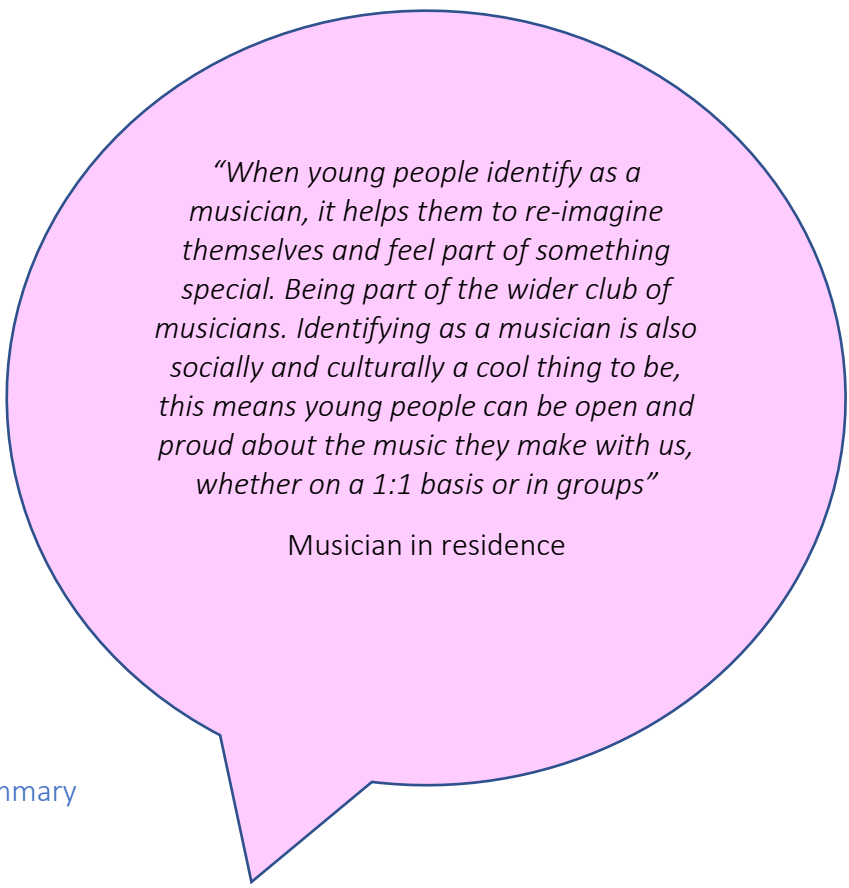# Small stories of hope: An evaluation of "Young Voices" music making intervention with children and young people in custody and nonmainstream schools.

Written by Alexandra Russell

Contents

> *"When young people identify as a musician, it helps them to re-imagine themselves and feel part of something special. Being part of the wider club of musicians. Identifying as a musician is also socially and culturally a cool thing to be, this means young people can be open and proud about the music they make with us, whether on a 1:1 basis or in groups"*
>
> Musician in residence

Executive summary

Overview

- The study conducted a comprehensive and ethically robust evaluation of Young Voices; a new programme for Changing Tunes that engages children and young people in custodial settings and attending nonmainstream schools in music making sessions delivered on a rolling basis.

- The study explores the 'co-creation of narratives of change', based on informal observations and conversations with children, young people and musicians in residence.

- It is the narratives of children and young people, and the musicians that work with them, that have shaped and informed the study methodologies and key findings.

Settings & visits

- Vinney Green Secure Children's Unit (03.11.22 & 01.12.22)
- HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall (08.12.22 & 22.12.22)
- St. Mattias Pupil Referral Unit (27.09.22 & 24.01.23)

Sample

- 9 X children and young people
- 4 X musicians in residence

Methodology

- Ethnography
- Informal group/participant observations
- Researcher as participant
- Unstructured interviews

The study was designed to address the three following research questions:

1. What are the relational qualities between the Changing Tunes' adult Theory of Change model and the Young Voices programme?
2. How does Young Voices methodologies support the development of positive identities away from that of an offender/ excluded child/young person?
3. How do theories of social capital and desistance emerge in the narratives of participants?

Background

- Children and young people held in custodial settings, and those placed in provision outside of mainstream education, often lack a positive influence in their life and are likely to be surrounded by negativity (Wong, 2021). They can be subject to a multitude of serious complex life circumstances and have often experienced adverse childhood experiences, score low in confidence and self-esteem, have special educational needs, and metal health challenges, which can cause significant barriers to participation. This makes them two of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society.

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 31 states that 'every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities' (UNICEF, 1989). Access to the arts should be seen as a cultural entitlement, just as access to education is an entitlement for all children and young people (Arts Council England, 2013). The arts have been shown to be a meaningful tool for supporting highly vulnerable children and young people being held in prisons, secure children's homes and in nonmainstream educational settings. They have the capacity to 'build self-confidence and skills through writing, producing, and performing their own music' (Wong, 2021).

- The 2019 White Paper illustrates ways in which arts projects may play an important part in the process of desistance; aiding changes in self-identity and personal agency, with the capacity to build social and human capital. For example, the arts may help to foster a sense of achievement or new ways of seeing oneself and others, in some cases motivating offenders to engage with other services. McNeill (2012: 2) states that:

  > 'the arts can encourage cooperation within the groups, between the group members and the arts practitioners, and, on occasions, outside of the immediate art groups, these projects not only develop social and human capital, but demonstrate how negotiations are managed in positive personal and professional relationships'

- Participatory and participant led music making methodologies are well positioned to open up a different yet meaningful form of engagement that is fun and gives children and young people permission to play, so they can move from being passive recipients of policy or practice to active participants in design. In doing so, this shifts the power imbalance between the 'professional' and 'child' to create a greater sense of equality in the learning environment. This process requires practitioners to be open-minded, and participation to be facilitated by skilled musicians who understand the barriers children and young people face.

- Many children and young people attending nonmainstream schools, as well as those in custody, have spent limited time in formal educational settings – often citing negative experiences of education and learning that cause lasting damage to wellbeing (YMCA, 2016). This may mean that they are likely to struggle to gain meaningful benefits from engaging in formal learning styles and environments that require them to be passive and stationary. 'Flexible learning programmes offer a model of re-engagement in which relational ways of being an educator are prioritised' (Morgan, 2015: 1). This advocates for the use of active, experiential and democratic methods of learning that shift away from traditional classroom and teacher-centric methods; allowing children and young people to explore and rehearse versions of themselves in a meaningful and memorable way.

Young Voices key attributes:

- Participant led / co-produced
- On-going sessions (i.e. on a rolling basis)
- Democratic dialogue
- Responsive to learning styles and needs
- Shame free / non targeted
- Active & collaborative
- Creative & playful
- Develops pro social and strength based relationships and network (i.e. builds social and human capital)
- Improves confidence & self-esteem
- Supports the reconstruction of a values and beliefs system
- Hopeful and forward looking
- Develops music skills and aptitude to pursue music orientated goals post release/school

- Although the study was conducted at three separate settings, key findings show the relational qualities and benefits of Young Voices across custodial settings and in nonmainstream schools. Participants reported positive experiences, including fun and enjoyment, self-expression, and having something meaningful to do with their time. They described enhanced feelings of mental wellbeing, including relief from depression, improved mood, relaxation, and reduced stress and tendency for violence.

- Young Voices harnesses creativity, connectivity and positive self-expression to explore what it means to be human. The use of active, fun, collaborative and participatory music making methods result in high levels of engagement. Permission to play is an essential foundation of the programme, helping to build rapid levels of rapport and trust within groups and on a one-to-one basis. This allows guards to be dropped and vulnerability to be shown in front of others. The process aids the development of openness, social bonds, meaningful deconstruction of complex intrapersonal and interpersonal themes and the reimaging of self in a short space of time within a safe learning environment.

- All participants in the study stated that they enjoyed the process of music making, as it was a chance for them to learn new skills and develop their talents in line with their future goal of 'becoming' a musician. Young Voices was also a mechanism for them to reflect on their own lives, gaining a deeper understanding of who they are, achieving more self-acceptance, and having a platform to be heard, respected and challenge negative identities associated with offending and marginalisation.

- Narratives of participants indicate that Young Voices builds social ties and networks of trust, increasing social and human capital through the development of 'deep relationships' between peers and musicians in residence. The benefits gained from building social bonds with peers and musicians gave participants access to a range of different perspectives from within the group and challenged entrenched perception of a negative 'self'. The study asserts that access to informal music making sessions contribute to the actual process of pro-social identity formation, to a large degree irrespective of content (Hinton-Smith et al.2019).

- Key findings from the study have informed the design of a new *Theory of Change model (ToC), contributing to an emerging discourse and body of knowledge on the importance of the arts with excluded, marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people. The ToC model attempts to present a composite picture of Young Voices methodological approach with children and young people which shares some areas of commonality with the adult ToC model. However, there are key areas where the adult model differs to their work with children and young people. The new model depicts a series of interconnecting and progressive key attributes, activities, outcomes and goals that are the cumulative result of participation in Young Voces. The goals cited in the new ToC model support the 2021 National Association of Youth Justice briefing: *Explaining desistance: looking forward, not backwards* (Wigzell, 2021):

1. Agency
    - nurturing individuals' personal agency to change
2. Identity
    - A positive identity away from that of an 'offender'/ excluded YP
3. Socio-structural factors
    - Growing aspirations to pursue personal development opportunities
4. Relationships
    - Able to reconcile, build and maintain healthy and safe social networks

(Wigzell, 2021: 8-12)

*ToC model can be found in the appendix of this report.

