

In partnership with:

Adoption South East | Five Rivers Fostering

East Sussex Local Authority | Diagrama Adoption

ABOUT SOUNDCASTLE

Soundcastle is a joyful music-making charity empowering people to play, create and sing. We use music as a tool for change, helping children and families thrive, supporting adults at risk to recover, and nurturing creative practitioners. Our community programmes build confidence, reduce isolation and enhance wellbeing. Nationally, we share best practice through training, presentations and commissions, inspiring inclusive, wellbeing-focused spaces rooted in our values of action, care and joy.

MUSICAL BEACONS - READY TO PLAY

Musical Beacons – Ready to Play is Soundcastle’s online music-making programme for foster and adoptive families. By meeting families in the comfort and safety of their own homes, we remove barriers such as travel, time and accessibility, opening the door to creativity for those who often feel excluded from cultural or community activity.

Many of the families we work with are navigating experiences of trauma, poor mental health, disability, neurodivergence or exclusion from mainstream education. Ready to Play offers a space where these challenges are understood, and where creativity becomes a tool for confidence, connection and expression.

Each session is fun, imperfect and full of possibility. Our facilitators invite families to explore sound together—singing, dancing, experimenting with body percussion and playing instruments. Children are supported to discover their musical voice, create brand new music and feel proud of their achievements. For older children, the opportunity to work towards an Arts Award qualification adds structure, motivation and a sense of accomplishment.

Delivered in eight-week blocks during term time, the programme nurtures shared family participation. Parents and children create side-by-side, strengthening relationships and building trust through playful collaboration. Families who may feel unable to attend in-person groups due to behavioural or emotional needs find a safe, welcoming space where they can thrive.

In 2025–26, we partnered with two foster agencies and two adoption agencies to engage families who would benefit from Ready to Play. The programme supported 14 families, including 21 adoptive parents and foster carers, 1 young parent with her newborn in foster care and 17 children aged 2–14, including 4 sibling groups.

We delivered 105 bespoke and inclusive Ready to Play music sessions.

Young people submitted and achieved 7 Arts Award qualifications

Sessions are designed to increase confidence, strengthen family connectedness, and enhance wellbeing. Feedback is gathered through surveys, optional interviews and facilitator evaluations.

We are delighted to report that across the year, evidence consistently indicated **improved confidence, stronger family relationships and increased wellbeing** for participating families.

Aim 1: Increase Confidence

Across the year, both Soundcastle facilitators and participating families observed clear increases in confidence. This was demonstrated through regular attendance, completion of Arts Award portfolios, willingness to try new skills, and greater creative expression. Children and parents sang, danced, shared ideas, interacted more readily with facilitators and became comfortable exploring new sounds.

83.3% of participants reported improved confidence.

"There have been loads of benefits. For them, they just LOVED making music together. They felt proud of what they produced. There was a big sense of achievement and accomplishment. They made something fantastic and the Arts Award was so validating. They learnt so many musical skills with Fernando [Soundcastle facilitator] that they haven't had the opportunity to before."
Adoptive parent

"It was lovely to see her [a young parent] practicing and using songs from the sessions in day to day life which happened more and more throughout the weeks."

Foster carer supporting a parent/newborn placement

"He has begun dancing more confidently, and clapping along to beats in music. He requested a drum kit! and now feels confident trying to play a range of instruments, and using his body for percussion."
Adoptive parent

"As a foster carer, it feels really good to support them to achieve something tangible in a world that our kids can find hard to achieve in... Arts Award is a recognised qualification that genuinely allows them to explore and develop real life skills. This has opened up Zac's mind to so many more opportunities. He would now like to do a short course in photography and digital media - when before the only thing he could think of was construction. He feels like he has options and now he has the confidence to try them!"
Foster carer

Aim 2: Strengthen Family Connectedness

Families and facilitators reported significant improvements in attachment, emotional regulation, communication and shared enjoyment. Music became a point of connection for separated young parents, siblings in shared placements and families navigating complex emotional needs. Many continued creative activities between sessions.

100% of families reported increased connectedness, with 67% noting a large improvement.

