



Groove & Grow

Supporting young parents in challenging circumstances through musical social interaction

A collaborative action research project between SoundLincs and Bishop Grosseteste University

Dr Pat Beckley



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unleashing potential through music

A report developed through a collaborative research project between SoundLincs and Bishop Grosseteste University.

This research was developed as part of the initiative: 'To identify ways to support young parents in challenging circumstances to participate in social interaction with other young parents and their babies and toddlers through musical activities' (2015-2017)'.

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The project was initiated by SoundLincs who tirelessly seek to promote music and use this as an effective tool to support multiple groups such as young parents in challenging circumstances, children with special needs, young offenders and many more. The team were kindly supported by staff at Paragon Asra Housing group, formerly Asra Housing Group, Barnardo's Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service and colleagues at Bishop Grosseteste University.



Abstract

The study arose from a Youth Music funded project for SoundLincs to support social interactions of young parents in challenging circumstances and their babies and toddlers, through musical activities.

It was initially focused on young parents leaving care and developed into a programme working with those in challenging circumstances. SoundLincs liaised with relevant organisations to facilitate musical activities in the young parents' homes and later venues for group meetings. A designated SoundLincs Music Facilitator organised the musical activities delivered, including reference to ideas and initiatives from the young parents involved. The group meetings began at the SoundLincs base, later accessing a purpose-built facility (The Foyer) for the second stage of the programme. Findings showed that the support through music was highly beneficial, giving participants greater confidence and resilience to develop their next steps both for themselves and their children, as well as promoting an enjoyment of musical activities.

It was planned to develop the initiative further through another programme of meetings, accessing a safe and secure outdoor play area. The report begins with a consideration of the context of the work and an overview from literary sources, of possible challenges for young parents.

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Background to the Report

‘Young people leaving care are one of the most disadvantaged groups of young people in society. Not only have many experienced abuse, neglect, or difficulties at home, but coming into care has often failed to compensate many of these young people, so that the time they leave - often at a far younger age than other young people leave home - their life chances are very poor’ (Stein, 2005: 166). This section of the report considers the possible challenges faced by the young parents who participated in the programme of musical activities devised by the SoundLincs team.

Challenges for the participants could include poor family backgrounds, lack of stability in their upbringing, challenging levels of educational attainment, leaving home at a young age, being a young householder as well as being a young parent. A study of inter-generational transmission of social exclusion estimated that young people who have been in care are two and a half times more likely to be adolescent parents than other young people (Hobcraft, 1998). Stein highlights, ‘It is often as a consequence of their pre-care, in-care and leaving care experiences that many are likely to have multiple disadvantages that predispose them to poor life chances, including poverty and social exclusion’ (2005:170).

According to Leigh and Warwick (2018), ‘Adults who come from disadvantaged backgrounds find themselves in situations where they face a number of different social, emotional, environmental and health-related challenges.’ If issues are left unresolved or they lack the knowledge and skills of parenting, positive changes to lifestyles required as a new parent are particularly challenging. Access to groups to share experiences with their child can help to break the cycle of difficulty and support a positive outlook. In this way, the cycle of difficulties is broken and parents can be supported to enjoy caring for their child. Lynch cites multiple challenges for young parents who are care leavers including:

- They are likely to have babies who are potentially adoptable or placed in care with a view to adoption
- They could be alienated by prior negative experiences, with professionals struggling to engage with them
- The young parents often felt judged by the experiences they had as a child
- Previous childhood experiences can negatively impact on their resilience and abilities to negotiate the many demands associated with bringing up a child, for example, housing, education, employment and relationships.

Young parents may have challenging circumstances prior to their having the baby, yet this could be greatly increased following the increasing pressures with the demands of a small child. Simms and Smith (1985) consider the challenges of bringing up a small baby ‘for the very young mother whose contemporaries are mostly at a stage in their lives when social life is of central importance, the isolation of being alone all day with a baby is even more difficult to bear.’ They continued that their ‘study suggests at least one in ten teenage mothers with a toddler is not very pleased about having a baby so young.

The real figure is almost certainly higher' (ibid, 86). According to Hudson and Ineichen, (1991: 139), 'The isolation of many teenage mothers is due to a number of factors, not least among them being their need for relationships, their need for support.' They continue, 'Their hunger for affection can begin a devastating downward spiral of poverty on many levels. The issue of poverty is significant in any discussion of teenage parenthood because it affects both parents and children so closely.'

The possible challenges faced by young parents could impact on their relationships with their babies or toddlers. Histories of maternal neglect and the quality of mother-child interactions during early childhood were found to predict neglect potential during middle childhood. Results suggest that neglect potential may be a mechanism through which early potential for child abuse and insensitive maternal interactions affect later externalizing problems in children of adolescent mothers. When considering physical and emotional neglect together, it is the largest single category of child maltreatment.