Background

Note: *the terms 'children and young people' and 'participants' refer to individuals that took part in the study.*

Despite the numerous complex challenges faced by children and young people in custody and attending nonmainstream schools, hope can be found in the work that the voluntary sector delivers in these settings. Changing Tunes engages 'people with lived experience of the criminal justice system in music programmes that unlock their creativity and individual potential'. Their vision is of a world where 'people with lived experience of the criminal justice system can experience the life-enhancing benefits of music-making, especially its power to help them lead crime-free lives that are meaningful and creative.'

Young Voices is a new initiative for Changing Tunes, engaging children and young people within nonmainstream education and custodial settings in informal, participatory and co-produced music making sessions that are delivered by musicians in residence on a rolling basis. The ethnographic study was conducted over two separate visits to Vinney Green Secure Children's Unit (SCU), St. Matthias Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall and ranged from one hour, to full day sessions. The study builds on the assertion that offenders [and non-offenders] are capable of personal change when motivated, given the chance to express themselves differently and the opportunity to try out new ways of relating to other people (Baim et al. 2002).

The ethnographic study is participant-centred, drawing on key insights and perspectives of nine children and young people participating in the Young Voices programme. It is in their narratives and stories that meaning can be deciphered, giving key insights into how the Young Voices programme was experienced and interpreted by those taking part in it. The participation of musicians working alongside participants proved to be instrumentally positive for everyone – breaking down barriers and achieving high levels of engagement. The narratives of musicians in residence will also provide key insights into Young Voices methodological approach and offer valuable context for each setting.

The study aims to represent the individual and collective 'small stories' (Maruna et al., 2019) that children and young people tell themselves and others about the 'co creation of narratives of change' (Georgakopoulou, 2006). It is within small stories that it is possible to find narratives of hope, and whilst even small stories are multi-dimensional, the core of each story is representative as 'intrapersonal, interpersonal, or systemic' (Todd-Kvan 2021). The study considers the relational qualities between the Changing Tunes adult Theory of Change model and their work with children and young people to examine possible shifts in pedagogy. The key findings aim to present meaning rather than conclusions based on the qualitative research methods employed and small sample number. However, 'naturalistic generalisations' may be derived from the key findings. For example, it may be possible to apply some aspects of good practice, such as the benefits of developing positive and democratically structured relationships when working with children and young people who are, or have the potential to be, disaffected (Leather, 2009).

The study is interdisciplinary and set within an existing body of knowledge of the benefits of arts practices with marginalised and social excluded groups. It employs theories of desistance, social capital, narrative identity, social learning theory and music pedagogies as a central framework to address the research questions. It considers how the formation of narratives of desistance, social capital and pro social and strength-based identities emerge during children and young people's participation.

Key findings suggest that the process and benefits of building social capital, and the development of pro social narrative identities are interrelation and interdependent concepts and constructs. Similarly, some of the enablers of desistance theory that have 'transferability and application to children' (Wigzell, 2021: 8-12) can be found in the narratives of all research participants (offender and non-offender). Therefore, the interplay between social capital, narrative identity and desistance presents areas of commonality between children and young people excluded from mainstream education, and those held in custodial settings.

Desistance theory is an emerging field that has mainly explored adult behaviours in relation to crime and cessation, and although there is no one activity that can effect change (such as programmes or people), it is typically understood to be 'more than just an absence of crime, it is the maintenance of crime-free behaviour and is an active process in itself. It is a journey that involves the pursuit of a positive life' (Maruna, 2007:652). Desistance narratives are founded on a belief in what Maruna and King (2009) call 'moral redeemability'. This is the assumption that people can change or that a person's past does not necessarily dictate their future. Although most young people 'mature out of crime by the time they reach their early twenties, there is a growing body of literature that suggests there are commonalities in the desistance pathways of adults and adolescents, including the role of positive supportive relationships and networks' (Wigzell, 2021: 6) which are a key enabler of building social capital.

Desistance takes success stories seriously, 'recognising the individual as the agent of change' (Maruna et. al, 2019:6). The study will consider how desistance theories (Cernkovich et al.,2002; Maruna et al., 2019) are evident in new self-narratives that are formed in relation to connected experiences. Todd-Kvam (2021) asserts that desistance is supported by social networks and relationships, and that behavioural change requires both individual agency and collective support networks to establish stability. Research conducted by Maruna (2001) suggests that self-expression and introspection (often associated with participatory arts activities) may support some of the incremental steps of desistance, by empowering children and young people to 'discover their true self, usually with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in" them' (Wigzell, 2001: 87).

If it can be argued that custodial setting and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are part of our communities, then social capital is a relatable term when considering social cohesion. It is generally accepted that 'respectful and trusting relationships, social ties and networks of participation constitute some of the key enablers of social capital' (McNeill, 2006: 55). Bourdieu (1986) states that social capital is built on the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through social networks (Poteyeva, 2018). The development of 'relationships of care that build social capital should be of primary importance for practitioners to support and empower children and young people to achieve positive outcomes' (Wigzell, 2021: 12).

Narrative identity is socially constructed. Our narratives develop in interaction with ourselves, significant others and wider socio/cultural context, and continue to develop as they are told and retold (Todd-Kvam 2021). Difficulties arise when one self-narrative becomes dominant and rigid, constraining a person's ability to imagine alternate versions of themselves. Change is possible when experiences challenge our dominant self-narratives. Gergen and Gergen (1988) emphasise the continuous and relational nature of narratives: their telling and enactment are inherently embedded and socially interdependent actions.

Identity plays some role when considering children and young people, with negative self-concept associated with engagement in offending and positive identity development often linked to desistance (McMahon and Jump, 2018; Johns et al., 2017; Beyond Youth Custody, 2017; Nugent and Barnes, 2013). Wigzell (2020) emphasises the need for 'caution over assumptions that all children in the youth justice system have pro-criminal identities that need to be changed, since they risk doing more harm than good; particularly if they are 'deficitfocused and stigmatising'. However, the 'small stories' found in the narrative identities of children and young people can help to develop our understanding of journeys of personal change and desistance.

Methodology

The study is purposively qualitative (Hu et al.2018), within the context of ethical and practical complexities of research with vulnerable groups (Roberts et al.,2018). Maruna (2019) highlights the importance of designing research methodologies that value stories about interactions with oneself, with others and with the 'system' that are central to this study. The research was conducted in accordance with social science research design (Straits et. al 1988: 94), including data collection; data processing; and data analysis and interpretation. It draws on data gathered from nine children and young people during music sessions, and 4 musicians in residence outside of sessions.

The methodology is grounded in a belief that stories are all around us and within us. Our narrative is the way in which we story our lives to make sense of the world around us and ourselves within it (Riessman, 1993). The relational acts of reflection and storytelling have been used for problem-solving (Bheamadu, 2003) and behavioural change (Cook et al, 2004) and more recently as a means to develop emotional literacy (Thomas et al., 2007). Telling our stories has the capacity to facilitate emotional development (Thomas and Killick, 2007; Noctor, 2006, Bettelheim, 1975) by fostering awareness and promoting empathy (Thomas and Killick, 2007) and equipping us with the skills and knowledge to work though emotional dilemmas and difficulties (Noctor, 2206).

Research questions:

1. What are the relational qualities between the Changing Tunes' adult Theory of Change model and the Young Voices programme?
2. How do Young Voices methodologies support the development of positive identities away from that of an offender/ excluded young person?
3. How do theories of social capital and desistance emerge in the new narratives of young people and musicians in residence?

Ethics

According to Cooper and Schindler, 'research must be designed so an informant does not suffer physical harm, discomfort, pain, embarrassment, or loss of privacy' (2003: 112). The study followed their six principles of ethical social research:

1. ethical responsibility rests with the individual researcher
2. subjects should not be exploited for person algin
3. some form of informed consent is highly recommended or required
4. all guarantees of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity should be honoured
5. subjects should not be coerced or humiliated
6. secret research should not be conducted

The study was purposively designed to be ethically robust and took a trauma informed approach to collecting data on 'creative arts' practices with vulnerable participants (Petrillo, 2021). It avoided discussing potentially triggering subjects around offences, historic abuse, bereavement, breakdown of the family unit etc. The design recognised the 'impact of trauma on young people's development and capacity to learn and reflect' (Morgan, 2015: 1). It acknowledges the profound and complex challenges and vulnerability of excluded children and young people in additional provision and custodial settings. Securing views of vulnerable children and young people is also challenging because of the inherent 'power imbalances between the researcher / professional and young person' (Slaw et al. 2022). Therefore, the research was designed to limit the sense of pressure children might feel at being asked direct questions by an adult that they had no relationship with prior to their participation in the study. This necessitated the need for conversations to be informal and unstructured, and questions were only asked within the context of what was being discussed within a session, and no form of note taking or use of audio recording was used within the sessions. All research participants voluntarily participated in the research, and informed consent was gained from all children, young people and musicians in residence prior to the commencement of the study. Anonymity was guaranteed (within a safeguarding framework) to ensure no identifiable information featured in the final report, and all agreed to have their contributions used within the key findings of this report.