"Ryan has some sensory issues, and I sometimes find it hard to get through to him and to help him relax, particularly if he is overwhelmed. I also love music, but in the past he has often told me to be quiet if I try to sing, or to stop it if I try to dance or have fun with him around music.

Since the sessions, Ryan has been much more aware of how mummy has fun with music and he can join in with that rather than compete with it, and that he can make his own musical choices.

Music can be a really important way to connect and it's lovely being able to dance and sing with him."

Adoptive parent

"Mum and Dad are currently separated while Mum is in a Parent and Child foster placement but they used things Mum learned in the session to incorporate in an online night time routine they shared with baby each evening"

Foster carer supporting a parent/newborn placement

"We all really valued doing this as a family. There was a sense of togetherness - we all worked together and it supported our family dynamic.

I can't think of any other activity where we are all together, including me as the Dad, participating together to make something new, to have fun and create."

Foster carer

Aim 3: Enhance wellbeing

Wellbeing gains were consistently observed, including reduced social anxiety, improved mood after sessions, increased resilience and pride in children's achievements. Several families purchased instruments and continued music-making at home.

100% of families reported improved wellbeing, with 75% reporting a large increase.

"I have 3 kids who were all involved and I've noticed that we're doing more together beyond the sessions, playing board games, singing songs: there is a desire to come together and have fun now."

Adoptive parent

"I think it will give my son an important tool which he can use to augment his wellbeing throughout his life."

Adoptive parent

"The facilitator was GREAT at being considerate to the different kids' needs. Nothing phased him. He was thoughtful about what they needed and kept everything fun."

Foster carer

CASE STUDY

Zac — Building Confidence, Skills and Future Pathways Through Creative Learning

Zac is a 14-year-old in long-term foster care whose early childhood involved instability and disrupted schooling. He is not currently in mainstream education, and GCSEs are not an accessible pathway. Before joining **Ready to Play**, Zac had never worked towards a formal qualification, and traditional learning environments had offered few opportunities for success.

Ready to Play provided a flexible, trauma-informed, family-centred space where Zac could engage at his own pace. Through the programme, he achieved the **Bronze Arts Award** — his first accredited qualification. The weekly structure created consistency and emotional safety, helping him feel secure enough to participate.

Zac's foster carer shared that he "finds written work a real barrier." The adaptability of Arts Award was therefore crucial. Instead of written formats, Zac used PowerPoint to document and present his learning, a method that played to his strengths and supported ownership of his portfolio. Once he discovered this approach, "he really got into it and it became a gateway to self-expression."

The family-centred model further strengthened his engagement. Working alongside his 8-year-old foster sister and carer created shared purpose and sustained participation. The open-ended creative approach encouraged Zac to explore multiple artforms beyond Soundcastle's music sessions, trying new things without fear of failure. As his carer noted, "it didn't matter what the end artistic output was as long as he actually tried and made something."

A major breakthrough came during Zac's Arts Award skill share, where he taught his teacher how to paint Warhammer miniatures — a skill first explored in art therapy. His carer described a significant boost in confidence: "He discovered he is really good at teaching." Zac also made progress in receiving and acting on feedback, becoming increasingly able to reflect and improve — a vital life skill.

Zac's achievement is now recognised in his PEP and EHCP, ensuring long-term visibility. Most importantly, Arts Award has expanded his sense of possibility. He now hopes to explore photography, digital media and higher Arts Award levels. As his foster carer summarised, "He feels like he has options now and the confidence to try."

Listen to Zac's collaboratively composed song with his foster carer and sister

<https://on.soundcloud.com/Olt8kOaxVKd3tsATVf>

*We love having dinner together
Walking and talking
Being together, exploring outside*

*Supporting and protecting
Being there for each other
Unconditional blended love*



What's next for Ready to Play?

This pilot, supported by Youth Music, has demonstrated the significant value of Ready to Play for foster and adoptive families. Building on its success, we are now developing the programme into a commissionable model for agencies seeking high-quality, trauma-informed creative support for the families they work with. Our aim is to form long-term partnerships with foster and adoption agencies who recognise the programme's impact on confidence, connectedness and wellbeing. By offering a flexible, evidence-based online model, Ready to Play is well-positioned to become a scalable, sustainable provision that enhances family support pathways and ensures more children can access accessible Arts Award qualifications and joyful, empowering music-making in the years ahead.

