

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)



Musical Connections members, artists and volunteers on the 2017 Residential Weekend, making music, socialising and using the Reflection Circles tool to document their progress

Contents:

Context (personal background of evaluation consultant and list of significant tasks undertaken)	Page 2
Project Outcomes	Page 3
Consultant's responsibilities and efficacy of their delivery measured against outputs 1 - 3	Page 6
Conclusion, output 4	Page 8
Conclusion, output 5	Page 10
A review of the evaluation tools used	Page 14
Why is the project model effective?	Page 21
How should the model be changed?	Page 22
Specific recommendations	Page 23

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Context

My professional background is as an experienced community arts practitioner. I have an interest in, and aptitude for working with creative forms of evaluation which flow from good quality personal and group reflection. Given this starting point, when I was appointed to deliver this role I began with confidence in my abilities to assist the team to draw out the stories which are integral to the project, and in my experience with designing personalised approaches in partnership with stakeholders. However, I was aware that I had more limited experience with strategic and hard data-based methodology. Working in partnership with Quench Arts on the evaluation strategy for Musical Connections has enabled me to develop some more skills in this field.

The major tasks of my role within the project over the last four years have been:

- To research and refine baseline and impact measurement tools for new cohorts of members receiving one-to-one sessions
- To design and develop reflection activities in group settings, specifically for monthly group sessions, the residential weekends and feedback on experiences pertaining to taking part in concerts
- To monitor the approaches, methodology and reporting of project reflection and evaluation; to provide feedback on these to the creative team and project coordinators who undertook most of that work
- To undertake member interviews and compile eight longer term case studies
- To prepare a report providing an overview of the project and its evaluation

NB Quench Arts and I have agreed that statistics for baseline reporting are best derived from project years 2 - 4, as the first year was always intended as a training and development phase and therefore the data are not directly comparable. Other information, such as quotations from case studies and end of year evaluation questionnaires, cover years 1 - 4.



Participants at the Year 3 residential weekend adding final thoughts to the reflection circles activity

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Summary Of Project Outcomes:

- *Vulnerable, isolated and disabled participants will have better chances in life through developing personal, social, artistic and life skills.*
- *Participants will feel less isolated, having improved health and wellbeing through music-making, encouraging active engagement in group and social activity.*

With the assistance of members, volunteers and artists, Quench Arts have been able to document many examples of skill development, reduction in isolation and improved wellbeing.

For example, baseline analysis shows that of the **30** members who set a “**get active**” wellbeing goal for themselves, **17** met their objective and **7** exceeded it.

Members often view the improvements holistically, i.e. being more active leads to better connection with other people; learning and developing ones creative skill leads to being more active and so on.

When working on the eight longer term case studies, I was struck FS's use of language. When asked to describe Musical Connections in one word his immediate response was, “*Family.*” It was therefore a delightful corroboration when I spoke with his Aunt and she said:

“I’ve noticed such a big improvement in his confidence since belonging to M.C. Years ago he would hardly speak... It’s doing a lot for him because before he had no friends and wasn’t going out. He lost his Mom 31 years ago and he was so close to her. Then he lost his Dad twenty years ago. It left him in shock and he had no counselling to help, so he withdrew into himself.”

“Being on stage has been the best thing. When I’m on stage I feel happy. I enjoy performing and also writing songs. It has made me meet new people and make new friends. It has changed my life, because I wouldn’t be doing anything else if I didn’t have Musical Connections”.

Long term member YS



On the 2017 Residential, CS, who is a former music professional isolated by her worsening Multiple Sclerosis, commented when asked about the impact of the weekend on her wellbeing:

“I met many new people and singing I know makes me feel good. I come away with a renewed determination to join a choir and try to meet up with other musicians, including for the song writing sessions.”

“I had a seizure in 2007 and I couldn’t function for a long time. When I came to Musical Connections it really made my recovery happen. I am more confident and assertive and it has made my mind healthier and more focussed. This spills over into my day to day life.

I can do some things that I would have been too introverted to do before, because I have come out of my shell. It is very good for creating more positive emotions. It is interesting how learning and working alongside others has made me realise that creating music with other people is better than doing so on your own.”

Member RM, who joined the project in 2014

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

- *Participants will develop transferable personal skills enabling them to be signposted to further accessible training/ development opportunities giving better life-chances*

Examples: Members ascribed finding the confidence to undertake these activities as a consequence of their Musical Connections activities.

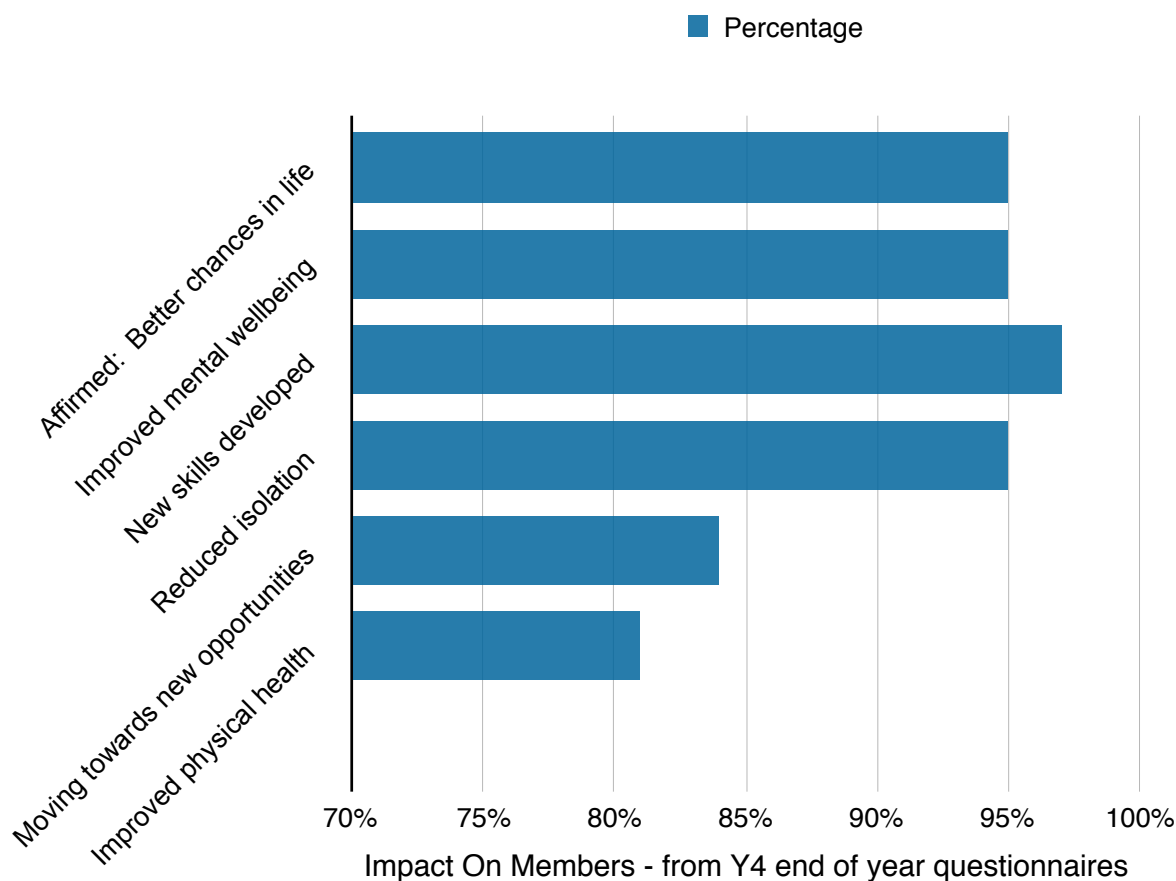
Examples from members joining during this round:

- VS – has supported with the Musical Connections newsletters all year and contributed artwork
- EC – has helped Quench man a stand at an external event, representing Musical Connections

Examples from longer term members of the network:

- GM – has been instrumental in developing BSMHFT's Recovery College training mode
- RH – volunteers for stakeholder organisation Community Vibe
- JL – designed the Musical Connections website and is now designing websites for lots of other bands and musicians

The following chart is based on the (very positive) final questionnaire responses from Year 4 members:



Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

- *Workforce development for emerging artists, through volunteering roles and training, will increase participation opportunities for vulnerable adults with specific needs*

Providing musical support for the group is great. I have learned this is how a musical organisation should be run. There is no stigma and they use your talents in so many ways. In an ideal world I would love to be a music support worker: I have gained the confidence and experience to do this. When other organisations are pulling the plug and saying, "music is not a therapy", it is particularly important that Musical Connections survives. I am living and walking proof (as a service user and now a volunteer) that music IS a therapy. This has been the best musical project I have ever seen - there's nothing like it."