Data gathering

- The research conducted an extensive review of relevant literature to construct a robust theoretical framework.

- Immersive ethnographic research methods were designed and delivered to respond to the learning styles of children and young people and the inherent disadvantages faced by many participants. Observing and interacting with a study's participants in their real-life environment, examining the behaviour of the participants in their given social situation and understanding the group members' own interpretation of such behaviour.

- Ethnography allowed me to actively participate in the Young Voices programme and build rapport and trust with participants; gaining an insider's perspective of the group and to have experiences similar to the group members (Adams, 2017:1).

- Researcher as participant approaches (Gans,1968) allowed for 'intensive research involvement, as observer and as participant' (Alexander,1982), 'wandering together with' participants in the process of arriving at insight and knowledge (Kvale,2007:19), enabling me to 'speak next to, as opposed to speaking for, marginalised groups' (Hinton-Smith et al.2019). Researcher-participant discussion allowed for the negotiation of meaning and supported gathering a valid representation of participant voice.

- Informal and unstructured interview techniques go hand-in-hand with participant observation and allowed me to engage in casual conversations with children and young people. Brief notes were taken immediately after the act to recall experiences in the field. Observation and informal interviewing helped to develop an understanding of the setting and to build rapport and trust by participating in the conversation. This is a beneficial approach as it helped me to foster 'low pressure' interactions and allow respondents to speak more freely and openly, while gaining an understanding of a setting and participants' ways of seeing the world around them' (Crabtree, 2006).

Participant access and recruitment

- Recruitment was via self-response to advertisement (Hu et al,2018) that was facilitated by musicians in residence at each setting. Participation was on a voluntary basis (subject to gaining informed consent).

Data analysis

- This study adopted an interpretative approach that 'embraces a view that reality is socially constructed and made meaningful through actors' understanding of events' (Putnam, 2017). Social theories of interpretative approaches assert that complexities of meaning are constructed and enacted in social interactions. It will use inductive research methods that 'start with specific observations based on empirical evidence, draw general conclusions and then build abstract ideas on the basis of evidence' (Creswell et al., 2007: 23). The stories that informants choose to share, whether relevant to the research question will still provide relevant insights into informants' vales, identities, cultures and communities.

- This study is framed by an appreciative inquiry approach, an interview method that allows self-reflection of the positive social capital available to and accessed by the participant. Appreciative inquiry was selected for its ability to draw out sources of social capital within the setting (Liebling et al., 1999), particularly focusing on beneficial gains from social resources rather than negative experiences associated with custody and marginalisation.

- Thematic analysis (Madden, 2017:142) will present a picture of the social context of the study to 'explore patterns and emerging themes and look for relationships between them' (Brewer,2000:105).

- A Theory of Change will be designed as part of the interpretive stage.

Arts in custody and beyond

'Despite complex reasons for disengagement and exclusion from conventional schooling, all children have a right to education that is of a high quality. Disenfranchised young people require alternatives for re-engaging in education.'

(Morgan, 2015: 1)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 31 states that 'every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities' (UNICEF, 1989). Access to the arts should be seen as a cultural entitlement, just as access to education is an entitlement for all children and young people (Arts Council England, 2013). The arts have been shown to be a meaningful tool for supporting highly vulnerable children and young people being held in prisons, secure children's homes and in nonmainstream educational settings. Children and young people in these settings are often facing complex life challenges resulting from disadvantage and marginalisation. Across PRUs, Secure Children's Units (SCU) and Young Offender Institutions (YOIs), the arts and cultural provision is effective in helping children and young people to:

- *Improve their mental health and wellbeing*
- *Express themselves and articulate their issues and challenges*
- *Take ownership over their creative expression*
- *Have an input in their own learning and personal development*
- *Build and develop transferable learning skills*

(Artsmark, 2022)

Many children and young people attending nonmainstream schools, as well as those in custody, have spent limited time in formal educational settings – often citing negative experiences of education and learning that cause lasting damage to wellbeing (YMCA, 2016). This can mean that these children and young people are likely to struggle to gain meaningful benefits from engaging in formal learning styles and environments that require them to be passive and stationary. 'Flexible learning programmes offer a model of re-engagement in which relational ways of being an educator are prioritised' (Morgan, 2015: 1). This advocates for the use of active, experiential and democratic methods of learning that shift away from traditional classroom and teacher-centric methods; allowing children and young people to explore and rehearse versions of themselves in a meaningful and memorable way.

The 2021 White Paper revealed that 42% of prisoners were excluded from school, this suggests that young people in custodial settings are also likely to feel more comfortable in informal learning environments to avoid the potentially triggering experience of formal educational settings. McGuire (2004) asserts that the learning styles of 'offenders' requires active and participatory methods of working that must be responsive to the learning styles of offenders. Behavioural programmes are most effective when they, 'help offenders to challenge their own (and each other's) attitudes in a powerful and memorable way – using role play, interpersonal problem solving and modelling, role reversal exercises and guided group discussion' (McGuire, 2004 p., 58).

Young Voices is responsive to this context and employs the four following models of learning that advocate for the use of active, participatory and co-produced methods that shift away from traditional classroom and teacher-centric methods. These include:

1. Freire's (1970) pedagogy treats 'learners' and 'teachers' as 'co-creators' of knowledge, and places them both at the heart of the learning and creative process.
2. Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) strategies to support the learning styles of children and people to develop themselves through 'doing'.
3. The VARK model (Mills et al., 1992) cites kinaesthetic learning styles allow 'learners' to physically act out events or use all their senses while learning.
4. The Socratic Method asserts that both the teacher and learner are responsible for adding to the discussion and expressing their thoughts, queries, and other concerns. It uses open-ended group discussion and debate with no pre-determined results. It promotes critical thinking and focuses on questions opposed to answers. With the help of questions, 'learners' can determine and identify the moral obligations and values of their life. It is a collaborative approach by the 'teacher' that motivates 'students' to find their own approach to solve problems.

Arts programmes with socially excluded and marginalised groups must be 'forward looking, they must focus on the potential of the 'individual', and what useful contribution, he or she can do in the future, and not on what harm he or she has done in the past' (Baim et al, 2002). Coastes (2016) recommends the 'provision of arts' and 'behavioural programmes' as central to reforms of 'rehabilitation' in prisons and secure settings.

The National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA, 2019) states that art and creativity have the power to enable personal development and foster positive relationships and networks, and are essential for health and wellbeing, and therefore these activities have a crucial role to play in a restricted regime.

Consultations with people held in custody have shown that, 'connecting with others, groups and one to one communication with people in prison was without doubt the most common theme arising from discussions on regime reform' (Conway, 2021:17). The 2019 White Paper illustrates ways in which arts projects may play an important part in the process of desistance; aiding changes in self-identity and personal agency, with the capacity to build social and human capital. For example, the arts may help to foster a sense of achievement or new ways of seeing oneself and others, in some cases motivating offenders to engage with other services. McNeill (2012: 2) states that:

> 'the arts can encourage cooperation within the groups, between the group members and the arts practitioners, and, on occasions, outside of the immediate art groups, these projects not only develop social and human capital, but demonstrate how negotiations are managed in positive personal and professional relationships'

However, the 2019 White Paper also found that there is insufficient evidence to determine whether arts projects have a measurable impact on reoffending. The Arts Council England (2013) asserts that projects 'need to have a longer-term perspective and more hard evidence on the impact they might be having on promoting social inclusion and behavioural change' to inform policy-making. Short term arts projects often fail to enrich young people's lives and can lead to frustration and disappointment (de Roeper and Savelsberg, 2009; Woodward et al., 2008). While acknowledging the need for longer term studies, there is evidence to suggest short term arts projects may play a crucial role in helping those in custody see a new crime-free future for themselves, 'with a clear link between the arts and desistance' (Hardwick, 2019).

The process of making art can be a liberating and affirming experience for young people that have been marginalised and disenfranchised due to complex life circumstances. The arts have been shown to build confidence, self-worth & identity and self-reflection (among other attributes cited in the key finding section of this report). However, it is important to resist assumptions of 'transformation' that are commonly attributed to the arts, and instead consider reframing impact as evidencing incremental steps towards personal development and growth.

The national standards for children in the youth justice system (GOV.UK, 2019) recommends the following approaches to supporting socially excluded and marginalised children and young people:

1. *Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime. This leads to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.*
2. *Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.*

Participatory and participant led music making methodologies are well positioned to open up a different, yet meaningful form of engagement that is fun, so they can move from being passive recipients of policy or practice to active participants in design. In doing so this shifts the power imbalance between the professional and child to create a greater sense of equality in the learning environment. This process requires practitioners and staff to be open-minded, and participation to be facilitated by skilled musicians who understand the barriers children and young people face.

Music making projects in custodial settings can help children and young people to shape their individual and collective identities, providing opportunities for development and shifting attention away from offender identities (Woodward et al., 2008; de Roeper and Savelsberg, 2009; Baker and Homan, 2007).