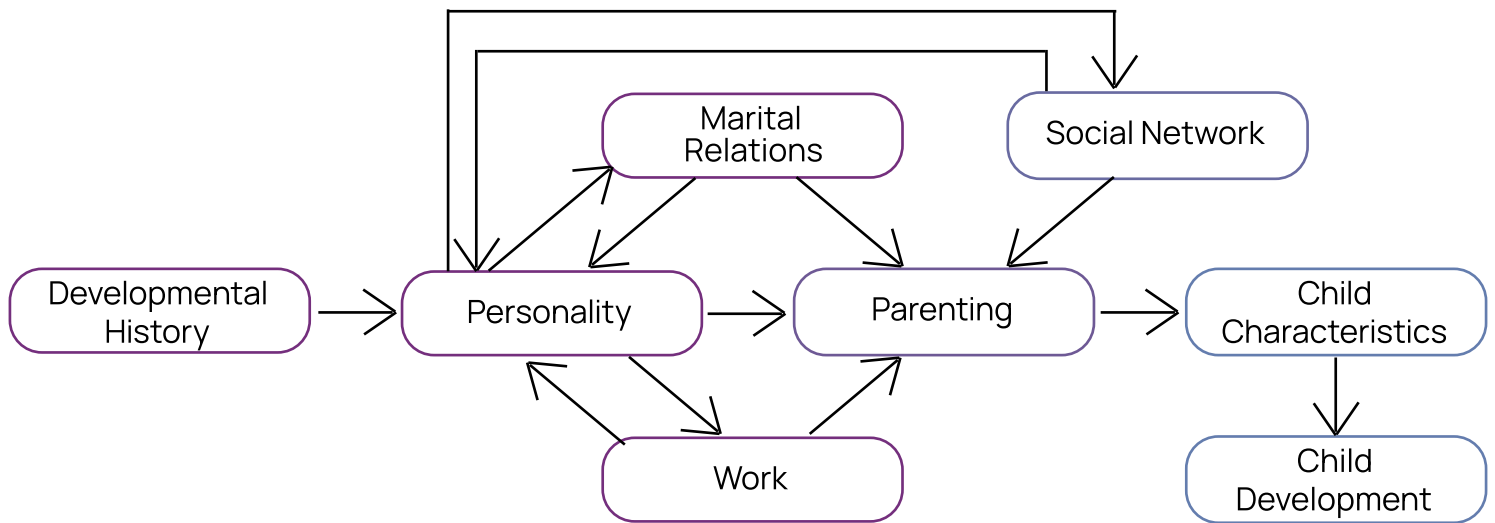
The focus on child neglect is important because of its potential as a causal factor in understanding children's development. For instance, Hildyard and Wolfe (2002) concluded that neglected children, in contrast to physically abused children, were more likely to have severe cognitive and academic deficits, increased social deficits (including social withdrawal and limited peer interactions), and more internalising problems such as depression. Mothers who are younger than 18 years of age at the birth of their first child are more likely to neglect their children than older mothers (Brown et al., 1998; Zuravin, 1988). An analysis of neglect by teenage mothers holds constant the two main variables predictive of neglect in the population at large: socioeconomic status (SES) and age.

Belsky (1980, 1993) has proposed an ecological model of child maltreatment in which maltreatment is a socio-psychological phenomenon determined by forces at work in the individual, nested within the family, the community, and the culture. This model draws heavily on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of the ecology of human development and consists of four levels that have been found to be predictive of child maltreatment in high- and low-risk samples: ontogenic development, the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Belsky, 1980).

The first level of Belsky's (1980) model, ontogenic development, includes personal characteristics of the maltreating individual such as past histories of maltreatment as well as current psychological characteristics and resources (Belsky, 1993). The second level is the microsystem, which represents the immediate context (i.e., the family setting) in which maltreatment takes place. At this level, characteristics of other members of the family, as well as family dynamics, are implicated, including children's characteristics. The third level represents the social structures that surround parents and children, such as neighbourhoods or work environments. Factors in the exosystem play a role in the maltreatment process through their influence on the microsystem, that is, the immediate family context. The fourth level in Belsky's ecological model is the macrosystem, represented by social attitudes (such as attitudes toward violence or the value of children). There seems to be evidence for intergenerational transmission when considering abuse and neglect together; the proportion of maltreated parents who subsequently maltreat their children ranges from 25% to 35% (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987). Maternal adjustment also is implicated in child neglect, especially depression (Ethier, Lacharite, & Couture, 1995; Gauthier et al., 1996).

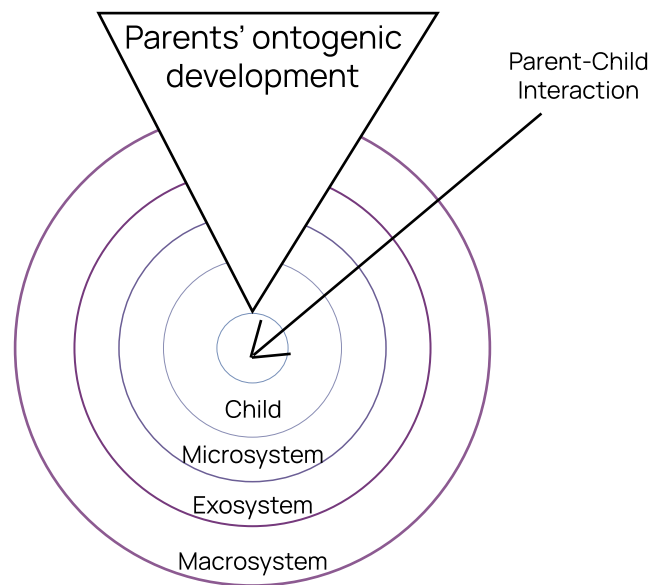
Perhaps because of similarities between adolescent and neglectful mothers (for example, young age at childbirth and often living in poverty), their children seem to manifest similar developmental delays, including deficits in intellectual functioning and academic achievement as well as problems with social functioning. Children born to adolescent mothers are likely to experience more adverse developmental outcomes than children born to adult mothers, including deficits in intellectual, linguistic, and visual-motor functioning as well as academic readiness and performance during the early school years (Sommer et al., 2000; Whitman et al., 2001).

Belsky's (1984) process model of the determinants of parenting



Model by reseachgate

In this way, the parental experiences impact on the child's development



From image by Christian Medical Fellowship

The NSPCC state (2018) that 'Children's early experiences have a significant impact on their development and future life chances. As a result of their experiences both before and during care, looked after children are at greater risk than their peers.'

As Belsky's model demonstrates, the parental experiences impact on the development of the child through the interactions between child and parent. It is suggested that future research should focus on the impact of interventions with adolescent mothers that are tailored to the parenting characteristics that place them at risk for neglectful parenting. For instance, programmes might teach teen mothers more positive and effective ways to interact with their children as well as decrease rigidity in their attitudes toward parenting and their children. Children who are suspected of being neglected could be targeted during early childhood to receive interventions consisting of effective ways to deal with their emotional outbursts through direct training in impulse control and socio-emotional regulation, thereby preventing the later emergence of aggression and delinquency (Lound et al, 2006).