Volunteer Wayne Hands



Members singing with Lead Volunteer Katie Stevens at the 20th Anniversary concert

"Volunteers get an amazing deal as we get to work with all the artists and learn from all of them and see different ways of working. I cry at every concert as it overwhelms me how amazing everyone is to be brave enough to share the songs and stories. I am so proud of everyone and feel touched to be part of it."

Lead Volunteer Michelle Holloway

"I am getting so much out of being a volunteer. It has definitely helped my own song-writing and it is a pleasure to be here [at Musical Connections sessions]. This has made me realise what I am able to do. I have studied music, but I wasn't really using my skills and talent. Now that gap has been filled. My keyboard and drum skills have improved. Whereas before I would have used backing tracks, now I am actually playing live. For some people, this is all they have got because of their issues. It gives their lives purpose and it's important. It gives my life a purpose: I can contribute and help."

Volunteer Jameela Rose

Since the beginning of this funding round in 2013, 19 volunteers have worked on the Musical Connections project, assisting via their musical and social skills and learning from members and artists alike.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

My responsibilities and the efficacy of their delivery

Outputs 1 - 3 of the evaluation consultant contract are:

- *To strengthen a collective understanding across the project artistic team, beneficiaries, stakeholders and partners of the purpose and importance of evaluation*
- *To assist, train and support the Musical Connections project team in undertaking monitoring and evaluation against the project expected outcomes using agreed indicators and measures. Note: 'Project team' includes project beneficiaries as we are keen that aspects of the evaluation become more user-led. As such, applicants may want to develop and use a member advisory group (meeting monthly) and new member 'consultant' volunteers to assist here*
- *To support the project team in making the monitoring and evaluation process accessible, relevant, appealing, creative and more user-led*

The following is a review of how effective the process leading to these three outputs has been.

During Year 1 of the current funding round I was able to consult with a number of members including the Member Advisory Group. I modelled several approaches and creative evaluation tools for them and we discussed which would best fit the project's ethos. It was clear that in their day-to-day lives most members feel burdened by a vast number of complex forms which they have to complete, in sometimes emotionally charged situations, to permit them to access benefits, social and medical care. Therefore, we agreed that it was important to reduce the amount of form filling required by the project so as not to alienate members from the process (or indeed from the project itself). Although some questionnaires have been necessary, as a team we have tried to ensure that these have been completed through one-to-one conversations with me, the project coordinators, or with artists and volunteers who have built a rapport with members during project sessions. In terms of creative methods, the members expressed a preference for visual and story-making methods of evaluation over (for example) movement and drama approaches.

Quench Arts planned well for this process to be able to take place with each new cohort of members, by scheduling two of their twelve one-to-one sessions for reflection and evaluation. These were programmed for the first month of participation (usually September/October), with a follow up at the end of the project year (June).

The content of these session included completing and revisiting two specially adapted baseline documents, the nationally recognised tool the **Outcome Star**, and the **Five Ways To Wellbeing Flower**. The latter was designed by me to be user-friendly and fit in with the graphic style of the Outcome Star. In addition to the pure baseline function, I was also keen to utilise aids for personal reflection on confidence and wellbeing which at least some members might find valuable in itself, rather than being tick box exercises. I hoped these would also stimulate conversation between member and artists, and, particularly in terms of the wellbeing goal-setting, that they would contribute to the end of year **Case Studies** which provide the most significant information of all. The third document was a **Feelings Checker**. This was also completed at the mid point of the project year. Personally I regard this as less of a third baseline; more a check and balance on the other information we collected during the year: for example, if a member was showing steady or improving confidence in their feelings throughout the three checkers, it would be fairly straightforward to interpret the data/responses in their Stars and Flowers. Conversely if there was a spike or dip in the checker, this might help the member reflect on internal and external challenges and achievements at particularly points in the process, and therefore provide more detailed feedback at the end of the year. (See pp 14 and 15 for examples).

How do you feel about your level of social confidence at the moment?				Fabulous
			Good	
		OK		
	Poor			
	Dire			

The Feelings Checker examined people's description of their social and artistic confidence, plus their sense of their own wellbeing and ability to connect with others on the project.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

In the previous funding round, each artist was allotted ten sessions with each member. Understandably, if one gives artists more one-to-one time it is terribly tempting to use that for rehearsal or more songwriting... From Year 2 onwards we agreed as a team schedule a refinement to the process which was suggested via discussion with artists: the twelfth one-to-one session became a group activity for the year's cohort. This began (at my suggestion) with a music-based reflection activity. To marry the evaluation process to the actual content of the project, the artistic director facilitated a short group songwriting activity: members contributed words for (usually) a verse and chorus inspired by their own experience of being part of the project. By stimulating their creative, questioning minds, we were then able to get more deeply felt and owned responses for the evaluation forms and revised baselines.

There was limited time to develop a rapport with members but some, notably HQ, GM and (since she joined in 2014) BB have been very valuable in contributing to my own overview of the process.

My own opinion is that the consultancy contract suffered somewhat from the time and budget allocated to it. A smaller contract focussing almost entirely on years 1 and 5 would have allowed a more experienced evaluator the time to consult, develop and tweak materials, with more of the overall budget then being freed up so that the coordinators could better support the creative team to help collect, analyse and understand the data themselves. A larger contract would have enabled the consultant to be more embedded in the project and to take a greater role in training and negotiating with artists, members and stakeholders. It should be stated that although there was time initially planned for this, the realities of delivering the project on schedule caused that to be minimised. If more time for development could have been available as scheduled, the consultant would also have been better placed to support Quench Arts with data capture and reflection activities, perhaps being seen as more integral to the process, like the current long term volunteers.

In reality, the contract fell somewhere between the two extremes and at times understanding of the process I was attempting to introduce suffered amongst the creative team and membership. An effective way to find out if something is workable is to try to do it yourself and without this, as with many consultancy roles, it is possible to feel at times as if one is impeding understanding rather than nurturing it. Sometimes there was confusion within the group and team as to the nature of my role. There was a tendency, especially in year 1, to view me as an outsider responsible for the collection of data (whereas the project coordinators did the vast majority of this work), rather than someone who's foremost role was to help integrate evaluation into the project. Having less of a physical presence at project sessions also meant that I have been unable to witness, document and analyse some of the extraordinary moments which artists regard as, *"Just me doing my job."* and therefore sometimes overlook.

As with many established projects delivered by experienced artists, there was some resistance to the change of approach from the project artists, who had been content with previous evaluation models. Limited time for training and consultation before the contact sessions began exacerbated their concerns about the changes. This also resulted in an unwillingness to set aside time for reflection with members, especially in group sessions. This did improve over time, and we were also able to devise several exercises which were neither onerous or time consuming, which gained the approval and understanding of the team.