The arts can also widen horizons and address disadvantage by affording children and young people valuable opportunities for expression and release as well as resources for coping with difficult emotions (de Roeper and Savelsberg, 2009; Lashua, 2005; Woodward et al., 2008). Viggiani (2011:5) found that music projects with children and young people in custodial settings produce the following outcomes:

- *Improvements in self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-concept*
- *Improvements in mood, reduced anger, increased motivation and improved behaviour*
- *Young people report positive perceptions of the impact of music projects*

Access to the arts and creativity can also 'increase personal development and transform the lives of children and young people who may never have had access to the arts before' (Koestler, 2019). As well as promoting arts-based skills, programmes are often intended to tackle offending behaviour and reconnect young people at risk to mainstream education, training and employment (Arts Council England, 2013). Participatory and participant led music is a means of finding a peace and calm that exist far too infrequently elsewhere in their lives. Taylor (2015: 23) states:

> *'The freedom to work independently and the element of trust that is displayed in allowing the participants the chance to devise, develop and experiment as musicians, raises self-esteem, boosting confidence, but also, enables young musicians to find their own musical voice, and express themselves.'*

This approach to music making necessitates consideration of the individual needs and interests of children and young people, as 'there is no 'one-size-fits-all' pedagogy' (Davidson, 2022). For example, some young people respond positively to rap as a genre that acknowledges their backgrounds and respects 'their' music. More broadly, the impact of music making may be contingent upon the extent of 'ownership' felt by the young people taking part. However, this sense of 'ownership' may vary across contexts and can be influenced by a range of factors, including the skills and approaches of those leading music projects (Baker and Homan, 2007; Lashua, 2005; Tyson, 2002; Gann, 2010).

Although the arts have been shown to 'make a significant and positive difference to the lives of socially excluded young people, funding needs to be moved away from 'one-off, isolated pilot projects' into more coherent strategies that would allow young people to participate in on-going arts projects (Randell, 2002 as cited in Wilkin, 2005). The delivery of rolling sessions (i.e. without a pre-determined end) increases the formation of meaningful and trusting relationships between peers and musician, and recognises the likely 'ebb and flow' in participation and engagement of children and young people with complex emotional needs.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are 'education placements for children unable to attend a mainstream or special school' (GOV, 2022), and fulfils local authority obligations to educate all children. The vast majority of pupils permanently excluded in the UK are from schools in England (Anna Freud, NCCF, 2022). PRUs cater for a variety of children's needs and offers support through a combination of therapeutic approaches, small group teaching and vocational teaching methods (Tate and Greatbatch 2017). However, it is important to acknowledge the significant challenges and barriers to participation and progression that children in additional provision face.

> '*the potential adverse effects of exclusion and the disadvantageous outcomes for PRU attendees has long-lasting harmful implications for physical/ mental health, educational attainment, employment, and criminality; DfE (2020) reports just 60% of CYPs from AP moving on age 16 to a sustained destination (education, apprenticeship, or employment)'*

(Owen, 2022: 20)

Although PRUs do not necessarily always accommodate looked after children, 'Almost 40% of looked after children go to nonmainstream schools (such as pupil referral units and alternative provision) and their educational attainments are far lower than the 60% who went to mainstream ones' (Thomas et al. 2015: 6). The national protocol on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers (MoJ, 2018), states that looked after children (who have been looked after for at least 12 months) are five times more likely to offend than all children. The current rate of permanent school exclusions and pupils being illegally excluded from their school, are leaving children vulnerable to criminal exploitation' (Unicef, 2020:2) and 'may require proactive safeguarding from gang influences and the threat of trafficking' (JFK, 2019).

Children and young people attending PRUs experience significant inequality and disadvantage, with 'over half of pupils eligible for free school meals (54.6%), this compares to 22.5% for the overall school population' with most pupils (72.2%) being boys (GOV, 2022). PRUs have also been evidenced to have a negative impact on some children's wellbeing (CYPN, 2014), resulting in a 'sense of isolation and stigma, which can exacerbate feelings of social exclusion and disillusionment' (JFK, 2019). This can result in negative feelings about school (Morrison, 2023).

The Independent (2015) cites that, 'Children will often arrive to Pupil Referral Units at a chaotic moment in their lives', commonly in the context of difficult and complex family situations. Children and young people who are excluded from school were more likely to have behavioural difficulties, difficulties with peers, attention difficulties, low self-esteem and emotional and mental health difficulties, with many children and families struggling with substance misuse issues and have experienced domestic violence (National Children's Bureau, 2011). Children referred to PRUs often have difficulties with peers, score low for positive wellbeing, emotional strengths and skills and support networks (Anna Freud, NCCF, 2022).

Despite these complex challenges, PRUs can also be the saviour for children and young people who would otherwise have little or no hope for an educational future. Sobel (2019) asserts that PRUs have the power to support children to 'feel a sense of belonging, a sense of worth, a sense of becoming more than just a 'naughty kid'.

'In the last fifteen years of working in PRUs I have been touched by the innovation from teachers, senior leaders, teaching assistants and even the administrators.'

(Sobel, 2019: 2)

PRUs can also be a good base from which to deliver a range of services. With the advantage of having a higher pupil/staff ratio, PRU staff generally 'know their young people and often their parents very well and work hard to build a relationship of trust which is vital if there is to be meaningful engagement with services' (National Children's Bureau, 2011). Nevertheless, children and young people that are placed in PRUs still face significant barriers to participation due to the aforementioned factors. This requires settings to be 'aware of the depth and multiplicity of the needs of their pupils' (National Children's Bureau, 2011) by collaborating with a broad spectrum of agencies to support their welfare and mental health needs. PRUs must be equipped to be able to provide the different types of support children need in order to increase the likelihood of successful reintegration into mainstream education and, over time, improve their life chances. It is essential that initiatives to support pupils with 'social, emotional and mental health difficulties become more widely known and studied' (Thomas et al. 2015: 7).

'Failure to address the broader social and emotional needs of these young people may impede their capacity to take advantage of these educational opportunities, and will almost certainly continue to have a negative impact on their educational outcomes and future life chances'

(National Children's Bureau, 2011)

Children & young people in custody

Prisons are indicative of our moral and ethical compass. Dostoevsky (1985) eloquently asserted that, 'The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.'

The number of child arrests in the UK has reduced by 55 per cent since 2010. There are now half as many young adults in prison as there were 12 years ago (MoJ, 2022). Despite this, England and Wales still have the highest level of child imprisonment in Western Europe (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2023). The criminal justice outcomes for all children released from custody are bleak. 'The re-offending rate for children and young people sentenced to custody is 69.3% within twelve months, with those given sentences of less than six months having the highest reoffending rate at 77.4%' (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2023).

'Whilst custodial sentences are specifically for young adults (classified as aged 18–20), HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) policy and practice increasingly recognises that the process of brain development and maturity takes place up to the age of 25. And yet, there is often no difference between how young adults are treated compared with adult prisoners'

(Prison Reform Trust, 2023: 43)

The reduced level of cognitive capacity necessitates the need for radically different approaches to meet the emotional and educational needs of children and young people than those used in adult custodial settings. While in custody, each child and young person should be given access to age appropriate personal development opportunities that enable them to 'lead a successful, fulfilled and crime-free life on return to their community' (Prison Reform Trust, 2023: 43).

However, 'purposeful activity, such as education and training opportunities, is poor' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2022). The Howard League for Penal Reform (2023) states:

> '..there is no particular regime, training or education for 18 to 21 year olds whilst in prison. The result is that many spend most of the day locked up in their cells doing nothing. As a whole, young adults are overlooked in every aspect of their sentence.'

A 2020 Unicef analysis of the Youth Justice System in the UK states:

> 'Children who come into contact with the law are frequently overlooked, and are among the most vulnerable, marginalised and hidden groups within society. They have often been in the care system, experienced neglect or abuse and may have been excluded from school.'

To tackle high levels of reoffending and poor provision of meaningful activity, children and young people require learning environments that are trauma informed, safe, engaging and offer opportunities for their voices to be heard. 'Custodial settings that hold children and young people need to become places of purpose, not just punishment' (Conway, 2021:1). They have a duty of care to improve rehabilitation opportunities, and 'make this a key ambition of the prison system' (Conway, 2021:7). A 2023 Prison Reform Trust report states:

> 'The educational background of children in custody is poor—nearly nine out of 10 children (89%) in YOIs said they had been excluded from school. Over two-fifths (42%) said that they were aged 14 or younger when they were last at school. 85% of children in YOIs said they were taking part in education in custody before the pandemic. Only 16% said they were in offending behaviour programmes, 8% had a job, and 5% were in vocational or skills training'.

Compared to other parts of the youth justice system, YOIs have a lower staff to offender ratio, reflecting the focus of these institutions on incarceration as opposed to rehabilitation and care. COVID-19 had a significant impact on young people's mental health, which left many feeling lonely and isolated (Office for National Statistics, April 2021). For young people in custody, the pandemic was a 'catastrophe' in terms of rehabilitation' (Conway, 2021, p.3). HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2022) highlighted the 'significant damage' that continues to be caused by the lack of rehabilitation provision. In 2022 most young people were still locked in their cells for 22.5 hours a day, and even more at the weekend, with limited access to hygiene, social interaction and meaningful activities (PRT, 2022). The monumental task of reforming a penal system in crisis continues to be deeply compounded by the Covid 19 pandemic. It is a lack of meaningful activity outside of cells, matched with significantly reduced access to rehabilitation, as well as prisons being understaffed, which is having a pernicious effect on prisoners' mental health and well-being. A 2022 report published by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) paints a bleak picture of the current conditions for prisoners amid on-going Covid 19 restrictions:

> 'Over two out of five (44%) [of prisoners] reported experiencing thoughts that they would "be better off dead" or considered hurting themselves in the preceding two weeks. Almost one in five (19%) reported experiencing these thoughts every day.'