Demographic factors such as poverty, unsafe neighbourhoods, family conditions and living arrangements, in addition to single parenthood, compound the difficulties many of these mothers face (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Mothers in these circumstances may have little knowledge of child development (Osofsky, Hann, & Peebles, 1993; Roosa, 1983; Stevens, 1984), be less competent language users, and be less likely to engage in facilitative play and language behaviour (Culp, Appelbaum, Osofsky, and Levy, 1988; Culp, Culp, Osofsky, and Osofsky, 1991; Keown, Woodward, & Field, 2001). In addition, when compared with older mothers, adolescent mothers are less likely to use responsive interactive styles (McAnarney, Lawrence, Ricciuti, Polley, & Szilagyi, 1986). They are likely to engage in styles that are more restrictive and controlling (Coll, Vohr, Hoffman, and Oh, 1986). These negative maternal interaction styles, in addition to socio-demographic variables, contribute to their children being at greater risk for failing to develop the competence needed to enter school ready to be successful students (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002; Causby, Nixon, and Bright, 1991; Raviv, Kessenich, and Morrison, 2004).

Findings from the research suggested interventions to prevent insecure attachment, developmental delays, and behavioural issues for this at-risk population of children of teen mothers are crucial. Findings revealed that the effectiveness of the varied interventions appeared to be related to changes in the mother's style of interacting; effectiveness was not related to support services provided or the intensity of child-directed services. Children of mothers who were responsive achieved more positive developmental outcomes than children of mothers who were less responsive. The findings of Landry, Smith, and Swank (2006) further supported interventions targeting maternal responsiveness to facilitate greater growth in targeted infant social, emotional, communication, and cognitive development. More definitive research is needed concerning the type of intervention that will have the desired impact and a way to ascertain which components of the intervention are responsible for the outcome. The underlying philosophy of exposing mothers to the importance of increasing the amount of time that they spend positively interacting with their children and encouraging mothers to become more responsive and less directive as they connect appears to be a valuable approach to the desired end of promoting more positive child development. The mother's demeanour, appropriateness, and style of interacting determine the kind of relationship and experiences to which the child will be exposed. These protective mechanisms can be enhanced through education.

The emphasis was not on the “what to do” but on the “how to” engage in more positive and stimulating ways to help their children develop to their fullest potential to become healthy, happy, and productive adults. It is hoped that by intervening early, exposing parents to information, and providing the mentoring needed to help them support and encourage the development of their babies and toddlers, the children will be more ready for starting school and more successful throughout life. It will also support the young parents to become confident in their abilities, promoting their resilience to fulfil their own life chances as well as those of their children.

Support for Young Parents and their Babies and Toddlers

Young parents have little guidance on parenting and support from local authorities in their pathway towards leaving care. Neither is there specific guidance for the child in these circumstances. Those leaving care at 18 can stay in their foster arrangements until they are 21, although not those in residential care settings under a Pathway Plan. These arrangements do not include how to navigate parenthood or have responsibility for a baby and young child. Oxfordshire Children's Services state, 'The Pathway Plan should be pivotal to the process whereby young people map out their future, articulating their aspirations and identifying interim goals along the way to realising their ambitions.' The comprehensive section in Lincolnshire's Service Manual based on Leaving Care and Transition gives clear guidance to support pathways for transition, although there is little specific reference to young parents. Any changes to benefits received would have significant impact on this vulnerable group. The concerns are alongside worries of their own children being taken into care if they are deemed to be unfit and the possible background of historic familial difficulties.

Aims of the Project

Some understanding of the challenges faced by young parents with babies and toddlers, particularly those who had previously experienced difficulties led to a need to identify the existing situation in Lincolnshire and ways which could support them in the future. Young parents in challenging circumstances are less likely to have support mechanisms in place to provide help for them, social interaction and communication and role models to give information about how to give the best possible care for a growing baby. This can increase the likelihood of the child being taken into care thus spiralling the parents' anxiety that this could happen. According to the Care Inquiry (2013) the greatest failing of the care system and associated child welfare procedures, found in a study of eight organisations, was that the system too often broke, rather than built, relationships for children in care. The Inquiry spoke about the need to make, protect and nurture relationships. It cites the increase in poverty, unemployment and changes to the benefits system which put additional strains on families in difficulties. This has been compounded, they suggest, by public sector cuts reducing the ability of local authorities to carry out their duty of care towards vulnerable children. They continue, the number of children in the care system in England has risen since 2008 and is continuing to rise.

The overall aim of the project was to gain insights into the perceptions of young parents of the challenges they faced through an ethnographic study, gaining knowledge of their expertise of situations they encountered.

Knowledge of the challenges was deepened with understandings from those they worked with, for example, the SoundLincs Music Facilitators, Family +, Asra managers and Barnardo's support staff.

Therefore, the specific aims of the project, based on participants' understandings were to:

- Identify musical activities which would support young parents and their babies and toddlers to participate in group networks with others who were experiencing similar challenges
- Identify how musical activities could support individuals, promoting such aspects as bonding, positive outlooks and behaviours between them
- Consider future strategies to promote networks for young parents and their babies and toddlers, through the medium of music

Context of the SoundLincs Project

The project began as a SoundLincs initiative as a means initially to support young parents leaving care and later those in challenging circumstances, in gaining peer support and promoting personal, social and emotional aspects for the parents and their children through access to a group outside their own living space. A designated SoundLincs Music Facilitator was identified to work with the parents with their babies and toddlers to develop their musical awareness and skills while supporting and enhancing personal, social and emotional aspects.