Some of the effective reflection and evaluation under my aegis came from the Year 3 and 4 residential weekends. Proportionally, the time dedicated to these activities far outweighed that of the main project, as I was contracted to attend two of the six sessions: Friday evening and Sunday afternoon and to take responsibility for the overall evaluation process. The impact on information collection was clear. Having a dedicated specialist present, who was not also trying to write two songs and/or be responsible for a group of people, allowed us to integrate evaluation into the process more easily. Members attending also seemed very willing to contribute feedback throughout the weekend and in the final group discussion. I think being able to incorporate the **Reflection Circles** (see the review of tools below) was key to this.

In terms of data capture from group sessions, the change of venue from Hopkins to APMC affected evaluation and reflection sustainability, because we lost a dedicated space for reflection, display and information capture. However, the benefits to the project of being in a space with a strong community ethos outweigh these issues for the project as a whole. If at all possible moving forward it would be good to be able to have some sort of accessible display (even if this is designed as an online "scrap book") so members can be encouraged to keep track of how the project and the evaluation itself are progressing.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Conclusion, output 4:

- *To enable the project to better triangulate baseline data and cohort progression information/ statistics so that this evidence can be utilised to showcase the impact of the project alongside individual case studies*

Data capture:

In the first instance, the project coordinators were naturally keen to prioritise capturing baseline data from the new recruits to Musical Connections. Therefore the output was focussed towards this in years 1 and 2: developing and delivering baseline materials which could be integrated into the project. Some members of the artistic team found it easier than others to use the tools, and as I have already mentioned, concerns were expressed about whether the evaluation questions were intrusive. Much of this came from a positive motive of protecting their clients. Since we began to explore this approach in Year 1, it has become easier for all the team members to feel able to ask the questions in an appropriate way. My own experience has been that, while members understandably vary in their responses and volubility, they consider the project to be closely bound to their wellbeing and confidence. This being the case, the majority are willing to answer in detail, even if they are reticent at the outset. In June 2017 I facilitated an evaluation exercise with Year 4 member KW. She began by saying to me, *"I can't tell you anything because I don't know you."* Once I had begun to talk to her equal-to-equal and reinforced she did not *have* to tell me anything, she became much more forthcoming, describing how through performing in the final concert she made progress:

"I have a phobia about people and society and I conquered that. [Doing the concert] has helped me with the phobia. It's inspiring watching the other performers."

At times members have come to the conclusion themselves that they overestimated their own feelings at the start and have asked to revise their initial baselines to lower scores. This seems to me to be a very healthy approach.

The team working on this project are hugely patient and sensitive in the way they build connections with vulnerable and isolated adults. I would encourage them all to view the baseline process as a complementary way of using their undoubted communication and empathy skills.



Artist and Music Support Worker Steve Ison accompanies a member during her first year end concert in 2016

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Caveat: One issue with data reliability which should be stressed is that a small number of the members whose figures form part of the Year 2 - 4 statistics have taken part in the project from secure wards in hospitals. When referred to the project, it is hoped that they will progress to living in the community during their first year, this being the plan at the outset with NHS staff. Of course, in reality, sometimes this cannot happen due to slower recovery than expected or staffing issues. In this scenario, as a first step towards being discharged into the community, it is hoped that they will progress to being given community leave to be able to access project group activities with supervision and support from staff at their setting. While neither wishing to discount their input or downplay the value of the project to this group of members, clearly their experience of Musical Connections is not the same as the main cohort who can generally access all group activities with greater ease. The former will frequently be in less of a position to be objective about their own capabilities and progress due to a) their current state of mental health, and b) the limited ability to meet, learn from, and compare themselves to other members as readily. This can lead equally to overstating or understating both emotional states and competencies.

We have also captured data and personal stories during group activities, most notably the Year 3 and 4 residential weekends. For a more complete summary of the tools used in different activities please see the section on reviewing the evaluation tools on page 14.

An exercise we called the **Confidence Counters** was used to help verify the artists' perceptions of the group process before and after each session. A routine was established whereby a key volunteer would ask each member to select a counter and put it in a specific box to denote his/her confidence level. This exercise was then repeated at the end of the session to see whether the social and creative activities had impacted upon members' confidence.

Example

Before the first group session of year 4:

26% recorded themselves as feeling under confident 43.5% as average 30.5% as very confident

After the session:

0% recorded themselves as feeling under confident 30% as average 70% as very confident

Triangulation:

This has improved as we worked to encourage members to make their own contributions more discursive and informed. It has been good to see an increasing amount of first person narrative in case studies alongside the artists' descriptions of personal growth. Supporter statements have also been extremely valuable, although we should not underestimate the difficulty of being able to obtain corroborative statements for isolated people due to lack of personal connections; overworked Community Psychiatric Nurses etc. I suggest prioritising this last factor earlier in the project year. This might mitigate against the stress for artists and staff caused by trying to obtain information for the whole cohort during the final phase of the project year. There are also confidentiality issues which should be addressed (see Recommendation 11 on page 24).

Making use of the effective stakeholder network of local organisations has also helped corroborate the internal project data. If an evaluation consultant is no longer in place to help bring a fresh set of ears and eyes to the project, I think this will become even more important to the robustness and health of Musical Connections.

Again, more could be done to promote good data capture via the various group activities. It might be worth considering encouraging more experienced members to support newer ones by documenting progress they observe. Implementing this would be down to the judgment of the project team, however, who know the peer group best, so I am not including it as a formal recommendation. A further option, which could also help volunteer skill development, might be for each committed volunteer to work side by side with a longer term member to create a mini case study of that member during at the project year.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Conclusion output 5:

- To support the further development of BSMHFT and Quench Arts evaluation practices to enable us to better analyse the effectiveness of our work and project models, so that we can identify the specific reasons, activities and processes which have the most impact*

Revisiting the brief indicates that it was initially anticipated that there would have been more direct involvement in the evaluation process from BSMHFT (the grant holders) during the lifetime of the project. Ultimately, this was not the case, due in part to the retirement of a key member of Trust personnel early in the process. Despite this, the extremely dedicated team of artists, volunteers and especially Liz Viggers and Nicola Briggs of Quench Arts managed to collect a truly significant amount of high quality reflection and data.

The sheer range and amount of output is noteworthy of itself. Some keys outputs for beneficiaries:

Since Year 1 of the current funding round, Musical Connections has:

- Welcomed **48** new long term members to the network
- Continued to provide opportunities to a further **76** long standing members
- Contracted **4** professional community artists to work on the project throughout the process
- Facilitated **699** one-to-one sessions with members, plus **834 additional** sessions via the Music Support role
- Run **104** workshops for groups of members
- Recorded **146** original songs by members to project CDs and supported that process through **51** recording days
- Delivered **4** residential weekends
- Promoted **8** Musical Connections concerts featuring members' work
- Provided opportunities for **19** volunteers
- Created paid opportunities for **6** of those volunteers within Musical Connections, or with other projects under the Quench Arts aegis

The model permits a great deal of flexibility and allows the project team to support different members according to their needs. Much of this flexibility can be ascribed to the ethos and the professional skill levels of the artists, but there is an additional, invaluable factor, namely the Music Support worker role. Through this, the very effective post holder is able to provide ongoing musical support to individuals and bands growing out of the project, such as *ADHD*, a band comprising members and volunteers, to enable them to take up other creative opportunities. To provide a sense of the scale and commitment to this role, he has supported **108** external performances involving members.

This small team have not only been able to deliver an unusual and outstanding project, both artistically and administratively, they have also been able to prove that they have done so. This is a project team which reflects and learns as it grows.