For further information about Ready to Play, please contact:



Hannah Dunster

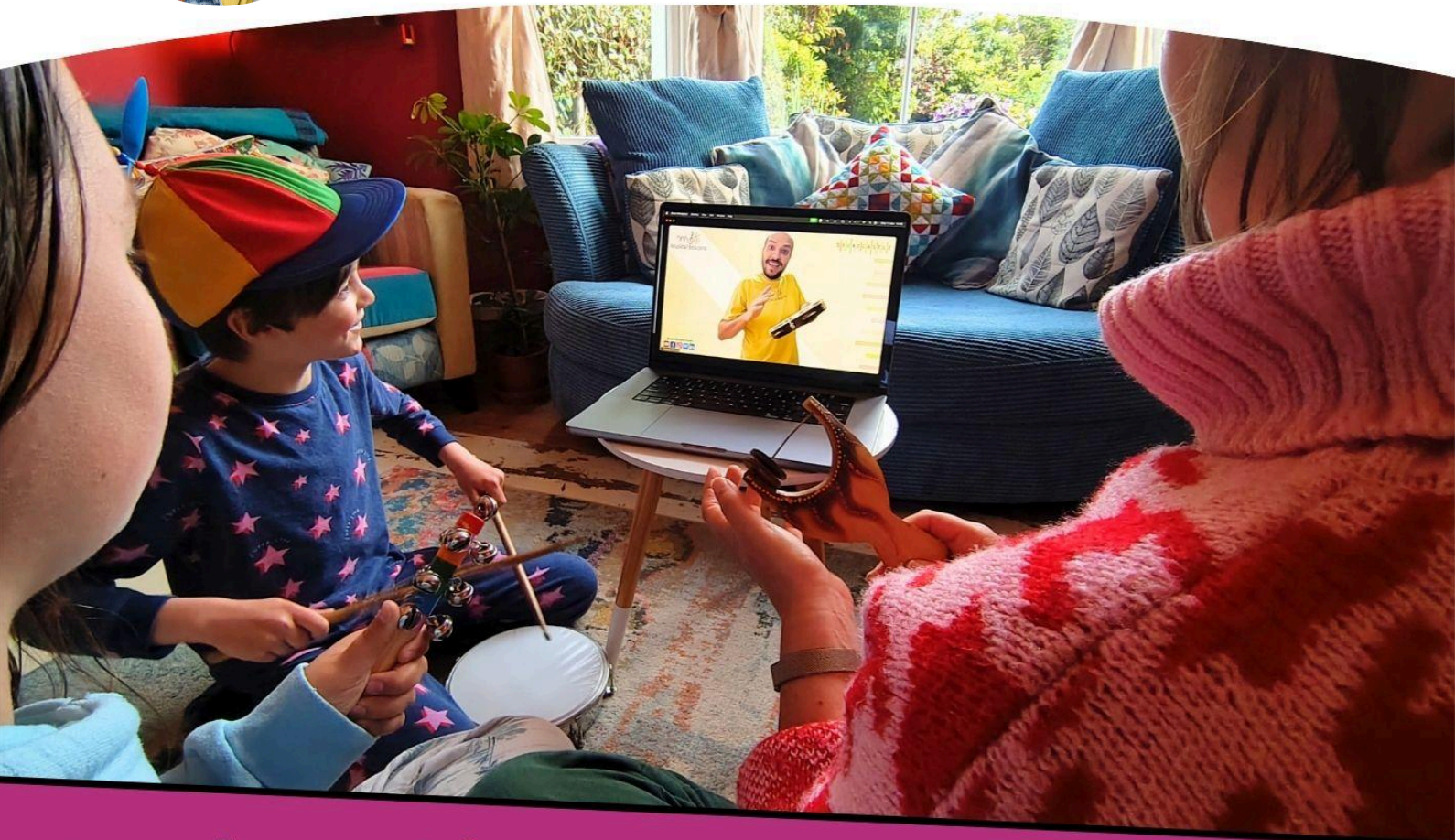
hannah@soundcastle.co.uk

07436 027 841

With thanks to our funders:



*All names used throughout this impact report have been changed to protect the families involved.



Ready to Play

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