SoundLincs

soundLINC'S is a not-for-profit community music organisation based in Lincolnshire, operating across the East Midlands. soundLINC'S provides and develops high quality and innovative music-making opportunities for all ages and communities through strong partnerships. SoundLincs vision is simply 'everyone has an opportunity to be empowered through music'. During its 20 year history, the Company has made a major contribution to the transformation of the musical landscape of Lincolnshire and the East Midlands by initiating, developing and delivering music programmes, workforce development, information, resources and research services across a wide range of genres.

SoundLincs commenced with a part-time Director in 1998 and has grown to include a staff team of 8, a Board of Trustees comprising 7 dedicated volunteers, a freelance workforce exceeding 40 musicians and artists. The Company operates from a building base in Lincoln although its digital reach encompasses an international audience.

Barnardo's Lincolnshire Leaving Care Service – Stage One

Barnardo's Leaving Care staff in Lincoln gave their support to develop the project and links were made to ensure young parents leaving care were able and interested to access the initiative. Barnardo's website states, 'through no fault of their own, many children and young people face neglect, violence, abuse and chaotic surroundings. This can affect every aspect of their life, from progress at school to their ability to form trust and friendships.'

'Barnardo's provides support to children with families experiencing a range of adversities, for example, young carers. Barnardo's nurtures struggling young families. Being a parent is one of the most important jobs there is. It is also one of the hardest. Little attention is paid to preparing people for this vital role, yet parents are the key to giving children a happy and stable childhood. Most parents want to do their best for their children but for many, living with disadvantage can severely compromise their ability. Poverty, unsuitable and insecure housing, domestic violence, lone parenthood and being a young parent can all disrupt a parent's ability to cope, and families under stress need extra support. Evidence increasingly emphasises the importance of early brain development, with very early experiences having a lifelong impact on long-term mental and emotional health.

Barnardo's work includes parenting groups and one-to-one work with parents through their network of family centres, community-based parenting programmes and specialised work with parents who have particular needs. Some services organise courses which give parents a chance to step back and think about some of the things they are doing and how to improve. Barnardo's also help girls who become pregnant whilst still at school by providing support to enable them to finish their education and prepare for parenthood. Their parenting services provide both general support and specific parenting education programmes which enable parents to deal more effectively with a range of children's behaviour.

Children may be taken into care for a number of reasons; they may have been abused or neglected, or they may have families who are struggling to cope in difficult circumstances. Whatever the reason, these children are highly vulnerable. Their problems are made worse by the number of moves that many of them are forced to make during their time in care, which can also seriously disrupt their education. Not surprisingly, many of them do less well at school than their peers. This has a lasting effect on their adult lives; care leavers are more likely than children who have not been in care to be unemployed, get into trouble with the law and they often have trouble forming stable relationships.

Barnardo's leaving care services aim to bridge the gap for children in care between leaving care and living in the adult world. They help young people to develop the life skills they will need to look after themselves, including encouraging them to undertake employment, training or further education. When they leave, Barnardo's helps the young people secure permanent accommodation and remains available to offer support and counselling if necessary.'

Barnardo's work within the remit of their financial constraints and during the project the post of parenting support service for the young parents leaving care had to be closed due to lack of funding. This led to SoundLincs team endeavours to maintain the project and hence resulting in the need to forge new links for the project base working in partnership with Asra Housing Group based at the Foyer.

Groove and Grow Participants Stage One

SoundLincs sought to support this work by devising musical activities which would help young parents and their children to enjoy working together within a peer group. Three families were engaged in the project, two single mothers and a father and mother of one of the children. A parenting support worker from Barnardo's was assigned to work with the project and aid facilitation for gaining access to the SoundLincs team and BCU researcher to meet those interested in participating. Initially, it was planned to meet the parents in their personal living spaces, followed by group sessions held at the SoundLincs base in Lincoln. The living spaces comprised a privately rented studio flat in a shared house and two, 1-bedroomed properties.

The project developed in a second stage in an identified meeting space under the auspices of the Sleaford Foyer in conjunction with staff at The Sleaford Foyer and Paragon Asra Housing group.

Family+ at The Sleaford Foyer – Stage Two

The Sleaford Foyer building is currently managed by Axiom Housing Association, part of the Longhurst Group, through the Supported Housing department. The Foyer was managed and run by Paragon Asra Housing during Groove and Grow.

Family+ is a young parent's project based at The Sleaford Foyer. There are three 1-bedroomed and one 2-bedroomed flats. Referrals are made via Housing Options at North Kesteven District Council. Referrals can be taken from all over the County, and mainly come from Children's Services. Family+ offers individual support based on the family's needs and work closely with other agencies. Family+ also supports the families to move into their own accommodation which, depending on their situation, can be social or private rented housing.

As part of their support, Family+ encourage families to attend the Children's Centre so they can access sessions and services from there. There are several mental health groups that regularly meet at The Foyer together with drop-in sessions with Addaction and West Lindsey Domestic Abuse Service.

Groove and Grow Participants Stage Two

Four young mothers with their babies and toddlers, met once a week to participate in the musical activities provided by SoundLincs. They had been allocated flats in the housing development on short-term contracts of up to two years before they might be eligible for a council run home. The Sleaford Foyer provided a safe environment for the young parents, having designated accommodation within a relatively enclosed setting, which had access to CCTV. To gain entrance to the Foyer visitors were requested to sign into the building to ensure those who were in the building are known. A manager was available at the reception office. The group meetings were held within the main building. The young parents also had access to a group area on the first floor, which comprised a comfortable, light and welcoming space containing resources such as books and toys, for the babies and toddlers to use.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to gain deep insights into social interactions for the participants involved.

Methods Used

The study initially used interviews at young parents leaving care living spaces as pre and post interviews covering a set of musical sessions, followed by reflections of the study and a stage two study using an ethnographic approach incorporating interviews and observations in situ of the musical sessions taken.