> (Prison: The Facts, 2022:4)

> 'Those agencies charged with the care of children and young people need to move away from current, 'interventions which are ultimately punitive, controlling, stigmatising and harmful' (Haines & Case, 2015: 4) and consider the 'importance of meaningful, trusting relationships, which are less amenable to procedure and measurement but equally, if not more, important for changing lives.

> *As France and Homel (2006: 305) argue, what children value but are often not receiving 'is not so much programmes and content, but a good supportive relationship with an adult who is not judgemental and is able to offer guidance and advocacy when needed.'*

<div align="right">(Wigzell, 2021: 3)</div>

Unicef (2020) asserts that the UK needs a system that gives every child who comes into contact with the law the opportunity to positively turn their life around. Children and young people in conflict with the law need 'love and support, not locking up. There are better ways to ensure that the troubled child of today does not become the adult prisoner of tomorrow' (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2023). This necessitates serious consideration of approaches that encompass the needs of the whole person and promote 'self-actualization, self-esteem, love and belonging' (Maslow,1943), as well providing opportunities to 'explore what it means to be human' (Thompson, 2020).

For children and young people in custodial, 'their label as an offender regularly supersedes their status as a child so that they are viewed as offenders first and foremost. When they are routinely viewed in this way there is an associated danger that their rights as children, rather than being understood as fundamental and intrinsic, are instead circumvented, ignored and disregarded' (Wigzell, 2021: 3). 'Amid the unique challenges currently facing society, it is more important than ever that the rights of children who are engaged in youth justice processes are recognised, protected and championed' (Unicef, 2020).

As Haines and Case (2015: 147) contend:

> *'There is a tendency for the youth justice system to lean towards interventions that are 'done to' children by practitioners rather than 'conducted with' children through detailed consultation and participation. Therefore, there is ironic potential for youth justice processes to actively disengage children.'*

There is an emerging body of knowledge that suggests 'effective interventions require the engagement of the child' (Wigzell, 2021: 3). However, children and young people in custodial settings often have 'limited opportunities to have their voice heard and state what they think would help them move away from offending, let alone their ambitions and aspirations for the future' (Wigzell, 2021: 4). This necessitates the need for custodial settings to design meaningful and quality learning opportunities that treat children and young people as 'co creators of knowledge' (Friere, 1970) in an effort to meet the specific social, emotion and physical needs of those in their care.

While not all secure order applications are made for young people already in the care system, the vast majority are (YJB, 2018). Fewer than 1% of all children in England are in care, but they make up more than half (52%) of children in secure children's units and young offender institutions (Prison Reform Trust, 2023). On care entry the inability of placements to sufficiently meet the complex emotional and behavioural needs of this small but vulnerable group of young people leads to an application for a secure order (Williams, et al 2019). Children can be victims of 'sexual/criminal exploitation, at risk of self-harm; or have a diagnosed or suspected mental health condition and have little or no contact with their parents or family members at the point of secure referral' (Wood et al. 2020: 10). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of children waiting for placements doubled. The limited number of SCHs spaces means that 'even when children get a place, they will likely end up living far away from home which must be incredibly for children and families' (Ofsted, 2020).

'Yong people are highly vulnerable and are less equipped to participate in group work than men in closed settings. 1:1 is valuable because I am a consistent presence in his life on a weekly basis and provide my undivided attention which is really valuable for him.

musician in residence

'I like doing the piano, I've got a keyboard at home now, so I can practice at home, then come here and do more practice. I want to do music when I leave school. It's quite calm in here when I'm playing – I focus on the music and forget everything else.'

young person

Key findings

St. Matthias Academy (PRU)

Overview

The 2022 Ofsted Inspection of St. Matthias Academy stated that:

> 'Pupils like this school. Teachers and pupils have strong relationships. Pupils feel safe and happy. Most pupils who attend St Matthias Academy have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, some pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties do not behave as well as they could, and at times learning is disrupted.'

(Ofsted, 2022: 2)

Despite the complex emotional and learning needs of children and young people at the setting, Ofsted places high expectations on 'staff to remind pupils of how they are expected to behave, and challenge inappropriate behaviour'. Academic achievement in reading and mathematics is cited as another area of significant importance, although it is reassuring to find that, 'subjects, such as art and science, are well considered and ambitious' (Ofsted, 2022: 2).

This study recognises the need for academic rigour to enable children to obtain essential skills in literacy and maths but argues that supporting the emotional well-being of vulnerable children should supersede, or at least be considered as important, within the stipulations set out by the curriculum in nonmainstream schools. Access to the arts supports a common sense framework to develop and nurture the emotional wellbeing and personal development of children in PRUs, providing the building blocks needed to enable meaningful engagement and learning.

Music making projects with vulnerable children and young people have been shown to have 'increased engagement with learning and employment, improved skills, increased confidence and self-esteem, improved communication, interaction and relationships, improved attitudes and responsibility, increased awareness, enhanced capacity for reflection and expression of feelings, and improved self-discipline and behaviour' (Viggiani et al. 2011: 4).

Young Voices is a new initiative at St. Matthias Academy, offering children the opportunity to engage in music making with a musician in residence. The sessions are held in the IT classroom in the presence of a member of staff who sat in the corner of the room occupied by another task on a computer. The high ratio of teachers to students at the PRU means that music sessions can be delivered on a 1:1 basis. This is an effective approach that appears to allow musicians the opportunity to quickly build rapport and high levels of trust with children by giving each child the attention they need to meaningfully engage in music making activities.

Participating in the Young Voices sessions was an autistic child who stated that he liked the certainty of working page by page through a piano tutor book. He enjoyed the process of learning cords and practicing pieces with a desire to 'get it right'. He was clearly very focused and spent the entirety of the session concentrating on playing classical music pieces while learning all of the technical aspects of music theory. He went on to tell me that he had been working towards obtaining a piano grade for three months and found joy in the process of playing and listening to music.

The personal and social outcomes of instrumental music teaching can have certain value for children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (Davidson, 2022). The methodologies practiced by the musician in residence promoted musical inclusion strategies that adapted to the needs and interests of children, rather than using one fixed pedagogy.

There was limited social interaction during the sessions, as the young person was utterly focused and committed to the task of 'getting the cords right'. The musician gave clear instructions and positive feedback, and the child adjusted his playing when directed. However, the musician in residence continued to present numerous opportunities to chat more generally about life and the child's musical aspirations for the future. The child showed no signs of heightened or unmanageable behaviour and engaged fully in the sessions. Unit staff commented on his engagement in music sessions and stated that the sessions were 'really important to him' and that he felt 'safe and supported by the musician in residence'. He wants to continue music once he finishes school and is interested in bursary opportunities to go to music school.

Musician in residence

- *'Yong people are highly vulnerable and are less equipped to participate in group work than men in closed settings. 1:1 is more manageable and the PRU only have three young people in a class anyway. There aren't opportunities for group work and collaboration in this setting. 1:1 is valuable because I am a consistent presence in his life on a weekly basis and provide my undivided attention which is really valuable for him. It is hard being a teenager with loads of hormones running wild, which makes them feel more self-conscious to make music in front of others.'*

- *'I'm not focusing on him, we are focusing on the music, you don't have to look at each other or talk about something, we play, that's the connection. Younger musicians are able to relate to young people and respond to their music genres like drill. They sometimes talk about their life circumstances and experiences because of the high levels of trust I am able to develop with them. Changing Tunes is all about participant led work as we are not teachers, we respond to, and are inclusive of their additional needs.'*

- *'Music making helps to build confidence and is non-judgemental. It's about the process and not the product. Young people associate learning with enjoyment, it is something they want to do unlike much of the academic learning they experience in the unit.'*

- When they identify as a musician, it helps them to re-imagine themselves and feel part of something special by being part of the club of musicians. Identifying as a musician is also a socially and culturally cool and accepting thing to be, so young people can be open and proud about the music they make with us, even if we are working 1:1 with us.'

- *We are the calm amidst the whirl wind and chaos of their daily lives at home and school. They express themselves through music, but it is the older ones that will explore their past, current and future narratives.'*

Young person stated:

- *'I like doing the piano, I've got a keyboard at home now, so I can practice at home, then come here and do more practice. I want to do music when I leave school. It's quite calm in here when I'm playing – I focus on the music and forget everything else.'*

> '*Music is about playing, having fun and community. If they discover that they love music, it can be a way out for them when they get released. It can be the positive thing that they can channel themselves through, get off the streets and escape a life of crime.*'
>
> *musician in residence*

> '*I look forward to these sessions every week, it's the only thing I like doing in here. I get treated like I'm good at doing this, and I get to make stuff and say what I want to say.*'
>
> participant

> '*I want to do music when I get out of here, I've been recording all my things I've done. I've almost got a whole album done. I plan to get it out there if they let me take it with me.*'
>
> participant

Vinney Green Secure Children's Unit

Overview

Vinney Green Secure Unit accommodates up to 24 young people of both sexes, aged between 10 and 17 (The Secure Accommodation Network, 2023). It has been described as an 'institute for young offenders deemed too vulnerable to be placed elsewhere in custody' (Bristol Post). Despite the vulnerability of children held it the unit, a 2022 Ofsted report found 'unlawful and painful physical restraint' of children have had a detrimental impact on their health and emotional wellbeing, with the use of 'solitary confinement for up to three days'.