"A nurturing and long-lasting approach, Musical Connections always spend an amazing amount of time with people."

Rebecca Nolan,
Wellbeing and Recovery Service Manager, Birmingham Mind

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

The following are quotations from members pertaining to different aspects of the programme.

One to one sessions with artists

"The way [my one-to-one artist] taught me was special and free flowing, so it was a dual thing: a partnership." Year 1 member GB

"It enables people from vulnerable backgrounds to express themselves artistically through songwriting and music and promotes wellbeing and confidence in me and, I'm sure, others."

Year 4 member RC

RC accessed the project largely through his one-to-one sessions with his artist, having recently left hospital and been given an assisted living place.

Group sessions (including smaller songwriting groups)

BB: *"I feel more valued and if others can do it, so can I. In M.C. you get to meet not just a few different people. [There is] more of a variety of people from all different walks of life. It broadens your horizons."*

KH: *"I keep coming because it makes a difference to my life: it gives me peace and relaxes me. I love to write songs and play the keyboard. I have done this for as long as I can remember but Musical Connections has helped me learn new things like new chords. If Musical Connections stopped I would miss meeting new people. Here people are helping each other. Making music elsewhere feels like making music on your own in comparison."*

Residential weekends

Members who have attended have told us that they value this opportunity greatly, even though it can be hugely challenging for an isolated person to be away from home and part of a group for a whole weekend.

"The goal setting whilst in a situation of stress provided a useful lesson of life in general." OC, 2016

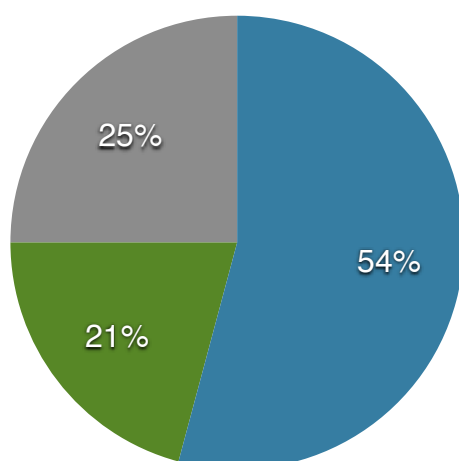
"I feel less isolated, more positive, relaxed and stimulated than normal. The mindfulness class was good for relaxation and wellbeing, so was the music." EC, 2017

"Suffering from Chronic Fatigue I found it a struggle, but loved the experience." PMc, 2017

"I didn't know if I would cope with so many people. I have achieved something" SB, 2016

"Working with people of different ages and disabilities has been a real eye opener when putting together a song and has given me a different perspective." PF, 2017

● Increased significantly ● Increased
● Similar level



Members attending the residential weekends of 2016 and 17 were asked about their level of confidence just before the activity began. At the end of the weekend they were asked again, and despite the pressures for isolated people of being in a different environment, no members reported a loss of confidence. 54% reported a significant increase.

In addition, of the 24 members, 10 had not been away from home to engage in an activity related to their interests for over a decade. 21 people out of the 24 said they would like to go on a similar residential in the future.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Concerts

From the end of year surveys, it is clear that members place a huge value on the Musical Connections concerts.

I spoke with 7 of the Year 4 cohort after the summer concert. Of these, 6 reported that their confidence was significantly higher after the concert than before (the final one stayed the same). 5 said they got everything they hoped for from taking part in the event, 1 got most of what she hoped for, and for the final member, it exceeded his hopes.

Member feedback: *"I'm beaming"* (KS); *"It went really well and everyone gave me compliments afterwards. Particularly my crisp vocals"* (BT); *"I feel calmer, I feel good, I feel a sense of solidity."* (EC)

Stakeholder organisations also value the concerts:

"The showcase is astounding: the range of people and the range of music too."

Cathy Crossley, Arts All Over the Place

"The end product is of a notable professional standard and it is great to see individuals' enjoyment and improved confidence."

Rachel Green, Community Vibe

Recordings

Artists commented that PF (Year 4) had not done any multi track recording before but loved the process. He has worked out keyboard, guitar, backing vocals and drum parts and has played them himself. Now he has a recording set up of his own at home. This clearly shows skill development via the project.

On receiving the project CD with his track on it, one of the project volunteers fed back that ST (Year 4 member) was so pleased that he sent him a photograph of it.

Socialising

Three to four social events are programmed per project year, and the members also take opportunities to socialise at Brainstorm (a mental health focused open mic night run independently by the Musical Connections artistic director) and other events. Year 1 member GB has found that, *"There is a great benefit to being with like-minded people."* The project makes space for people to come together aside from time spent making music and stakeholders view this as important for wellbeing. It also helps to give members opportunities to support each other. Year 4 member EC supported Year 3's FS (who has a physical disability) to access a Musical Connections. social event. In 2016 several residential participants raised issues around access with wheelchair user HQ during the evaluation discussion session and empathised with her.

Informal writing collaborations/bands (Unexpected Outcome):

On the Year 4 double CD of 31 tracks, every one of the songs except one was the result of a collaborative effort of composition between members.

I can think of no better way to demonstrate the facility this project has to help people connect.

"I think the most important thing is to see new people coming along and making songs together. Everyone learns something new each time: it just proves anything can happen when people come together."

Long term member KH

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Long term member DC (who now gets work singing with the M.C. affiliated band *ADHD*), and Year 4 starter PL collaborated on the song *I Don't Know You*. PL's lyrics were about the experience and impact of growing up without a father, and DC was able to relate to this from his own childhood. DC commented that it was,

"...an absolute privilege to be asked to collaborate with a rapper (my secret wish). When I heard the song lyrics and arrangement it was right for me as I made a big connection with all of it. I would love to work again with PL in the future."

PL's uncle told me how valuable this was for his nephew because: *"He is mixing and working with other people: making conversation and creating."*

Signposting to other opportunities

"I don't think I would ever have had these opportunities [singing with Choir With No Name, open mic nights, songwriting with others] without M.C. I dreamed of these things but didn't think this was a reality I could grasp."

VS (Year 1 member)

"I've been able to break my isolation by going to Musical Connections and I'm travelling to lots of events and venues all the time."

KK (Year 4 member)



Stakeholder organisations including *Arts All Over The Place* (providing support to people with mental health issues) at the Musical Connections 20th Anniversary signposting event and concert in 2016.

Are some aspects of the project more important than others?

From the data available, there is no clear view that some project activities outweigh others. There is a sense of the one-to-one sessions being the entry point and therefore most important to many in their first year. These provide a bridge to accessing the network further as a member of a social and/or creative group. This often leads to attendance at large group and songwriting sessions, and to recording and performing with other members, including writing informal collaborations - often the most exciting part of the project's many outputs as demonstrated above.

For Musical Connections to continue to grow, it is vital that we recognise the importance of maintaining the strands in their infinity variety. Perhaps this is only feasible because of the small delivery and management team, who all share a sense of the true connection between different activities.

"The space between activities is not on my radar."

Artistic Director Pete Churchill
re: mapping activity in Year 2

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

A review of the evaluation tools

This is a multi-faceted project, and as such we found we needed quite wide range of tools to match and do justice to the various activities.

Star confidence baseline:

This was adapted from a nationally recognised tool suggested by project artist/coordinator Paul Carroll and used previously on other mental health projects by Quench Arts staff. I feel it has worked well in the context of the project. For each of the six points of the star members are asked to indicate how much they agree with a statement which pertains to their participation on the project, for example, *"I feel valued and accepted."* This is revisited at the end of the year. Many members have been able to record an improvement in their score.