The Study Formed Two Stages

Stage One - Initially the young parents were those who were recent Care Leavers. This input was considered and reflections from this activity led to changes in methods used for a second stage which concerned young parents in challenging circumstances who were based in a designated housing block.

Methods used for the first stage comprised interviews with participants at the beginning of the project, followed by subsequent interviews after the course of musical activities were complete. These were agreed to be used by those who knew the participants as it was felt to be an unobtrusive means to gain data. Video data was declined due to the sensitive nature of the backgrounds of the young parents and connotations they held about this procedure. Initially, it was planned to have musical activities where the individual young parents were living, followed by group sessions. Analysis of this data concerned identifying themes within the comparisons of findings before and after the interventions.

Stage Two - considered reflections of the success of the first stage, drawing on the achievements of the musical activities between individual parents and children while attempting to facilitate and sustain a viable and engaging group input. It was therefore decided to gain the trust of the young parents prior through an ethnographic approach, gaining their consent for observations and a group interview of the musical activities group. This developed and participants gave permission for photographs and short videos to be taken of their children accessing the activities. Analysis of this data concerned a thematic analysis of aspects which emerged during the observations, photographic evidence and focus group interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Guidelines for ethical considerations followed the Bishop Grosseteste University framework and permission to undertake the project was sought from the Ethics Panel at BGU prior to the start of the programme. Those involved as participants were deemed to be vulnerable so particular care was taken to gain consent for any data collected, ensure participants were comfortable about the procedures and data was kept in a secure manner. Young Parents Leaving Care gave further permission for the designated support worker to share relevant information for the project.

Findings

This comprises Stage 1 and Stage 2 data collection.

Stage 1: Before and After Interview Findings with Young Parents Leaving Care

Initial interviews prior to the start of the programme took place in the participants' living spaces. Arrangements were made through the parenting support worker, to meet the young parents in their own homes for an initial meeting. Young parents, mother and father, A (YP A) lived in a rented house and the interview took place in the living room with firstly father, then both parents, with baby playing in the room. YP B interview took place in her rented room in a house share, with baby playing with toys on the bed as there was insufficient room for the child to walk around the bed. YP C lived in a rented house but did not answer the door when visited. The parenting support worker explained she was subject to panic attacks when meeting others or when attempting to go out of the house. The initial findings were therefore based on YP A and B responses.

Initial Interview Findings

YP A enjoyed playing with their son who was two years three months old. This included tickling, talking, going out and listening and dancing to music. Baby had won a 'Baby and Toddler Smile Competition'. YP B interactions with her son, who was eleven months old, consisted of observations of him playing. He liked to use her hair brush, threw things such as plastic balls she had bought, or watched him play with her friend's child when they visited her. Children sang popular songs, for example, those by Adele. They listened to the radio together and 'jiggled and danced' or 'wiggled hands and boogied'. The toddlers would listen to the sounds, sometimes stopping to concentrate or making noises. They were not familiar with nursery rhymes but had favourite singers and encouraged their children to join in the singing. YP A played Peek-a-Boo and enjoyed singing Action Songs with him, from a music disc they had. Parents had previously enjoyed participating in music, such as playing the drums or singing in a choir at school and YPA father suggested teaching the children some raps he knew.

YP A enjoyed meeting others and liked to show 'a super proud dad' and showing baby's 'good looks', particularly as baby and father looked so alike. YP B stated baby simply liked to 'get out of the room'. YP A had accessed sessions at the Children's Centre and particularly liked the sensory room. They had challenges at times due to his behaviour, for example when he cried when they visited McDonalds. YP B had visited the Sure Start centre but had difficulties speaking to others. Many had English as an Additional Language and she found it difficult to understand what was being said. She said she would like to meet others but 'don't mind not having any friends'. YP A was busy preparing to go out to a meeting with friends they had planned, followed by shopping. Father was hoping to access a course and gain employment.

Further scrutiny in discussions from the Barnardo's Support Worker with the YP B identified that the mother had not eaten as she only had sufficient funds to pay for food for her child. A 'friend' had taken some spare money she had but she had not seen him since for him to repay the debt as promised. She could not afford the bus fare to get across the city to access the Food Bank. The Support Worker made arrangements for her to access sufficient food until the next payment. During the interview, men who had rooms in the house could be heard talking and laughing in the communal lounge, which YP B said she did not like to use. YP C had not been seen and the house curtains were closed. The Support Worker was going to look into this to check all was well.

Post-Programme Interviews

The post-programme interviews were taken with the researcher and young parents and their children as the Parenting Support Worker's term of employment had ceased due to lack of funding. They were taken in YP A home, YP B's new social housing home and in YP C's home along with her friend who came as a support for her.

All participants very much valued the musical activities from the Music Facilitator in the 1-2-1 sessions. YP A noted the sessions were interactive and 'we all joined in' with baby often 'watching what (the Music Facilitator) was doing'. YP C agreed stating that her baby 'watches when she comes and sees what she's doing'. YP A and their child had enjoyed singing nursery rhymes and had brought records to sing along to, to sing together when the Music Facilitator was not there. They liked to sing to songs in adverts too. YP C enjoyed singing 'If you're happy and you know it' with her son, who was eighteen months old. They 'had fun', while they liked to dance together to Justin Bieber songs now. The toddler had been given a toy drum set and 'loves it' playing with his music set. YP A's son liked to wriggle to any music and do the actions learned during the sessions.

Only YP B attended the group sessions. YP A parents had 'been very busy', visiting a Gran who was ill and getting father ready for possible interviews for employment. They were also busy renovating the house, adding a new loft insulation and changing windows. They felt the session fulfilled their expectations and they would like to participate in another musical programme as their son became older. YP C suggested she was 'scared of meeting' but would like to meet others if she could bring her friend with her. It was a 'bit full on the first year' when there was a baby. The sessions were not what she'd expected and loved 'seeing (her baby) reacting to it all'. She was very appreciative that it had been set up for her and her son and there was nothing she did not like about it. She wondered whether more information from Barnardo's could have been given at the beginning so she would not have been worried about what it might be as she had been previously nervous about participating in anything new.