Since the 2022 Ofsted report, many of the concerns raised appear to have been addressed and improved at the secure unit. The education watchdog's latest report (2023) says it did not identify 'any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children' and that children felt safe and were treated with dignity and respect. It describes the home as a 'positive environment which supports children to make good progress'.

The significant improvements in the care of children being held at the secure unit is reassuring, but the 2022/23 Ofsted findings highlight the desperate and oppressive living conditions that some children experience in secure settings. This context is important when considering the role of music and creative expression when working with vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged children in secure settings (as stated earlier in this report).

For many of the children being held at Vinney Green, access to music making can be a profound escape from the monotony of the daily regime on the unit that dictates what they do and expects compliance in the process of doing it. Although many members of staff are clearly committed to the welfare of children in their care, they are often confined within the premasters of their roles and restricted by limited resources to be able to invest in more therapeutic interactions.

Yong Voices music making sessions were held in 'the shed' which is set away from the rest of the unit. It is an informal and relaxed music making environment, purposively decorated to resemble a music studio, full of musical instruments, adorned with soft lighting and artistic impressions of well known musicians. It can get cold in the shed, so there are heaters plugged in blowing warm air into the studio space, which is small, meaning group work can be challenging. Although young people did not appear concerned by the limited space and lack of permanent heating, the musician in residence has hopes that a larger, warmer, and more permanent space will be made available to them.

All young people in the various music making sessions reported positive experiences, including enjoyment, distraction from the wide ranging implications of criminal offences and awareness of new opportunities. They enjoyed making rap based genres (drill and grime) using lyrics they had written, often prior to attending sessions and expressing their life journeys and challenges they faced along the way. They had developed music software skills to give them autonomy over the recording process, with guidance from the musician in residence to avoid using lyrical content that glorified or condoned their offences or violent behaviour.

The study found that Young Voices has the capacity, ethos and expertise to support and nurture children and young people's emotional well-being and provide a safe space for positive self-expression. A significant merit of Young Voices is the rolling nature of the sessions that provide children with stability and allows for the development of positive relationships with musicians, sometimes over years. Young Voices methodologies address the power imbalance that children experience within the main unit by re positioning musician and child as 'co-creators of knowledge' (Freire, 1970). In this sense, it challenges hieratical structures that define much of children's engagement and learning in secure units (although this can also be the case in mainstream schools).

This approach is a shift away from formal and teacher-centric learning styles, encouraging the exchange of ideas through active and democratic dialogue between children, peers and musician, which enable children and young people to reflect on their individual and collective goals. The sessions are predominately participant led and empower young people to have autonomy over the music they make, with the freedom to choose from a range of genres and instruments that best connect with their interests and narratives in a meaningful way. Young Voices methodologies build pro social and strength based relationships and networks of trust within groups, as well as on a 1:1 basis. Young people are willing to take direction and suggestions from the musician in residence. Staff stated that the behaviours enacted by young people during music sessions were often in contrast to their challenging behaviour back on the unit. During the music sessions, young people were fully immersed in the music making process, they were calm, laughed and were responsive to direction from the musician in residence.

Young people stated:

- *'Being here feels like an escape from out there – I can be myself in here. I like coming coz I like music; it makes me feel good about myself.'*

- *'I look forward to these sessions every week, it's the only thing I like doing in here. I get treated like I'm good at doing this, and I get to make stuff and say what I want to say.'*

- *'I write lyrics to tell my story, I write them in my room and practice before coming here. I'm in the zone when I say them in the studio.'*

- *'I don't feel judged when I come to do music, it's fun and I can be myself here. It's something I enjoy doing.'*

- *'I get to play what I want to; I like the drums because they make me feel good. I forget where I am and just think about my beats.'*

- *'I want to do music when I get out of here, I've been recording all my things I've done. I've almost got a whole album done. I plan to get it out there if they let me take it with me.'*

- *'I get treated good here, it's alright, [the musician] is alright. He isn't like the other staff here; he listens to me and what I want to do.'*

- *'I can get quite down if I can't come here – if I have to do something else – if someone can't bring me up here in time. I'd rather do music than anything else I have to do here.'*

Musician in residence stated:

- *'Music is about playing, having fun and community. If they discover that they love music, it can be a way out for them when they get released. It can be the positive thing that they can channel themselves through, get off the streets and escape a life of crime.'*

- *'It can be hard to keep them engaged, so on-going sessions allows them to drop in and out. They can take the time they need, work at their own pace and explore the music genre they want, to shape the messages they wanted to make. Over time and with positive affirmation, their confidence continues to grow.'*

- *'They've each got their own story, and denying them the chance to tell that story, is denying them their truth. As long as it doesn't feed back into a culture of criminal behaviour that glamourises it. The goal is to instil a positive obsession and a sense of joy at a really dark place in their lives. And go onto live positive lives and stop the cycle of reoffending.'*

- *'The staff know that young people engage in the music, they enjoy making music. They know that when they come to the music shed that I won't judge them in any way. YP don't have access to the music shed when I'm not there; it means that they don't get a chance to practice.'*

- *'Everyone should have access to music; it is a human right. It is nourishing in a way that people don't always acknowledge, and it does have the power to transform people's lives if they engage with it positively. Music can also help [children and young people] take their minds off the stress of being locked up. All music is an expression of people's lives, and I let the young people explore whatever it is they desire.'*

- *'I am someone who listens to them, that they can trust - they're opening up in their songs, so they seem to trust and respect me. I am a role model in the sense that I inspire them to stretch and challenge themselves to try new things in music. I have a rapport with the young people but it is so unpredictable from one week to another. Their emotions are up and down. They get news from outside and it can be a roller coaster of emotions but I'm always there for them, it's an open door.'*

- *'They used to have up to four in a class before Covid, but they noticed that when we dropped the numbers, there was also a drop in violence. 1:1 working means that they young person can get something done, but when there are two or three if can get out of hand and they don't make as much progress. If you work with individuals 1:1 then you can try to establish a group out of that, but when you just through random groups together then it is hard to manage. There are opportunities to come together through Glastonvinney and Rock School. More bravado and hype when you put a group together. The young people are so vulnerable with Adverse Childhood Experience - 1:1 sessions can be more revealing because their hearts are more open.'*

- *'Some unit staff have suggested that young people work towards a certificate, or even GCSE music, but I looked into the syllabus, and it just throws up a world of music theory that would be alienating to young people. It would probably deter them from music or making music. Young people need to experience music in a way that is practical, engaging and fun. Perhaps a BTEC in Technology might work because it is practical skill that they could use to go onto make music professionally in the future.'*

'They get to play and have fun. Learning new musical skills, honing their own skills that they already have. They become more confident in themselves when they can express their story in a way that makes them feel more comfortable than sat around a table talking to adults. The music helps them to feel a sense of remorse for what they have done.'

musician in residence

'I don't know what I would do without my music – I can get very down and negative about everything. Being here is freeing and makes me feel that I'm actually good at something.'

participant

'I'm going to do music as a job when I get out of here. I don't want to do anything else. I write lyrics in my cell all day – I can't wait to get out there and play.'

participant

HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall

Overview

HMP/YOI Swinfen Hall is a long-term closed young offender institution and takes young men aged between 18 and 28, mostly serving sentences of over four years. Within the prison are two specialist wings for those with emerging or diagnosed personality disorders, highlighting the extreme vulnerability of many young men being held at the prison. The prison was visited by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in July 2021 and in their report the inspectors stated the following key areas of concern:

- 'Despite the COVID-19 restrictions on mixing and the limited amount of time prisoners spent out of their cells, levels of violence, often serious, between prisoners were still too high and staff assaults were on the rise. It was very concerning to see increases in the use of PAVA incapacitant spray as a way of managing challenging behaviour.'

- 'Though inspectors saw some positive interactions between officers and prisoners, they also witnessed staff members who were ineffectual, dismissive or rude.'

- 'Though the prison had worked to increase the amount of time prisoners spent out of their cells, those without jobs were routinely locked up for 22 hours a day, a bleak prospect for the prison's young and energetic population.'

- *'For the last year, most education had taken the form of in-cell packs and though these had improved very few prisoners were getting regular, face-to-face education, particularly for those with learning difficulties.'*

- *'There were long waiting lists for rehabilitation programmes that should be helping prisoners to progress through their sentences, requiring the establishment to create an atmosphere that is safe and supportive.'*

Despite the significant challenges raised in the HMIP report, there are rays of light to be found in the small stories and interactions that occur during making sessions with young men and musicians in residence. Young Voices is delivered in a dedicated music space within the prison and provides access to a range of professional music equipment. The space was large enough to comfortably accommodate four young musicians playing guitars, drums, percussion instruments and using music software. The musician in residence explained that the sessions are more focused and calmer when numbers of participants are kept at this number, as young people's capacity to regulate their emotions is 'poor'.