This is a subjective measure and is therefore most useful in terms of recording the degree of change: it is more significant to show a movement of plus two points than to emphasise someone awards themselves ten out of ten. To assist with triangulation, it might be useful for artists to complete a star for each person after facilitating the exercise from the member's perspective. This could either be done in confidence or by the artist working alongside the member and giving feedback such as: *"You said you feel more able to compromise a little; I have seen you do so on at least five occasions so for my star I am going to score you showing more of a change."*

Outcome Star 1 (September)

How much do you agree with each statement at the beginning of your Musical Connections journey?

The star has six points, each with a scale from 1 to 10. The statements and their corresponding scales are as follows:

- Top-left point: "I often take part in local positive activities related to my interests" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)
- Top-right point: "I can achieve what I want to" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)
- Right point: "I am able to do things as well as other people" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)
- Bottom-right point: "I feel valued and accepted" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)
- Bottom-left point: "I find it easy to work with other people and I can compromise" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)
- Left point: "I find it easy to sing/play in front of others and express myself through music" (Scale 1 to 10, 1 at the center, 10 at the point)

Musical Connections

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Five Ways To Wellbeing Flower goals

This tool, based on a document produced by the New Economics Foundation on behalf of Foresight (called The 5 Ways To Mental Wellbeing), asks members to identify a series of goals, e.g. *“How could participation in Musical Connections help me keep learning?”* At the end of the year these were assessed in terms of still working towards, met or exceeded. An additional measure was used: some members were so unwell it was hard for them to focus on their future and set personal wellbeing goals. Therefore we regarded it as a success if they were able to set new goals going forward after the end of year one. This exercise also provided helpful quotations and insights for case studies. The artistic director in particular fed back that that this exercise was significantly harder for some members to understand. He suggested it would simpler if I had included some examples of goals, however I was keen to keep it more personalised and open ended than this, although I appreciate it made artists’ jobs more difficult in facilitating the exercise. Two of the other artists also struggled from time to time, worrying that asking these questions was intrusive. My own experience of asking members these questions was that although they often struggled to express themselves via this format, very few seemed to find the process of talking about their feelings and aspirations to be painful. Some found it actively therapeutic. For example, artist Nicola McAteer told me on several occasions that BB had enjoyed doing the baselines (she was part of the trial of tracking members over the longer term) and that they had helped her recognise her own progress. The hardest of the 5 Ways goals for members to comprehend was **“Be mindful.”** This did become slightly less abstract over time as one project artist began to incorporate mindfulness activities into her group work. Members such as EC fed back that they found this to be of value.

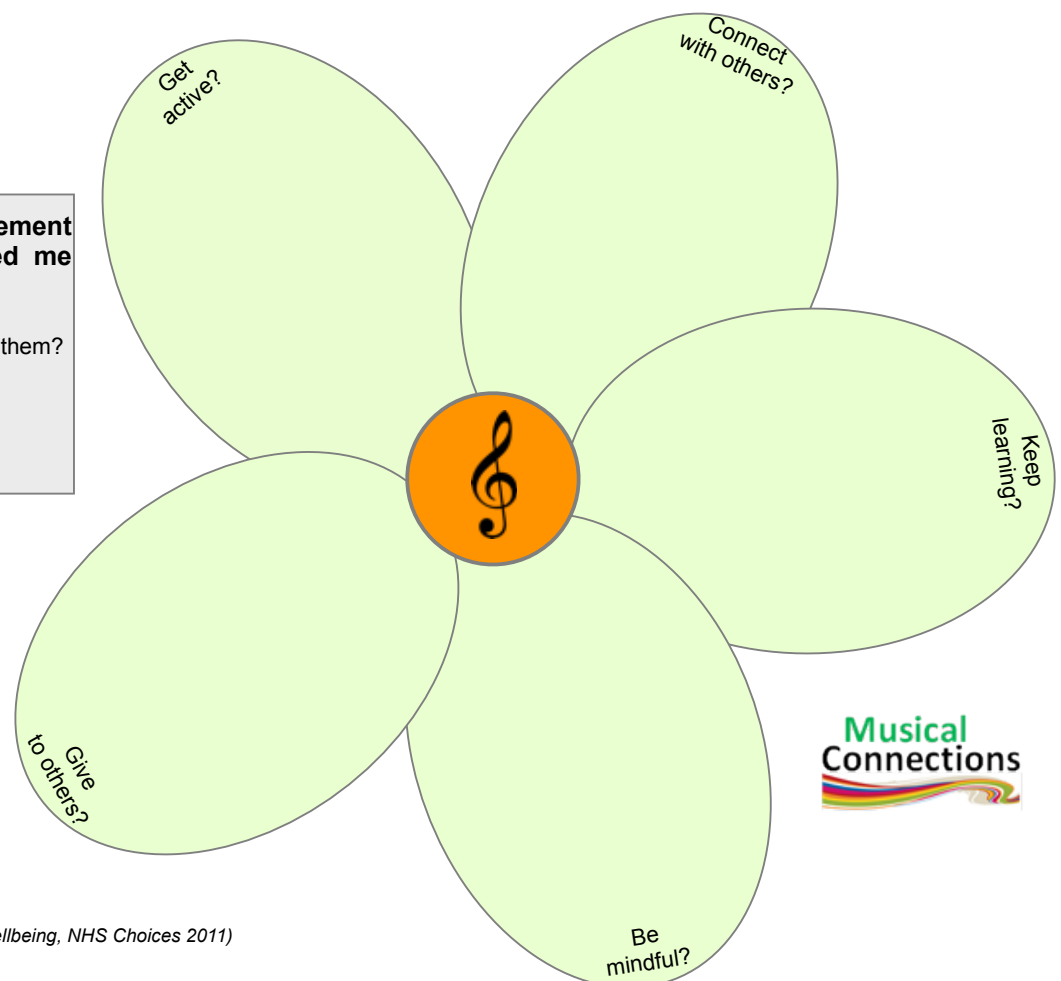
How Am I Doing With My Goals For Musical Connections? (Final)

How has my involvement in the project helped me with my goal/goals?

Am I still working towards them?

Have I met them?

Have I exceeded them?



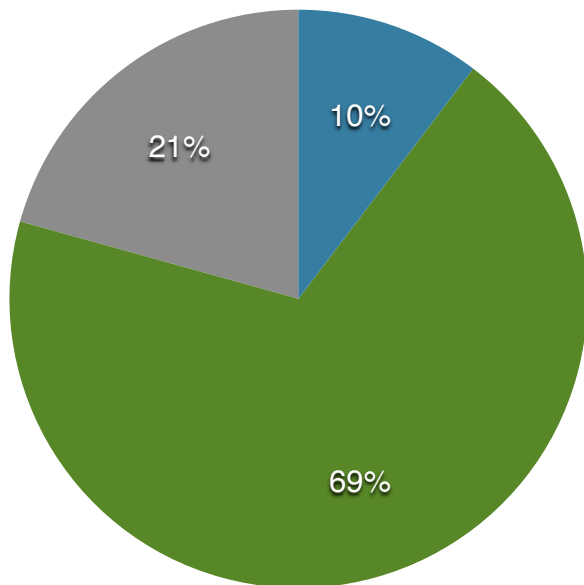
(adapted from Five Ways To Mental Wellbeing, NHS Choices 2011)

As a piece of general feedback on the pictorial repertoire of tools, member PF commented, *“I like the image-based exercises - they help me express myself more [than forms].”* PF is one of the more introverted members of the final year cohort.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

I have found it useful to analyse the data from the Wellbeing Flower in this way (using figures from Years 2 - 4 inclusive):

● Working towards ● Met ● Exceeded



Keep learning
(29 members selected this goal)

