Newham Music
- Newham SEND hub
- Altmore Children's Centre
- Peabody Community Foundation
- Waltham Forest Music Education Hub
- Salvation Army Housing Association
- East Sussex Young Parents Service
- Active Hastings
- Southern Housing
- East Hastings Family Hub
- Oasis Community Project, East Hastings
- In2Play
- Sea Glass Arts
- Spun Glass Theatre



**All names used throughout this impact report have been changed to protect the identities of those living/working in the safehouses.*

S | O | U | N | D | C | A | S | T | L | E

ABOUT SOUNDCASTLE

Soundcastle is a joyful, expressive music making charity and exists so that every person is empowered to play, make and sing. We use music as a tool for change, supporting vulnerable communities to thrive, creative practitioners to grow and cultural organisations to make lasting change. Our work increases confidence, reduces social isolation and enhances wellbeing through embedded community music programmes which focus on making ripples of change in micro-communities. The ripple effect grows through our national impact: We deliver presentations, training, commissions and model best practice. We support and inspire the development of inclusive, wellbeing focused spaces inside other organisations. Everything we do is underpinned by our values of:



ABOUT MUSICAL BEACONS

Musical Beacons is a Soundcastle programme which celebrates youth voice, family bonding and community connection through the power of creative music making. It is an embedded creative health programme in the South East of England with a strong evidence base of positive impact for marginalised community groups, developed over the last 13 years. We bring together isolated families through creative sessions in inclusive and supported environments within their communities. We support them to build confidence and act as a bridge between isolation and local community activities. The families we work with face barriers to accessing cultural or community activity. These barriers look like:

- socio-economic deprivation
- living in temporary accommodation
- generational unemployment
- poor mental health
- having English as a second language
- caring for disabled and neurodiverse children
- having a child excluded from education
- being a very young parent

A Musical Beacons session is joy in its purest form. Soundcastle facilitators engage families in messy play with sound, exploring the realms of possibility for children and their families, helping them to understand that music is for everyone. We play, make and explore, supporting children to find the confidence to express their musical voice and to create their own brand new music. We create a safe, musical space for families who feel unable to attend other existing music groups due to their child's behavioural or emotional needs.





Our facilitators use a combination of voice, sensory toys/materials and accessible musical instruments, working in a responsive way, adapting to different settings. This could look like:

- facilitating a non-verbal child with learning disabilities and their parents, supporting them to explore, create and have fun together
- working in a safe house with a young parent living with PTSD and supporting them to use play and song to bond with their baby
- facilitating an adoptive family online because the child's sensory needs prevent them from attending a group session and using family songwriting to support the building of new family relationships and bonds

Throughout 2024-2025, we worked in partnership with a range of music hubs, housing associations and community and cultural partners to produce our Musical Beacons programme. This involved:

- 612 community members including 377 children
- 17 music and artist facilitators
- 94 Musical Beacons Umbrella sessions: Individual sessions for families with disabled and neurodivergent children and their siblings (Newham and Waltham Forest, London)
- 30 Musical Beacons Paradox Centre sessions: open and inclusive musical play for families with very young children aged 0-4 years, (Chingford, London)
- 10 Musical Beacons Artesian Gardens sessions: open and inclusive after school music sessions in the park. Sessions for families with children up to age 10, many with ESOL and disabled children with autism and non-verbal communication (Leytonstone, London)
- 20 Musical Beacons Langthorne Park sessions: open and inclusive after school music sessions in the park. Sessions for families with children up to age 10, many with ESOL and disabled children with autism and non-verbal communication (Leytonstone, London)
- 30 Musical Beacons Broomgrove sessions: open and inclusive musical play for families with very young children, involving musical walkabouts, stay-and-play sessions and special community events. Sessions for families facing socio-economic deprivation, living in temporary accommodation, generational unemployment, poor mental health and many with disabled and neurodiverse children or children excluded from education (Hastings, Sussex)
- 8 Musical Beacons In-2-Play sessions: outdoor creative music making in a preschool setting, involving early years children from Broomgrove Estate and their play workers (Hastings, Sussex)
- 55 Musical Beacons Safehouse sessions: a sustained service in two safehouses for young parents and their babies (Newhaven and Eastbourne, Sussex)
- 8 Musical Beacons - Ready to Play! sessions: a new pilot of bespoke, online sessions for adoptive families (Families can register from across the South East of England)
- 1 Love Broomgrove Family Fun Day!

262 inclusive family music sessions 
 **That's 220 hours of music making!**

Take a peek into the world of Musical Beacons with our introductory film here:



<https://youtu.be/w7fZOoR1wIQ>

The Musical Beacons sessions are designed to:

- Increase Confidence
- Reduce social isolation
- Enhance Wellbeing

Our social aims are to:

Increase Confidence
Reduce Isolation
Enhance Wellbeing

Musical Beacons members complete feedback forms and optional 1:1 interviews at the end of each term. In addition, artist facilitators hold debriefs after every session as well as several team evaluation meetings throughout the year. We are delighted to report that feedback from 49 surveys and interviews completed throughout the year as well as facilitation team observations indicated an overall increase in confidence, connectedness and wellbeing.