YP B had moved into a home and was busy redecorating it. Her partner visited during the interview but did not stay. Her school-age brother was staying with her during the school holiday. Her son was playing with musical instruments in the living room while the interview took place. He danced and copied his mother when she touched one of the instruments. 'We did this in the session' she said. Her son 'enjoyed the drums, instruments and singing together'. She was pleased she had been asked about her own interests for the sessions, for example, which songs to learn. She 'knew it was going to be good with (the Music Facilitator)'. She liked learning new words in the songs.

She had been nervous about attending the group sessions at first and was not sure when she saw one of the walls of the room at one side had a window where others could see her, as she thought she might be being judged about what she was doing. The people were very friendly and kind which helped as she was 'a bit nervous at first, starting, meeting others and a new place'.

The Environment for Groove and Grow

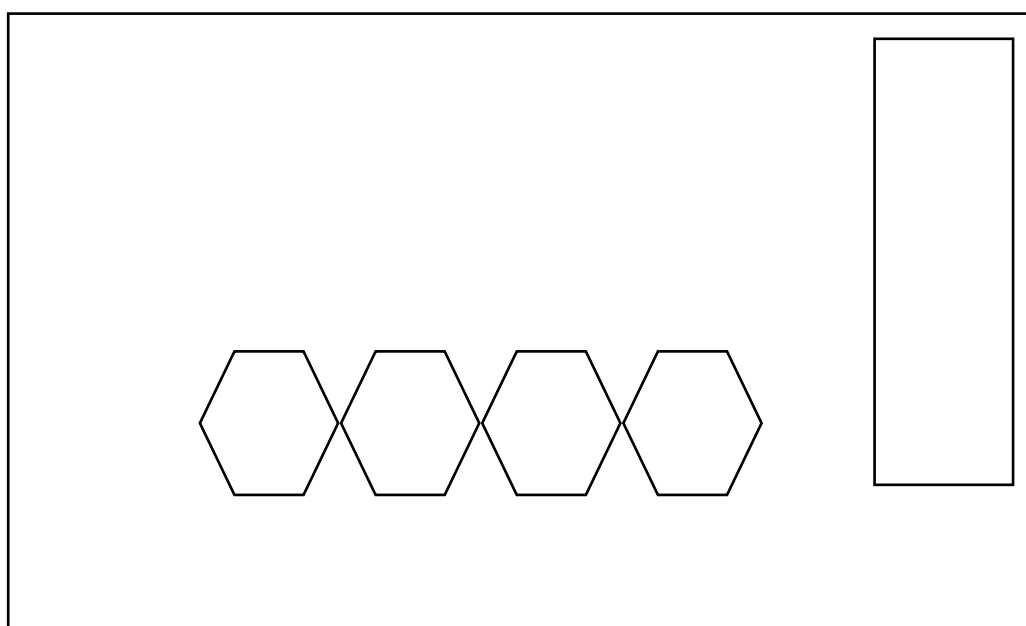
3a. Headlines

A supportive, welcoming and safe environment was deemed to be significant in fostering a group which was sustainable, viable and able to develop the interests and skills of young parents in challenging circumstances and their babies and toddlers. Young parents experiencing difficulties with food or housing found it challenging to access other forms of support, including a Food Bank, in accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Basic needs of food, warmth, somewhere to rest should be accommodated, alongside security and safety needs, prior to psychological and self-fulfilment needs. Once basic needs were met attempts for group activities to promote relationships, friendships and self-esteem needs can be forged. This may account for the difficulties in securing group activities for those leaving care. They enjoyed the activities in their environment which they deemed familiar. Those based at the Sleaford Foyer had a secure, safe, supportive base to begin their development into group interactions.

The Multipurpose Room at The Sleaford Foyer

Participants were given the opportunity to arrange furniture as they wished, and the young parents enjoyed being given this responsibility and discussed the benefits of different arrangements. The rectangular space represents the kitchen area where drinks could be made and biscuits stored. The hexagonal shapes represent the tables where bags and other items could be placed out of reach of the babies and toddlers. The tables were placed together to provide space at the far end of the room where there was space for dancing and circle games and activities.

*The
Secure
Entrance*



Musical Activities

The second stage of the project concerned young parents in challenging circumstances residing at the Sleaford Foyer. Participants were YP D with a two-year-old daughter, YP E with an eighteen-month-old daughter, YP F with a two-year-old son and YP G with a four-year-old son. Parents felt the sessions helped their children to enjoy activities, get them involved and enjoy music.

Songs

The songs chosen actively promoted engagement with the activities. Introductory songs welcoming children and parents, tidying songs and singing goodbye ensured all were routinely engaged throughout the sessions. Actions songs, drawing on parent and child ideas of words or phrases, gave participants ownership of the actions and songs. For example, the four-year-old suggested 'Superman on the bus', with parents giving ideas for movements. Participants became familiar with favourite songs and chose which ones they would like to sing next, practising them at home. A Family+ support worker was invited to show a Health Visitor colleague the participants' homes and noticed the musical instruments used by the children during the visit. Parents were encouraged to think about songs they had heard and would like their children to sing with them.

Dance

Participants' confidence in dancing grew throughout the programme. Initial reticence in participating, sitting quietly with their children, was dissipated when the Music Facilitator chose songs which encouraged dancing and movement, such as 'The Wheels on the Bus'. This was developed to most songs and used those brought by participants.

Musical Instruments

Initial observations showed a reluctance to touch instruments. Accessing the instruments was encouraged by the Music Facilitator and children became eager to explore which ones had been brought and what they sounded like. This became a strong feature and the babies and toddlers sought the musical instruments bag at the start of the session, carefully listening to sounds individually and with others. Parents suggested they could make their own instruments and a session was devoted to this. The Music Facilitator carefully judged the instruments taken to the sessions, having known ones and introducing when appropriate, different instruments to enable an exploration of various sounds and textures.