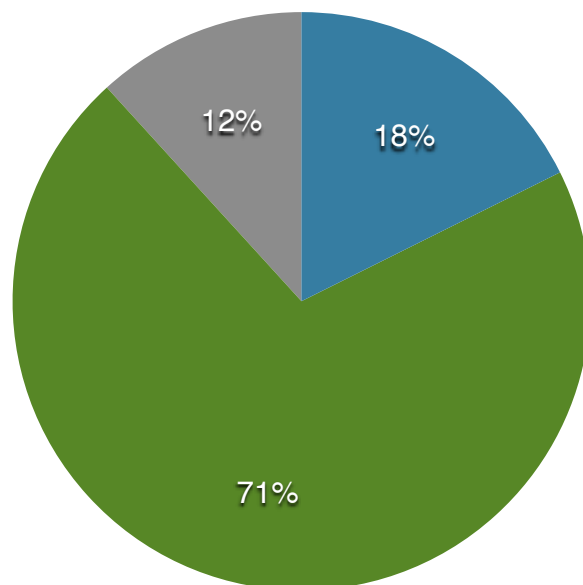
Example:

September: "[I] always want to keep learning"

June: "Very much [achieved]. Interesting how [M.C.] has made me realise that creating music with other people is better than on your own."

RM ,Y2

● Working towards ● Met ● Exceeded



Connect with others
(17 members selected this goal)

Example:

September: "Help with confidence with people and communicating with them. Making friends."

June: "Making friends and having fun and enjoying yourself. I feel like I've achieved something. I feel I've got better at opening up to other people and letting them open up to me."

KW ,Y4

Feelings Checker (NB this is not only a baseline - a guide, check and balance, see section on delivery, page 6). A useful method of getting a snap shot of a member's perception of his/her confidence three times during the year. Members grade their confidence with factors such as their artistic skill by marking them as a note on a musical scale (scored out of 5).

A previous version called **Sliding Scales** was rejected. This was because it was too hard to understand and unwieldy. I had hoped to design a tool which could measure whether someone's mood was on the up

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

or down scale, e.g. *"I am a four and I feel like I am progressing upward"* (marked on a ladder) or *"I am a four but I feel like I might relapse"* marked on a snake. Members found this hard to understand and artists also worried that the snakes and ladders graphic was potentially condescending, so we agreed to modify the document to the straightforward feelings checker.

Case Studies. These provide the most useful information about the project. Not only do they provide significant insights into the member's journey through the year (or in the case of the longer term ones, years), they also place this in the context of clear reporting of the project activity and the developing connection between member and artist and members and peer group. There has been a palpable improvement in the quality of the case studies over the last three years in particular because Quench Arts have been diligent in standardising the approach and giving feedback to artists about what is working well in the writing.

End of year participant evaluation forms. These are working well especially now they can be completed as an informal conversation between staff and member and utilise the project's iPads. I think they also work well because standard questionnaire forms are not overused throughout this project.

Confidence Counters. These have been used to record members' confidence levels before and after group sessions. The data was anonymised, but nevertheless gave useful feedback to artists and to individual members:

"I have noticed that, when we are asked to think about our confidence levels before and after the group session, I feel more confident at the end." (Year 2 member BB).

We experimented other early stage activities too, most notably a **guided observation sheet** I use in other professional situations, when I mentor emerging practitioners and ask them to observe my own delivery style. I wondered if to ask volunteers and more experienced members to look for specific examples of good practice on occasion (e.g. *How are the team supporting members to communicate their own ideas or feelings today?*) might provide useful feedback as well as insight for contributors. However the team found this process uncomfortable and intrusive within the context of a Musical Connections session, so we agreed to drop this activity.

On the final session of each year for new members (in years 2, 3 and 4), we came together to collect the significant amount of information we needed, including beginning the session with **song writing as reflection** (artist led). Artists feel this has been effective for members, labour saving (with the caveat that sufficient numbers of members turn up), and also allows the peer group to celebrate their year end together effectively. However, project managers report it has budget ramifications and is certainly not labour saving for them - although they value the celebratory aspect of the session. As a reflection activity, I also ran **Mapping Activity** on these three occasions to help members and artists discuss where they felt most at home; which part of the project they most liked to visit; whether there were barriers to accessing different parts of the project, and whether there was any type of activity where they lacked knowledge of what happened. Generally participants found this a thought-provoking experience. While one-to-one and group activities scored highly, many contributors had other favourites, such as recording or concert performances. Several found the concept of the signposting aspect of the project and the specialist groups difficult to understand in the abstract, but nobody reported a major issue.

Online surveys (used by Quench Arts for gathering data from referral organisations and also for members' feedback at times). Some Musical Connections members either do not have access to, or are uncomfortable with, information technology and will always prefer the offered paper or telephone options. This caveat aside, the project has been able to capture useful information via this approach.

Target board: This was an activity which was effective when the project was initially based at Hopkins Centre and therefore had a dedicated space for reflection. We purchased a magnetic dartboard and, immediately before each group session, asked the Members Advisory Group to suggest a statement to post beside the board, relevant to what they wanted to know from members. Members then positioned magnetic darts close to the bullseye if they agreed with the statement or further away if they disagreed. An example statement: *"I feel accepted by everyone at M.C."* This helped the advisory group to keep a finger on the project's pulse.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Post box with starter sentence postcards: A box was placed near the target activity so that members could offer feedback on practical and qualitative aspects of the project. Examples of starter sentences offered:

"Today has been helpful for my health and wellbeing because..."

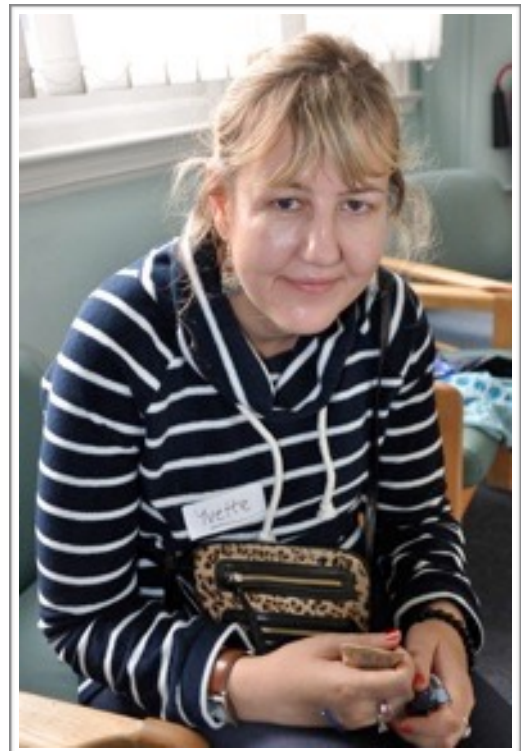
"One thing I think we could improve..."

Metaphors Game. A box of random objects, such as a small trophy, a tea strainer, a paint brush... were offered to individuals within the group. Each person selected one and used it to describe how they felt about the group session. This worked well and was enjoyed by contributors, with two caveats. 1) The "treasure trove" of items needs to be refreshed regularly, otherwise as Lead Volunteers Katie Stevens and Michelle Holloway, who often facilitated the exercise, fed back, *"You get the same responses several times."* 2) It provides good feedback in house, which engages members and is readily understood by arts practitioners, but it may not translate as well for external readers. The images below are taken from the very first group session of 2nd October 2013.



"I chose the sponge:

I am sad today but as time goes on on this project, the water in the sponge will evaporate and I will achieve my goals."