Aim 1: Increase Confidence

Throughout the year Soundcastle and our partners observed an increase in confidence. Examples of this included parents and children:

- Committing to and regularly attending sessions
- Singing and/or dancing for the first time
- Improving speech development
- Offering creative ideas to the group
- Interacting with other members of the community
- Playing with their child without fear of judgment or 'looking silly'
- Becoming comfortable with new and different sounds

98% of community members surveyed felt that taking part in a Musical Beacons programme had helped to **increase their confidence** and **80%** felt their **confidence had increased by a large amount.**

"This was a way of dipping a toe into the water of music making for us. We'd never done any before. It's definitely given me the confidence to take her to an in-person toddler music session because she clearly loves singing. It was so good to have the music flow into the rest of the week for us. It stayed with us!"

Adoptive Parent, Musical Beacons Ready to Play!, South East

"I've always struggled to talk to new people and when my son was a newborn, I would go to some baby groups and I always felt judged by the other older mums. But I like Musical Beacons because the mums are all a mixture of ages and I don't feel judged here."

Young parent, Musical Beacons Safehouses, Eastbourne

"My young child has started dancing and enjoying music."

Parent, Musical Beacons Broomgrove, Hastings

"At the beginning my son was scared of noises and people and now, he learnt how to play music and feel more confident. Also for me, it gives me energy and a mental break while sharing a good moment with my son."

Parent, Musical Beacons Paradox, Chingford

"The sessions improved Elijah's confidence in trying new things and being comfortable with different sounds. He's responded really well to songs being sung with his name and having his actions copied. It has also made a small improvement in my own confidence in engaging in play with Elijah and Jack – I've gotten some great ideas from the sessions which align with the advice we've received from NHS speech & language therapy."

Parent, Musical Beacons Umbrella, Newham

Aim 2: Reduce Social Isolation

Soundcastle and our partners observed a reduction in social isolation. Examples of this included:

- The sessions motivating isolated community members to leave their house
- Parents making new friendships and meeting up independently of the sessions
- Walking to and arriving at the sessions together
- Making connections with other families whose children have additional needs

94% of community members surveyed felt that taking part in a Musical Beacons programme had **helped to connect** them to their community, and **71%** felt a **large increase in their sense of community connection.**

"Group sessions have really helped with sharing ideas/connecting with other families who are going through similar things."

Parent, Musical Beacons Umbrella, Newham

"(Talking about her baby) This is the only group thing she does.... Used to knocking around at home."

Parent, Musical Beacons
Broomgrove,
Hastings

"It's the only group I come to regularly and I've made friends (so has Lexie). it is 100% the best group I've been to, even ones I've paid for."

Parent, Musical Beacons
Broomgrove, Hastings

"Seeing the same members every week and other parents felt really good because it acted as an anchor of the week and give me a sense of community."

Parent, Musical Beacons Paradox, Chingford

"...sharing and hearing others personal experiences helping me feel I'm not alone."

Parent, Musical Beacons Paradox,
Chingford

"I can now connect to the other parents without feeling embarrassed and my son has made new friends."

Young Parent, Musical Beacons
Safehouses, Eastbourne



Aim 3: Enhance Wellbeing

Soundcastle and our partners observed an enhancement in wellbeing across the programmes. Examples of this included community members and their children:

- Overcoming social anxieties in order to attend sessions regularly
- Leaving the sessions in a far more talkative and relaxed mood than when they arrived
- Expressing feeling uplifted with an increased feeling of resilience
- Expressing a sense of reassurance when witnessing their children achieve new things
- Purchasing their own instruments and actively making music at home and beyond the sessions

96% of community members surveyed felt that taking part in Musical Beacons had **enhanced their wellbeing** and **71%** considered that to be **by a large amount**.

"This is the ONLY thing we have done which has been of any benefit from having an adopted child. I can't think of any other services or support that we have been able to access in such a positive way.

Any other interventions are for families in crisis, this is simply positive, feels good and uplifting... this has been about filling up the bucket of good feelings! "

Adoptive parent, Musical Beacons - Ready to Play!, South East

"Gets me out the house, a change of scenery plus music makes you feel good. It gives you a boost even if you're having a bad day, I come out better after being in the group for an hour and half."

Parent, Musical Beacons Broomgrove, Hastings

"I think she was very relaxed in the sessions and not as dysregulated as she can be after school and Fernando [Soundcastle facilitator] made us all feel very at ease."

Adoptive parent, Musical Beacons Ready to Play!, South East

"It's really nice to see our children happy and makes us all feel more relaxed knowing the children are having a good time.

When our kids are enjoying themselves, it becomes a mum's space to relax as well."

Young parent, Musical Beacons Safehouses, Eastbourne

"My son likes playing with instruments all the time, but even on the bus now I have to sing 'Wind the Bobbin Up' and 'The Wheels on the Bus'."

