Steps into Music

An Early Years Music Project for Sound Connections

Funded as part of the Youth Music Action Zone

How the project did come about:

Children’s Centre are for children and their families, Hackney Children’s Centre will offer the services that young children and their parents need to thrive and make the most of life’s opportunities.

Ann Tayler Children’s Centre is the Strategic Children’s Centre in Area F and works closely with 2 area F satellite Children’s Centre (Morningside and Mapledene) in addition works in partnership with voluntary, statutory and community groups and childcare providers.

“Steps into music” was set up by the Ann Tayler Children’s Centre Parent’s Forum a newly formed charity, enabling the centre to access funding that does not fall within statutory delivery of the centre. The funding was to provide Music and Movements session for children under 5 and their parents core aims to increase the participation of the most disadvantaged families and targeted children with Speech and Language and also where English is an additional language.

By providing 20 sessions of 2 hours of Music and Movement, once a week at the centre but also trying new approaches of delivery such as in local Parks, and Community Estates.

The 45 mins sessions were divided in two groups: 0-2 years old and 2-5 years old.

The project also worked in close partnership with Speech and Language, ESOL services to engage wide diverse groups of parents, carers and children. Community outreach used a targeted approach to work with families over an 8 months period to gauge interest and increased participation.

What were you hoping to happen?

The project hoped to provide high quality Music and movements sessions which will engage new users, families and increase the Language and Social Development of children who have little engagement with Children’s Centres activities but also face disadvantages that stems from living in high areas of deprivation where little or no opportunity exist for the most vulnerable.

During the year, guest’s musicians will join the session at culturally appropriate times.

We aimed to initiate new ways of providing Music & Movement for under 5 by trying new approaches such as taking the sessions to Local parks/playgrounds and communities estates during the Summer term.

Using External and internal outreach, children from hard to reach background will become engaged in high quality music activities with their parents/carers.

Build a referral route between Speech & Language therapy group and the Esol provision in Children’s Centre
What actually happened?

The Music and Movements sessions were really popular and ran at full capacity.

Referral from Speech and Language group did happen but clashed with the Speech and Language session happening at the same time, therefore families referred could only attend the last 15 mins of the session.

A child accompanied by her father and grandfather joined after a visit from the outreach worker into the S&L sessions. The father came back for another few sessions with his child.

However, regular attendance was hard to maintain due to family commitments.

Parents attending the Stay and Play and a few ESOL Parents and children joined in, especially for guest musician’s session such as the Chinese New Year celebration and black history month

The excitement and noise generated by guest musicians brought new users to the sessions from within the centre with much positive feedback from users.

Some mothers participated when accompanied by an outreach worker who had to stay with them during the whole session and maintain some contact (phone) during the week to ensure they come back the week after. Hand holding and reassurance was key to consistent engagement of these parents and carers. However the children, who were encouraged to attend with their parents, did enjoy and engaged in the music sessions in a lively way.

Outreach support was on hand for parents and carers who attended with more than 1 child under 5. Therefore extra support was in place to help supervise the children but also to ensure each child can received quality interaction during the session. E.g. a mother with 2 years old twins commented that “she would not have joined the session if the outreach worker would have not offered support”.

Some of the ESOL students understood that the Music & Movement session was a great way to learn more English, meet new parents but also to support their children settling in the crèche, as they became comfortable with the centre.

But there have been cases when a mother has mentioned that Music & Movement is culturally not appropriate for her and her children to attend an issue to address for future delivery.

The Music & Movements sessions have been successful with fathers and are often the activities where we see most fathers & children in attendance.

Outdoor sessions:

Some sessions took places in the local estate playground and were successful, but most were hampered by the poor weather of summer 2011 and had to be brought back indoors. Also, to provide sessions in the local park playground, an application form and lengthy Risk Assessment form was required by Hackney Council. This was a put off as it was time consuming for little outcomes;
therefore we decided the Estates playground may be an easier option as we asked permission to the Tenant Association in charge of the estate playground.

However, clearing the grass area of rotten fruits and dog excrement meant the music leader and volunteer parent had to spend quite some time prior to the session clearing up. This was a problem as the music leader was working to tight timescales and we had volunteer parent attends assisting and supporting with her children. Therefore a member of staff and more volunteers are needed to ensure the session start on time

**What did people get out of it?**

From the evaluation forms collected, most parents commented that:

- Their child interact s better with other children
- Children language skills improved
- They have made new friends
- Learn new ways to play with their child/dren.

The music leader (Alison) has a good knowledge of the Children’s Centre Extended Services activities and can refer or signpost parents to different services when needed or if a parents approach her with any arising issues. However, this is hard to measure.

All the music sessions ran at full capacity each time. We are now looking at increasing them and change the days and time to ensure many other families can benefits from them to work more closely on a multi-agency referral route to maximise engagement and impact.

The Speech and Language therapists’ team agree that the sessions are beneficial for the children and families they are working with.

We are looking at new ways of signposting or including the sessions as part of the Speech and Language group therapy.

To ensure future success and that the Music sessions have a positive impact of the most disadvantaged children and families we will in the future:

- Ensure flexibility of approach and delivery: e.g.: deliver session when parents attend 8th & 27th month’s developmental health check-while they are waiting to be seen (most in groups)
- Recruit new dedicated volunteers and ensure the outreach worker can participate regularly in the sessions.
- Carry on having “mobile “session by maintaining good links with Community Estate Tenant Association, playground delivery and any other Open day/community celebration.
- Make regular contact with Speech & Language team to ensure with signpost children who may benefit the most.
- ESOL classes will from September 2012, plan one session a term for the parents and children as part of their lesson plan.
- All parents’ learners and volunteers on Childcare (QCF& NVQ’s) courses at the centre are seriously encouraged to participate in the Music and Movement sessions with their children. This is to ensure good childcare practice and learning experience for their future career.

For further information about this project please contact Nicky Pleming, Participatory Projects & Youth Voice Manager at Sound Connections, nicky@sound-connections.org.uk, 0207 7297220.