"I chose the bar of soap:

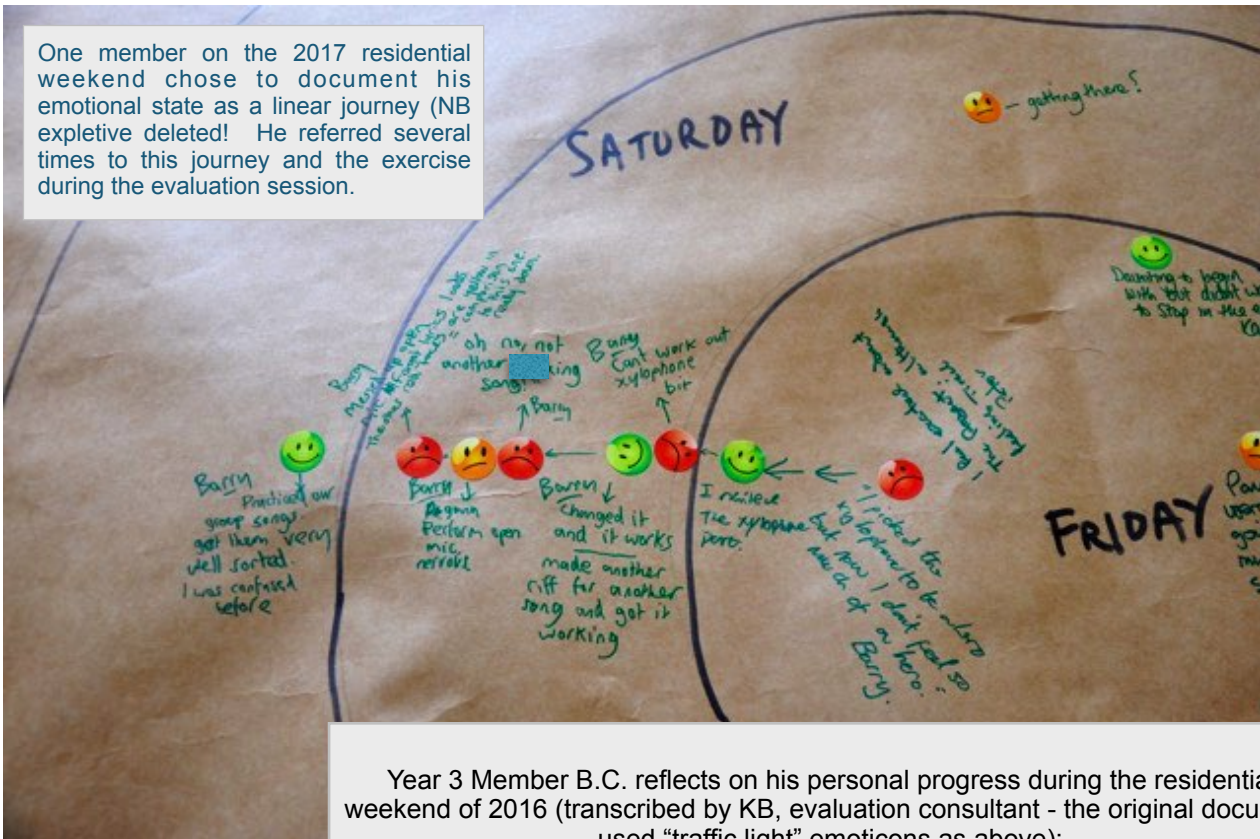
Because I feel refreshed, making new songs."

Residential Weekend Tools: For the first two years, evaluation for the weekends was handled by the team in situ, but this was very demanding given their non-stop responsibilities during the weekend, so the decision was reached to use my skills to manage the process and collect feedback for the Years 3 and 4 events. I worked with participants on Friday evening, set activities and tools to be used during the ensuing sessions, and then returned for the final half day on Sunday to complete the tasks. (**Reflection circles, group discussion, before and after envelopes** using emoticons to track changes in feelings and **personal postcards with starter sentences**).

The last three were also used on other occasions during the project.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

One member on the 2017 residential weekend chose to document his emotional state as a linear journey (NB expletive deleted! He referred several times to this journey and the exercise during the evaluation session.



Year 3 Member B.C. reflects on his personal progress during the residential weekend of 2016 (transcribed by KB, evaluation consultant - the original document used "traffic light" emoticons as above):

Arrival: "Concerned about getting lost."

After Friday session: "very productive... feeling the harmony!"

*Saturday: "Feeling a bit behind - understanding of structure."
"Games were a laugh and warmed me up."*

*Saturday Night: "Feeling pushed after dinner. Need more of a gap/break.
A bit full on. Feeling drained."*

Sunday: "A little anxious. Memory zapped but hopeful still."

End: "Feeling more optimistic about working on music projects, songwriting, thanks to the enjoyable music created by all of the talented persons who helped make this experience one to be remembered. One love."

Group feedback session.

This took place immediately after the final (performance) session on the 2017 residential weekend. A similar session was facilitated in 2016.



Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Example of a starter sentence and responses, relating to the Musical Connections project outputs:

*This weekend (Residential 2017) has had an impact on the way
I relate to others or work in a team because...*

- "I've had no choice but to communicate and socialise, going to my quiet room felt lonely, which is weird because I usually like being alone." (Member BT)
- "Good experience - I am mostly alone otherwise." (Member GMc)
- "I've been ill and missed everybody so being back with the team was emotionally happy for me. They have grown immensely from where they were. I'm so pleased with everyone." Also: "It helps me to keep organised and be able to socialise with the band. It's been emotionally exhilarating for me." (Member KJ)
- "Working with people of different ages and disabilities has been a real eye opener when putting together a song and has given me a different perspective." (Member PF)
- "Firstly, I usually spend all my time alone (isolated) so I have had to spend time with others and work as a team I have listened to others and encouraged others. By playing an instrument you have to work as a team." (Member EC)
- "...of the good team work here, acknowledging different skills/levels of understanding and mobility."
(Barbara - carer)
- "We had a good team leader and all worked well. Everyone contributed." (Yasmin - carer)



Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Why Is The Project Model Effective?

Musical Connections is a tried and tested model run and facilitated by a highly skilled and knowledgeable team. I consider the model to be effective for the following reasons:

- The small team of 4 artists and 2 Quench Arts managers truly share a passionate belief in the value of music as an agent for change and development
- They take pride in the personal growth of members, as is evident from the year end and longer term case studies
- The team have taken time to develop their approach but are also unafraid of criticism: making the most of opportunities to reflect and question their practice
- Members' interests and abilities are placed at the heart of each project activity
- The model provides great flexibility (due in part to the small team size and commitment of stakeholders) in providing the most positive access to arts and wellbeing for members, via an excellent range of targeted creative and social activities

It is a more complex and multifaceted project than many others run by more extensive arts organisations, but the passionate dedication and professionalism of the whole team ensure that it works exceptionally well to deliver its objectives. As member RM says, *"The whole set of activities working together helps you to feel secure."*

Quench Arts have built and worked to reinforce links with local organisations providing complementary services or able to refer new participants. The former include Arts All Over The Place, The Choir With No Name, Brainstorm (open mic events facilitated by the same artistic director, Pete Churchill), the latter include Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Service Foundation Trust, Community Vibe, Creative Support, Birmingham Centre For Arts Therapies and Birmingham Mind.

"What makes it work is the quality of the tutor-musicians involved. They are multi-talented, with very good interpersonal skills. This enables the creative process to be accessible to people from all backgrounds and abilities."

Rachel Green, Artist-Facilitator, Community Vibe

Sabina Bealt from Creative Support said:

"It is useful for us to be able to connect. M.C. is unique with the overlap between music and mental health. It is an innovation that the project will also support people with more complex needs. Staff are very musically accomplished. It is the only good musical project for adults with mental health issues I know about."

This is frequently a symbiotic relationship:

"M.C. come to perform at our events - it's a mutually beneficial relationship because they are so reliable and also they know they are coming to perform to a receptive audience."