Toddler Exploring Sounds to Accompany Music Playing and Showing Others

Group Interactions and Support

This aspect was demonstrated in a myriad of ways.

Social Interactions

This was possibly the strongest element of the programme. Participants spoke of their enjoyment of the sessions, with their child, and their desire to continue broadening their social community through joining similar groups. The venue for the groups was deemed to be very important. A community meeting identified that only one parent had joined the existing Parents Group at a Children's Centre. The young parents took ownership of the organisation of the sessions, suggesting an outdoor session in the sunshine one week and preparing drinks and biscuits in readiness for the group meeting. YP F took on the role of the leader, encouraging the others to be ready for the start, giving advice if there was a challenge while thinking carefully about her own responses to her child, which changed from dominant commands to positive interactions.

Parenting Skills

The Music Facilitator supported the participants, demonstrating as a role model, how interactions with the babies and toddlers occur. For example, rather than shouting commands, encouraging and coaxing or being firm but kind, such as an eagerness to turn a light switch on and off. Parents felt she was 'fantastic' and 'wonderful' and was 'calm and really patient with the children'. Most of the participants had said they were concerned about how to manage their child's behaviour. The Music Facilitator effectively demonstrated how this could be achieved and parents copied her, noting the improvement in behaviour and gaining confidence in their own abilities. Parenting skills included encouraging children to participate with others, to explore instruments rather than throw them, to follow instructions such as tidying away the instruments and to enjoy learning.



Toddler Tidying Away the Instruments They Used After the Session

Adult/Child Interactions

In the interviews with young parents leaving care, YP A had strong interactions with their son both before and after the sessions. They were positive about their future and gave affectionate responses. They had suggested they were unsure of how to deal with his behaviour, for example in McDonalds. YP B developed a changing mother/child bond as modelling from the Music Facilitator enabled her to have ideas of how to engage positively with her son and enjoy each other's company together. YP C noted that she could enjoy and succeed at an activity and it need not be something to be feared.

The group sessions were highly effective in promoting collaborative work within the sessions. As parental confidence grew and ways of working with children established, participants encouraged others in the manner of approach modelled. Individuals encouraged each other if difficulties arose, for example, if a child ran around a table or a new participant joined the group. YP F established a leadership role and prepared the room and drinks in preparation for the sessions and all people involved. YP D had family challenges and other participants helped her to maintain her bonding with her child while she was busy addressing other issues. YP E had challenges separating from her child but as the sessions progressed and she became more confident with the participants she became willing to let her daughter explore her surroundings and meet other young children in the group. The initial visit for YP G held challenges. She was unsure whether to attend the sessions again as she had difficulties working with her son whose behaviour was challenging. The following week other participants supported her and the Music Facilitator demonstrated how to manage his behaviour. These strategies were copied very successfully and she and her son were able to participate very effectively in the musical activities, showing a high level of understanding and musical ability between them.



Toddlers Roll the Ball Accompanied to Music

Babies and Young Children Interactions

The children benefitted from collaborative work. YP E and YP F children became close friends, 'chatting' to each other and sharing instruments. The older boys showed younger ones how to tidy away toys or do actions. The four-year-old, once he became confident in the security of the people he was with, demonstrated musical ability, understanding of ways to behave with others and support for the group, encouraging younger ones to participate. Participants in the group felt they had 'got to know each other' through the sessions which had helped them 'to be friends and a real community'.

Personal Development - Adult and Child

Musical activities encouraged bonding between parents and their children. This was enhanced through routine activities such as welcoming a child and parent in a song and particularly through songs where children and parents worked in twos together, such as 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' and 'Incey, Wincey Spider'. Participants made musical instruments together and enjoyed accessing the sessions and meeting people.

The made musical instruments gave an increased sense of bonding between the group, with participants eager to store possible boxes and materials, such as silver paper or chocolate wrappers. They were delighted their suggestion of the activity had been used as a basis of a session and shared support for the babies and toddlers through helping them to make their own instrument.



Toddler Exploring the Instruments Made Part Way through the Session

Wider Learning

The musical activities fostered a wider learning for young children with discussions with parents, and supported development of mathematics, for example, counting shapes, or expressive arts through different sounds, textures and materials or awareness of the world around them, through songs such as the 'Wheels On The Bus'. Language opportunities were promoted, for example in response songs.

Those based at the Sleaford Foyer had a secure, safe, supportive base to begin their development into group interactions.



Toddler Concentrating on the Song 'Incey, Wincey Spider' and Linking Pictures to Sounds

Social Capital

There is no definitive meaning of the term social capital but for the purposes of this study, it was meant as 'the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations' (Fukuyama, 1995: 10). The participants were able to be part of a network of relationships, developing their social skills which would enable them to use these skills in other situations. This aspect was demonstrated in a myriad of ways.

Confidence In Own Ability and Ideas

Participants suggested their own ideas, for example, the focus of a session such as making musical instruments or accessing the outdoor space. This affirmation of their suggestion grew their confidence to suggest activities or enhancements of play. Their confidence in speaking to the group grew. It fostered further discussions about future plans for their own and their children's development and next steps. Participants demonstrated a high level of organisation for themselves and their children, preparing for the session and getting their children ready to enable a good start to the session. Frequently they were eager, arriving early and waiting for the Music Facilitator to arrive, with drinks and biscuits prepared. Attendance was very good and individuals only missed a session during the programme, due to a medical appointment or when their child was ill.

Meeting Others

Participants developed a greater ability to meet others and visit new places. Their networks grew, both within the setting as they supported each other, but also as they participated in groups in the wider community, for example, sessions at the Church Hall or a visit to a farm.