The group were proficient in a range of instruments and showed greater agency to discuss their experiences of music making, and what it meant to them to have access to it while in custody, than younger participants in other settings. They all spoke about having extremely low self-esteem, lacking in confidence and experiencing long term complex emotional needs. They went on to discuss their struggles to self-regulate and manage mood swings, sometimes getting 'moody' with each other during sessions.

During the music sessions I attended, young men showed a willingness to take creative risks and step outside of their comfort zones to explore other genres, as well as palpable resilience when being asked to play repetitive cords or sequences for each other's songs. Their motivations for doing music in prison was varied, but they all identified as musicians, with a desire to develop their musical skills and pursue music as a career post custody. The musician in residence explained that this differs from his work with adults in prison, as they are often more interested in 'having a go on an instrument' to do 'something fun and enjoyable'. He stated that young men are more 'hopeful' as they are generally at a 'crossroads in their lives' with greater possibilities for desisting from crime. Young men in the sessions I attended had shown reduced levels of violence on the wings since engaging in Young Voices, perhaps this is in part due to having the opportunity for positive self-expression. However, the musician stated that facilitating sessions with young men requires 'higher levels of energy and structure than adults in prison'.

One young man said that they liked people to see him perform. Another said that he used his lyrics as a way to express his emotions/sadness but in a way that other people wouldn't necessarily be able to tell. One young man shared that he has had repeated suicidal attempts in the last few months. Music was the one thing they all looked forward to each week - they felt depressed when a session ended, and they would be forced to wait another whole week to play together again.

Two young men were hesitant to describe music making as a tool of self-expression, although both songs played were using lyrics of a personal nature. One of them chose not to share his lyrics with me during my first visit, but when I arrived for my second visit, he was keen to show me what he had written since I had last seen him play in the group. The musician in residence works alongside young men to help guide them away from lyrics that glamorise violence, gang culture and offences. He encourages the young men to take a different point of view on the same subject as a reflective exercise without imposing censorship.

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They all write their own music and lyrics for their own songs in preparation for rehearsing during session time. These were performed and rehearsed as a collective group, with the encouragement, direction and participation of the musician in residence. The young men supported each other through the duration of the sessions – describing themselves as a group - having developed strong social bonds over a period of two years playing together. The musician in residence showed impressive skills in facilitation, while 'jaming' alongside the young people on their songs.

The benefits of building social bonds and democratic and experiential learning practices were some of the most significant findings of the study, as well as the rolling nature of the sessions that allowed for long term access to music. It was the trusting and respectful relationships that had formed between the young men and with the musician in residence that created a safe space to perform different versions of themselves away from their narrative identities back on the wings. The collective nature of these sessions was crucial for young men in this setting, as they relied on each other to play instruments for their songs. This sits in contrast to 1:1 music making sessions in other settings due to perceived 'unmanageable behaviour.'

During relentless lockdowns due to COVID 19, music packs and thirty guitars were provided to young men in their cells. The group spoke about having 'cabin fever' after being locked up for the majority of the day, and that access to instruments helped to 'keep them sane'. Since lockdown, the number of young people wanting to do music has increased and young men have started performing in front of internal audiences at the prison. The culture of support for music in the prison is extremely positive, with the governor even playing drums as part of one of the performances. The opportunity to perform the music young men have written, with musical accompany from their peers and senior staff is building social capital and allowing young men to redefine themselves as musicians and not offenders.

Young people

- *'When I'm here I can be myself, I don't need to pretend to be cool or hard, I can just focus on my music and forget that I'm in here.'*

- *'I don't know what I would do without my music – I can get very down and negative about everything. Being here is freeing and makes me feel that I'm actually good at something.'*

- *'I find it really hard after a session ends – I have to wait a whole week before I can do it again. I wish we could make music all the time coz it is when I feel the most best about myself.'*

- *'I write all of my own stuff, I write about loads of different things, I write about relationships on the out, I write about how I'm feeling, I write about what I want my future to be.'*

- *'[The musician in residence] is a good guy – he plays along with us and helps us put our songs together in a professional way. He isn't like a teacher – he's someone we respect and trust when he gives us ideas about different arrangements.'*

- *'We get to have a laugh here, but we also get to become better musicians. Playing together is good but we sometime get on each other's nerves – we have to keep it together to be able to get all of our songs done.'*

- *'I've had a rough couple of months – I've been really down – Covid made me not want to be around other people. I'm happy to be here because there are only a few of us and I'm distracted by playing music and forgetting my problems.'*

- *'I'm going to do music as a job when I get out of here. I don't want to do anything else. I write lyrics in my cell all day – I can't wait to get out there and play.'*

Musician in residence

- *'These guys are really committed to making music – although they can sometimes get a bit moody with each other. Two of them have been playing together for a couple of years – the other guy joined about six months ago. They play as a band and contribute to each other's songs by playing a range of instruments.'*

- *'Music is a way for them to express how they're feeling in a positive way instead of releasing negative emotions on the wings through violence. They sometimes turn up feeling really stressed, but they leave a lot calmer and more content.'*

- *'Emotionally they are quite immature – they're more like 15 year olds – it can take a lot of nurturing and positive affirmation to convince them that they are worth it. They have very low self-esteem and low confidence levels.*

- *'I'm someone that believes in them – I'm someone they can trust. We connect as musicians, rather than being a member of staff and a prisoner. I think this means a lot to them.'*

- *'When we all work together as a band it feels great! Everyone is in the zone and bringing something different to the mix – you can tell when this happens because they all become super focused, smile and laugh.'*

- *'Music helps to bring people together – it is so important for these young people – it helps them rebuild their sense of self, develop skills and improve their confidence. They begin to believe in themselves and see a more positive future once they leave prison. Most of them have been told they bad for so long that they can't see the good in them. Music is a powerful way of finding meaning in their lives – it connects people and inspires them to want to do better in their lives.'*

Outcomes

Note: the word participant will be used to describe children and young people in this section

Young Voices key attributes:

- Participant led / co-produced
- On-going sessions (i.e. on a rolling basis)
- Democratic dialogue
- Responsive to learning styles and needs
- Shame free / non targeted
- Active & collaborative
- Creative & playful
- Develops pro social and strength based relationships and network (i.e. builds social and human capital)
- Improves confidence & self-esteem
- Supports the reconstruction of a value and belief system
- Hopeful and forward looking
- Develops music skills and aptitude to pursue music orientated goals post release/school

Despite the many challenges faced by participants in custody and in nonmainstream schools, key findings present rays of light that come in the form of storytelling through introspection and connectivity – providing meaning and illuminating insights into the short to medium term impact on participants personal development and progression. The music making sessions took a trauma informed approach, delivered by experienced musicians with excellent facilitation skills and a good understanding of the context of their setting and the complexities of young people's needs. They were responsive to, and inclusive of, the lived experiences of individual participants and the group dynamics at play.

The study findings challenge a common misconception that if an educational activity (music in this instance) is enjoyable and fun, it must lack the rigour and value of subjects that children and young people find harder and less enjoyable. The study found that Young Voices has significant benefits to children and young people's mental health and well-being, and the many examples of long-term voluntary engagement evidences the enjoyment and value participants place on access to the music making sessions.

The sessions are participatory, fun, collective and active, producing spontaneous thought and dialogue between young people. Young Voices invites participants to challenge by choice; presenting an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones and explore music within supportive group environments and 1:1 sessions. Access to music sessions on a rolling basis affords continuity and allows participants to continue their engagement in weekly music sessions for years in some cases, depending on individual circumstance. This ensures participants have the time needed for a meaningful personal development and upskilling in a variety of music mediums.

The sessions provided participants with a hands-on experience with professional recording equipment and the opportunity to create their own music and lyrics, along with mentoring and guidance. Young Voices builds and nurtures positive relationships between peers and musicians. Interviews with participants suggest that musicians and peers who are understood to genuinely care 'spark hope' (Nugent, 2015) through 'fostering a sense of empowerment'. Similarly, Trotter (1999) found that the pro-social modelling approach was most effective with young, high-risk children in the justice system (as cited in McNeill, 2003: 154).

Young Voices invites participants to determine the agenda of sessions and encourages them to decide on the genres of music they wish to explore with access to a range of quality music software and musical instruments. The themes explored, and direction of discourse are rarely, if ever, duplicated, given the bespoke and responsive nature of sessions. It employs co-production with no expectation of a definitive outcome, instead fostering personal reflection to empower marginalised and silenced voices to become agents of change.

Young Voices promotes the exchange of ideas through active and democratic dialogue, which enables participants to reflect on individual and collective goals. Participants are encouraged to take emotional risks and begin to show vulnerability in front of their peers by exploring musical genres that differ from others and sharing lyrics that often express personal reflections on their lives in custody and beyond. The process invites participants to challenge by choice; presenting an opportunity to step outside of their comfort zones and explore their self-narratives within a supportive group environment. Participants 'perform' different versions of themselves, sometimes new versions, but always as themselves. They are invited to 'de mask' (Baim,2002), reflect on the 'performances' given in our daily lives, and peel back the layers that form our sense of 'identity' and 'self' as social constructs (Goffman,1990). This process supports them to envisage different lives (Spargo et al.2014) and visualise, re-imagine and play out different ways of seeing themselves and others.