Cathy Crossley, Arts All Over the Place

*According to interviews with stakeholders carried out in June 2017, between them the network of sister organisations have referred at least forty new clients to the project in the past four years.**

** NB Some members were referred by more than one organisation, as there is such a synergy between them.*

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Quench Arts provide robust and efficient systems of project management. This is clear when things are going to plan, but even more evident when changes need to be implemented at short notice, such as when one of the two project coordinators was unable to attend the Year 4 residency due to a close family bereavement. A substitute coordinator was drafted in to support the weekend at very short notice and her words (emailed immediately after the weekend) describe the apparently seamless process:

"I was very impressed at Quench Arts' overall management of the project, they are meticulous in their organisation and its really clear that they bring vast experience of managing and delivering community music projects, including Musical Connections, to the table. This ensured that no stone was left unturned and created an atmosphere over the weekend where everyone (staff and members) could feel secure and confident. It also allowed me, a complete stranger to jump in at the last minute to cover for a coordinator's absence. I was made to feel really welcome and comfortable by everyone which was lovely and by the end of the weekend I felt like I had made lots of new friends.

The easy warm atmosphere really helped give confidence to the members, I was touched by the way that one of the members in my songwriting group was able to talk about his drink and drug addiction and how he overcame it, and then used this experience to contribute lyrics into the song we were writing. To me that is proof of the power of creative music-making. I feel really grateful that I was able to be a part of this special weekend.

I really hope that Quench succeed with their application to continue this valuable project".

Kath Kimber-McTiffen,
Co-Director, Wriggle Dance Theatre

"Everything runs like clockwork. It speaks volumes that as an NHS manager I have very little to do because of how professional it is, how well coordinated and how excellent the communications are. There is a completely user-led ethos: the people develop longstanding relationships. The music is key but so is peer support. [On the project] people stay well and do not need to access clinical services because they are recovering the community as they should: so many people becoming a family. It provides excellent relapse prevention."

Lakhvir Rellon,
Director of Community Engagement and Inclusion at BSMHFT

How Should The Model Be Changed?

As previously stated, I feel the project is working towards its aims very effectively and achieving its objectives. Small changes may be necessary as Musical Connections continues to flourish. Consider additional ways to accommodate the growing numbers of members who wish to access group sessions at times. Possibly look at alternative or back up formats for these sessions in the event of a particularly large turn out, as time pressures and having a small amount of personal space can be intimidating for some members - especially new ones. For example, Year 3 member RHi told me about his anxiety about taking part in the largest groups as someone who was habitually isolated.

Although the residential weekends are perceived as very valuable and effective by members and stakeholders, it might be possible to streamline the main project by omitting this time consuming and costly facet from the main body of funded activity. If so, other opportunities should be sought to recognise *"the value of taking people into a different environment"* as Lakhvir Rellon puts it.

Continue to build on the integration of creative reflection and evaluation tools which are sensitive to members' wellbeing and individual needs.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

Specific Recommendations:

1a Simplify and standardise online record keeping. It is currently very time-consuming to locate all the information pertaining to one person as information is currently filed project task rather than being member-focussed. This is particularly the case with longer term members who joined the network prior to the current funding round.

1b Another form of standardisation would be for all outcome documents to use a traffic light system (e.g. green for "objective met"). Some documents do this currently, but it would be worthwhile having an overarching policy for this which is also understood by members and artists.

2 Ensure all documents for public consumption are identified by initials only but also ensure it is simple to locate and collate the full name and details of the person concerned in the database for approved staff.

3 Consider whether it would be worthwhile investing in app development so that the current pictorial baselines could be filled in online while retaining the successful image-based approach. This would cut down the time needed for writing up and also for deciphering handwriting.

4 Ring fence some time for reflection/evaluation of group activities, even if that means adjusting the group session format slightly (see 5 below). Possibly consider using the reflection circles and before and after cards we developed for the Residential weekends on two group sessions per year (near the beginning and near the end). NB This may not always provide direct data as a stand alone activity, but I am firmly of the opinion that it has positive ramifications for the quality and detail of data produced, as well as positive benefits for participants.

5a Group sessions: Consider whether it might be worthwhile changing the format now the network has so many active members. The current format: Warm up - 4 song writing groups - short break (evaluation/socialising) - 4 song writing groups - 4 performances, feels at times as if it puts quite a lot of pressure on both members and artists and leaves less than sufficient space for either socialising or reflection. Would it be worth trying 3 song writing groups, with the fourth artist leading a warmup and then floating between groups to help coordinate and document feedback? This would also give artists an opportunity to learn from each others' processes. I can quite understand that the artistic team would probably be reluctant to do this, however, as they have a format which is working well for them.

5b An alternative would be to set up provision to collect and analyse data and feedback for a sample number of group sessions. This would be most effective if it was someone known and trusted by members and would therefore suit one of the coordinators or potentially one of the more experienced volunteers.

6 Expand the tracking of a cohort of longer term members and ensure that this happens efficiently from Year 1, so that Quench Arts can provide evidence of the benefits of long term membership of the network even more clearly.

7a Professional development: Consider tracking volunteer development in a more formal way. I would suggest via personal journals and/or use of similar baselines to those used with members. Volunteers could also be supported to learn how to write one case study of a member.

7b Track artist professional development if possible so that the project is able to demonstrate that it is working holistically for all partners. Perhaps this could be done by adding a journal paragraph on personal learning to some existing monitoring documents?

8 Triangulate baseline data by asking artists to score the same documents as members complete, but from their own perspective, as mentioned on page 14. A member may feel that s/he scores nine at the outset but this may appear differently to the practitioner. This could be achieved in conversation with the member in the final one-to-one session. For this funding round we have relied on artist comments to clarify this, but it would be worth exploring a data-based approach alongside this, as long as it did not become too time consuming.

Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph (Project Evaluation Consultant)

9 Offer improved artist and volunteer training or guidance to increase understanding of the value of, and confidence levels in delivering, evaluation activities from the outset. Reinforce again via training of artists and volunteers that it is the change information which is key to evaluation (*"I could do this but now I can do this"*), not providing a description of what happened - this is only useful for context in terms of evaluation.

10 If possible (I know this is very difficult), ensure dedicated space or resource so that all stakeholders can access ongoing evaluation and add comments during group sessions. If not possible, set up an online interactive scrapbook for example a private Facebook page and encourage people to take time to use it.

11 Currently, artists and managers are placed in the position of contacting carers, professionals and supporters such as relatives and mental health professionals to provide comments for individual case studies. Although this works quite well on an informal basis, I recommend that further safeguarding and protocols regarding calling such individuals and organisations should be in place, so they can feel confident this is a legitimate request, especially when the project is asking for personal information. This is a project for isolated people and consequently, they usually only have a limited number of supporters they can call on. Perhaps in the next round of the project it would be appropriate to make initial contact with carers and professionals earlier in the year so that they feel more informed about Musical Connections. This could be done by letter: *"Person A has given us your name as someone who we might talk to about their participation this year... we will be back in touch in June to ask for your opinion... please contact us if you have any queries..."*

12 Utilise the skills and knowledge of an academic evaluation specialist to ensure that the evaluation methodology continues to develop and become more robust, and is able to ask and answer questions we have not even thought of yet.



**Musical Connections Report: Kate Buttolph
(Project Evaluation Consultant)**



It has been a privilege to interact with and observe the progress of members, volunteers and artists as they have developed the project model together. I wish them, and the estimable Quench Arts, every success in their work to utilise their superb toolkit of musical skills to continue to develop their social support network, reduce isolation and improve wellbeing.

*Kate Buttolph
Musical Connections Project Evaluation Consultant
July 2017*