Young Parent, Musical Beacons Safehouses, Eastbourne

"The music sessions have made my son and myself really happy and reassuring as it shows that he can take turns, imitate and wait for an instrument to be played."

Parent, Musical Beacons Umbrella, Waltham Forest

"Leighton enjoys being around other people and being out and about, however there are limited options available for children with additional needs, these sessions cater to my child and the level he is at without putting pressure on us."

Parent, Musical Beacons Umbrella, Newham

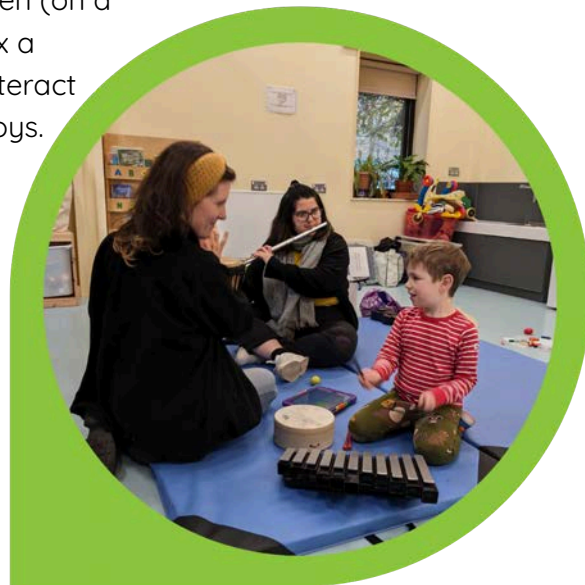
CASE STUDY

Our Musical Beacons after-school sessions in London originally alternated between the Epicentre and Artesian Gardens park before moving to the Paradox Centre and Langthorne Park. Having access to both indoor and outdoor spaces helps Soundcastle to offer inclusive music making sessions. This is Rema and Max's story.

Rema has 3 sons aged 3, 6 and 7. On the cold dark November evenings, it is hard to find somewhere the children can all play after school and Musical Beacons provides a space for all three of their ages. During her first session she tells us that her oldest son, Max, is autistic. In the hall the music facilitators give him plenty of space to move round the creative activity stations and examine the equipment. His mother joins her friends at the central table where she can chat, share food and draw and colour in as she likes. After a few weeks, Max picks up a beater and starts to play on a metallophone. Lila, a Soundcastle facilitator, picks up her flute and replies with some musical phrases. They continue a musical conversation for 10 minutes. As the weeks go on Max continues to have musical conversations using a variety of instruments. Later on, he chooses to play the keyboard with headphones on by himself for 20 minutes, exploring all the different sounds and modes. Max's brothers also move around the music and play activities, enjoying leading the Soundcastle musicians and joining in the disco musical statues games.

When the sessions move into the park in the Summer, Max and his family continue to join the sessions. He comes and plays for bursts of 5-10 minutes in between running round the park. When the team has space in our 1 to 1 sessions for families with neurodivergent children (on a separate programme in Langthorne Park), Soundcastle offer Max a space. They attend twice and this gives the team more time to interact more closely with him and understand what kind of music he enjoys.

Max continues to join the park sessions and shows the team songs he likes on YouTube. Everyone sings and plays along. If the instruments he wants are not available, he indicates the boxes and then the team help him find what he wants. Although he uses few direct words, Rema comments on how much she can see he enjoys the session and how much communication he offers our team. The facilitators are proud to have built the trust so carefully with this family.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR MUSICAL BEACONS?

The embedded nature of Musical Beacons means that we work hyper-locally in communities for long periods of time to achieve maximum social impact. Originally starting in East London, now Musical Beacons has grown across the East Sussex coastline from Newhaven to Hastings! We are focussed on financially securing the new programmes long term in order to maximise support for many more families in feeling better connected to their communities.

In London, we are growing links with Newham SEND hub to explore how to support more families across the borough and provide further musical play sessions that bring families with disabled/neurodivergent children together in small groups. In addition to this, we will collaborate with Waltham Forest Music Service to explore an inclusive instrument, Cosmo alongside the developers. We are also particularly looking forward to working with Peabody Housing Association on their feasibility study to build a new community venue in Chingford Mount that may replace the Paradox Centre.

In Sussex, we are collaborating with an exciting new cultural partner in Hastings and the coming year will see Soundcastle and Spun Glass Theatre combine arts practices, bringing theatrical play and storytelling into our Broomgrove music sessions.

We are also in the process of raising funds to continue our successful Ready to Play! pilot programme for adoptive families. This online offer means we can access a broader range of people across the whole of the South East who face barriers to attending music groups in person.

Current funding supports the full Musical Beacons programme to continue until March 2026. During a challenging fundraising climate, we are actively seeking new funders to support the work to remain at its full capacity within and beyond this time in order to ensure that local families feel accepted, valued and able to play a part in their communities.

For further information about Musical Beacons please contact:

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