Young Voices is responsive to the specific learning styles of participants in custody and in nonmainstream educational settings, whether during group sessions or working one to one with musicians. Many of the participants taking part in the programme had been excluded from formal education settings and had little or no experience of cultural and arts activities. The low literacy levels of many participants, and the negativity associated with formal learning environments, meant that active and participatory music making methods were effective at maintaining engagement, and provided therapeutic, as well as educational value, with the capacity to improve learning outcomes. In some cases, young people were supported to challenge entrenched attitudes and perspectives using various art mediums, exploring new pro social and strength based narratives. This approach enables participants to explore complex themes and narratives of the intrapersonal and interpersonal that resonate with their own lives and promotes 'self-actualization, self-esteem, love and belonging' (Maslow, 1943).

Although the study was conducted at three separate settings, key findings show the relational qualities and benefits of Young Voices across custodial settings and in nonmainstream schools. All participants reported positive experiences, including fun and enjoyment, self-expression, and having something meaningful to do with their time. They described enhanced feelings of mental wellbeing, including relief from depression, improved mood, relaxation, and reduced stress and tendency for violence. Young Voices takes the position of looking at, 'the strengths of those in the justice system (as opposed to correcting deficits)' (McNeil, 2019: 8). The music making sessions enable participants to more easily and less painfully tell the story they wanted to tell, capturing the complexity, including reflecting on where change needs to happen. The programme is a compassionate driven response to working with highly vulnerable children and young people.

All participants in the study stated that it was a chance for them to learn new skills and develop their talents in line with their future goals to 'become' a musician. It was also a mechanism for them to reflect on their own lives, gain a deeper understanding of who they are, achieving more self-acceptance, and challenging negative identities associated with offending and marginalisation.

Narratives of participants indicate that Young Voices builds social ties and networks of trust, increasing social and human capital through the development of 'deep relationships' between peers and musicians in residence. The benefits gained from building social bonds with peers and musicians gave participants access to a range of different perspectives from within the group and challenged entrenched perception of a negative 'self'. The study asserts that access to informal music making sessions contributes to the actual process of pro-social identity formation, to a large degree irrespective of content (Hinton-Smith et al.2019).

Participants at Vinney Green and Swinfen Hall gave performances that gave them a platform to have their voices heard (literally and metaphorically), and their musical talents acknowledged by setting staff and peers. This appeared to increase awareness among setting staff of the value of music making and helped to re-humanise and de-label participants within the context of the setting.

Enablers & barriers

Children and young people in custody and in nonmainstream education are often faced with the following barriers to participation:

- Chronically low levels of self esteem and confidence
- Significant mental health issues and learning difficulties
- Substance misuse,
- Instability with family/peers
- stress of court dates,
- meetings with legal representatives,
- competing educational requirements
- prior commitments on other programmes
- Disconnect with core values and belief system

However, it was apparent at all three settings that participants were motivated and keen to take part in Young Voices sessions and were engaged throughout the sessions I attended. In some cases, participants made the choice to attend music sessions over the option to take part in other activities. Some of the main enablers of participation were as follows:

- Safe and familiar space to deliver sessions
- Access to on-going sessions
- Feeling safe within the group
- Sense of hope and belonging
- Being believed in
- Positive self-expression
- Creative freedom
- Musicians pro-actively participating in sessions
- A willingness to make a positive change in their lives
- Building social bonds and networks of trust between young people and musician in residence
- Democratic and participant led learning methods
- Fun, active and playful

-   Non-offence orientated / no predetermined agenda or outcomes
-   One step removed
-   Developing music skills

Theory of Change model

Key findings from the study have informed the design of a new Theory of Change model (ToC), contributing to an emerging discourse and body of knowledge on the importance of the arts with excluded, marginalised and disadvantaged children and young people. The ToC model (attached to this report) attempts to present a composite picture of Young Voices, employing the narrative identities that form intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships between peers and musicians in residence. Young Voices methodological approach with children and young people shares areas of commonality with the adult ToC model. However, there are key areas where the adult model differs to their work with children and young people. The new model depicts a series of interconnecting and progressive key attributes, activities, outcomes and goals that are the cumulative result of participation in Young Voces. The goals cited in the new ToC model support the 2021 National Association of Youth Justice briefing: *Explaining desistance: looking forward, not backwards* (Wigzell, 2021):

1. Agency
> - nurturing individuals' personal agency to change
2. Identity
> - A positive identity away from that of an 'offender'/ excluded YP
3. Socio-structural factors
> - Growing aspirations to pursue personal development opportunities
4. Relationships
> - Able to reconcile, build and maintain healthy and safe social networks

(Wigzell, 2021: 8-12)

Access to music

Activities

-   Attending music sessions
-   Access to quality equipment
-   Play & compose music
-   Telling & reflecting on life stories
-   Opportunity to explore narratives of change
-   Recording / performing music

Outcomes

-   Creative, informal & relaxed environment
-   Improved musical skills
-   Increased feelings of self-esteem & self-worth
-   Growing confidence in own abilities
-   Building new ways of seeing oneself and others

Goal
-   A positive identity away from that of an offender/ excluded YP.

Positive relationships & role modelling

Activities

- High ratio of musicians to young people
- Professional musicians with excellent facilitation skills
- Co-production / participant led
- Greater feeling of affirmation & value
- Peer to peer support and skills sharing
- Increased feelings of affirmation and value

Outcomes

- Non-judgemental & shame free
- Being believed in
- Democratic dialogue
- Participation that is recognised & celebrated by others
- Building connectivity & belonging through storytelling

Goal
- Ability to build and sustain healthy and safe social networks.

Opportunity for artistic expressions

Activities

- Permission to play
- Employs kinesthetic & experiential learning styles
- Opportunity to form and commit to a music group of peers
- Setting pro social and strength based goal

Outcomes

- Having their truth heard
- Comfortable with taking creative risks
- Increases social & emotional wellbeing
- Increases self-determination & self-discipline
- Reduced dependency on instant gratification
- A sense of meaning & purpose in their lives

Goal

- Feelings of optimism & hope for the future.

On-going sessions

Activities

- Stability & consistency
- Trauma informed & responsive to complex needs
- Building trust & openness
- Rehearsing emotional regulation skills

Outcomes

- Allows for intermittent participation
- Safe space to present authentic versions of self
- Growing sense of self compassion
- Begin to build a values & beliefs system
- Aspirations to pursue a career in music
- Commitment & drive to see something through

Goal

- Nurturing personal agency to pursue positive change.

Recommendations

As stated earlier in the study, rigorous qualitative research is needed to yield insight into the experiences, meanings and values associated with music making with young people in justice settings and nonmainstream schools. Research should aspire to embrace a range of different strategies to develop this important field, including assessing economic benefit and social value, as well as the impact of music making on social and cultural capital and on the uptake and delivery of other services. However, it is important to acknowledge that the key findings presented in this report represent a small sample number within the timeframe of the study. Follow up post programme investigations would improve the depth and richness of insights into the impact of the programme.

1. Due to the vulnerability of participants, and the active and introspective nature of the programme, it is advisable to keep participant numbers under 5.
2. Musician participation is a vital part of the programme, having positive repercussions for young people in sessions and beyond.
3. The space in which the programme is delivered needs to be large enough accommodate young people and insulated to keep the elements at bay. The active nature of each exercise requires enough space to move freely around the room within health and safety guidelines.
4. On-going support is required from setting staff to support young people to attend sessions on time. This can be a complicated process due to a range of unpredictable and unforeseen circumstances.
5. Development of opportunities to access music sessions within community settings to aid continuity and support progressive goals.

Conclusion

This report aimed to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the Young Voices programme from the perspectives of children, young people and musicians in residence. The study highlights the significant benefits of Young Voices methodologies with highly vulnerable groups. The programme provides some of the key enablers that contribute to the longer journey towards desistance, and the construction or pro social and strength based narrative identities and relationships. The study recognises that courage is required to play and actively pursue self-honesty and self-discovery in front of peers, as this can be a profoundly revealing, painful and challenging process for vulnerable children and young people (likely more so than adults).

Key findings in this report show that participants work incredibly hard to critically reflect on their life choices and address entrenched patterns of attitudes, thinking and behaviours. The voices of children and young people provide compelling insights into the struggles and challenges they face and asserts the value of small stories within the wider conceptualisation of the programme benefits. The evidence presented in the study is overwhelmingly positive and suggests that Young Voices should be seriously considered as a key part of educational provision for YOIs, PRUs and SCHs.

The Young Voices programme should not exist in a vacuum, instead it should be used in conjunction within a broader holistic framework of care, provided by associated agencies, that are required for children and young people to practice the things they have learned outside of the boundaries of the programme. Without these wider needs being met, it is questionable whether it will be possible for children and young people to apply the vital life/music skills gained over the duration participation outside of the safety of the learning environment in the long term. Despite this, the many examples of profound personal growth and development captured in the study should be considered a vital stepping-stone towards meeting the complex needs of society's most vulnerable children and young people (as cited in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, 1943).

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