Next Steps

Participants spoke of their improved confidence in attending nurseries for their children's next steps. Some had identified that they might find it difficult but not impossible. For example, a friend might visit with them initially too or it might be challenging leaving their child with others. Parents began to view their future more positively, such as gaining employment or accessing training courses.

Conclusions: Strengths and Challenges

The social interactions organised, devised and encouraged through musical activities and the opportunity to access these in a non-threatening, safe environment gave young parents and their babies and toddlers the means to learn new skills in personal, social and emotional development as well as enjoy and develop their musical ability for themselves and their children.

Further work could be provided for young parents leaving care. It was evident that, while the young parents were well supported by staff from Barnardo's while the post was in place, participants were attempting to establish themselves in their new role and found their ability to engage in a group situation challenging. This could have a significant detrimental effect on their ability to participate in social interactions and inhibit their children during transition to school, socially and for educational opportunities. Basic needs, such as food and housing need to be met to enable young parents and their children to develop and thrive. This takes a while for support systems to organise and the interim period could be significantly challenging.

The young parents had positive suggestions for ways forward, for example, outdoor learning when appropriate or seeking advice for behaviour management. These were incorporated into future interventions planned. The importance of a supportive, welcoming venue was apparent. There were anxieties concerning being judged, for example, that they might be assessed through a glass window by an unknown person while they were participating in the activities, which might have negative consequences for them. A need to gain trust was apparent. Positive behaviour management strategies were used and promoted a happy, stimulating and encouraging atmosphere where participants could flourish, sharing their growing understanding of music and the development of their children.

Recommendations

The venue for the group musical activities is crucial in facilitating the requisite resources and needs for the interventions. The young parents needed to feel safe, welcomed and access a non-judgemental atmosphere where their hard work and challenges were appreciated and understood, with achievements celebrated.

Further musical network groups are recommended as an essential aspect to support young parents in challenging circumstances to develop their personal potential, gain confidence in their parenting skills, enhance the bond between parent and child and give the babies and young children opportunities to thrive in a positive environment.

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Appendix A

Songs with Your Child

Hello song

Hello.....

Hello.....

? And ?

It's good to see you here.

Instrument Songs

The Music Band

We are the music band, we come from far away and we can play.

What can we play?

We play our shakers.

Shake and shake and shake and stop

Shake and shake, shake and stop.

Mr Music had a Band

Mr Music had a band, had a band, had a band

Mr Music had a band

Let's march this way.

We Play and Stop

We play and we play and we stop!

We play and we play and we stop!

We play and we play

And we play and we play,

We play and we play and we stop!

I'm Playing – to the tune of Frere Jacques

I'm playing quietly,

I'm playing quietly,

Can you too?

Let's play together,

Let's play together

I love you.

Movement Songs

Hands On Our Head – to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

Hands on your head

Touch your toes

Turn around

Point to your nose

Clap your hands

Clean your teeth

Stretch your arms

Go to sleep (lie on the floor)

As we sit, on the ground

We will listen to some sounds.

Produced by H Benson Music - March 2017

Driving in My Car - to the tune The Farmer's in His Den

I'm driving in my car, I'm driving in my car
Beep Beep Toot Toot I'm driving in my car
I'm driving very fast, I'm driving very fast
Beep Beep Toot Toot I'm driving very fast
I'm driving very slow, I'm driving very slow
Beep Beep Toot Toot I'm driving very slow
The lights have turned to red, The lights have turned to red
Beep Beep Toot Toot So I must stop the car
The lights have turned to green, The lights have turned to green
Beep Beep Toot Toot So I can drive again

Clap your Hands - to the tune of Bobby Shaftoe

Clap your hands and wiggle your fingers
Clap your hands and wiggle your fingers
Clap your hands and wiggle your fingers
Now you've made a pattern

*Tap your knees and blink your eyelids
Bang the floor and nod your head
Rub your hand and shake your shoulders*

Roll The Ball

Roll the ball,
Roll the ball,
Roll the ball to
....catch the ball
And roll it back to me.

Row, row, row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.

The Grand Old Duke of York

Oh, the grand old Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men,
He marched them up to the top of the hill
And he marched them down again.
And when they were up they were up.
And when they were down they were down.
And when they were only half way up,
They were neither up nor down.

Lycra Songs

Where is?

Where is??, Where is s/he
Where is??, where is s/he
Where is??, where is s/he
There s/he is!

Stretchy Lycra

Up and down x2
Side to side x2
Forward and backwards
Here we go again
Ready.....

Stars on a Trampoline

3 stars on a trampoline
Boing boing boing boing
3 stars on a trampoline
Boing, boing boing

Popcorn in the Pan

Popcorn in the pan
Popcorn in the pan
Shake it up Shake it up
Pop! Pop! Pop!

5 Little Peas

5 little peas in a pea pod pressed
One grew, two grew,
So did all the rest
They grew and they grew
and they did not stop
Till one day
The pod went POP!

Appendix B

Possible Interview Questions for Autumn 2015

- Introduction and thanks for helping to support the project.
- What sorts of things does your baby/toddler like to do?
- What sorts of activities do you enjoy doing with your baby/toddler?
- How old is s/he?
- Does s/he enjoy music? What does s/he do to show this?
- Do you like music? Do you have any favourites?
- Do you sing nursery rhymes together? If so, which ones do you like to sing?
- Do you like to sing any other songs together? What are they?
- When do you do this?
- Have you played a musical instrument?
- Do you like meeting other people with your baby?
- What is especially good about meeting others?
- Are there difficulties?
- Is there any way we can help you to meet others?
- What are your expectations from the sessions?
- Do you think there are any other questions we should have asked?

Appendix C

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Young Parents Leaving Care: The use of musical activities to promote social interaction.

Name of Researcher: Dr Pat Beckley

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

 Yes No

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason

 Yes No

3. I agree to take part in this research project and for the data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication.

 Yes No

Name of participant

Signature

Date:

Name of researcher

Signature:

Date:



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