

Methil Music Project Impact Report

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Introduction

This project was commissioned by Youth Arts Access Fund/Creative Scotland to enable young people in the Methil area of Fife to participate in the Arts and express how they view the world through the creation of their own words and melodies. The composer/arranger, Dr Oliver Searle, and musicians from Red Note Ensemble worked with young people in Woodlands Nursery/Family Nurture Centre, Methilhill Primary School, and Levenmouth Academy. This was part of a larger project, guided by insights from the Corra Foundation, drawing together different parts of the Methil community and working with them in different ways. The composer/arranger also worked with two community groups for older people, and people with disabilities. The project was initially planned to run for one year, but was extended because of the pandemic and ran between 2021 and 2023.

The project culminated in a final 45-minute concert at Levenmouth Academy in March 2023 which the community were invited to attend. The concert included choral pieces developed with the primary school children, and performances of the high school pupils' pieces by the Red Note Ensemble trio of flute, clarinet and cello. The plan was to integrate more of the material from the older people with the younger people but due to lockdowns and isolations, it became difficult to make that happen.

The aim of this report is to find out participants' experience of taking part in the project, including the young people developing skills in music composition, and any suggestions they had for future projects.

Research methodology

A mixed-methods approach was taken with particular emphasis on a qualitative methodology to understand the impact of the project and gain the thoughts of the young people, their parents/carers and staff at the school, and participants from Red Note Ensemble.

A focus group was conducted with the music teacher and senior pupils involved in the project at Levenmouth Academy (Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet and Focus Group Questions). An anonymous e-survey questionnaire was sent to the parents/carers and teachers of the young people Woodlands Nursery/Family Nurture Centre, Methilhill Primary school and Levenmouth Academy (Appendix B - Questionnaire). An interview was also conducted with Dr Oliver Searle, a composer and arranger based at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland who worked with the young people, community groups, and Red Note Ensemble.

The focus group and interview were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis. A priori themes included: pupil satisfaction and enjoyment of the project, skills development, and suggestions for future projects.

Ethics

The project was approved by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Ethics Committee and Fife Council's Education & Children's Services Directorate. There were minimal risks associated with this investigation as the subject matter did not engage with sensitive material and was unlikely to cause any physical or psychological harm. Participants in the focus groups were assured that they would remain anonymous, and no pupil was identifiable from the data. The participants were given the right to withdraw at any time and advised that their participation was entirely voluntary. All data (recorded and written) were securely stored on a password-protected device. All raw data and any data not included in the final report were deleted. BERA guidelines were upheld. The researcher was PVG scheme registered.

Findings

High school composition project

The composer/arranger worked with a group of S5 Higher music pupils at Levenmouth Academy, where the pupils wrote short pieces in a similar way to other Red Note New Music Makers projects: 'Over a number of weeks, I helped them with those, put them together and then we actually included those pieces in a sharing at the final concert'. The secondary music class teacher described how, due to the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, the pupils had missed out on a lot of music class instruction on composition. Thus, having the opportunity to engage with the composer/arranger and the RNE musicians stimulated the pupils' creativity and allowed them to develop their skill in composing.

The music pupils were initially set a '10-minute challenge' to provide stimulus materials such as pictures, shapes, words, or musical notation for the composer/arranger and musicians to work with. In collaboration with the pupils, these materials were then turned into musical pieces for a performance in March 2023.

The pupil responses were unanimously positive. When asked for one word to describe the experience, these included: 'exciting', 'riveting', 'incredible', 'intriguing', and 'rewarding'. Comments included:

- 'I enjoyed being able to learn about composition and creating my own compositions and then having them [Red Note musicians] speak to me about it, and then perform it.'
- 'I just found it really nice, getting the insight of composition because we had not experienced that before, and they helped teach us from the beginning of it. And I just found that really interesting.'

Many pupils described how their confidence and skill in composition had improved:

- 'I was very, very nervous about it when we first got into it because obviously, we've not done anything like it before. But during the whole experience I've gotten so much better at composing certain pieces of music and being able to, like join up notes for different instruments to make it sound good.'

- 'I really liked the whole composing stuff because I've never really composed anything before and didn't really think of composing anything until they came, and I really enjoyed it. And now, in my free time, I compose stuff. I've gotten really interested in it.'
- 'I loved how involved the three musicians and Oli were in helping me bring my piece on. At first, I struggled quite a lot. But after I had a conversation with the musicians, it really helped me to bring it on into what it ended up as.'
- 'I feel much more confident in my ability to compose now, 100%.'

The class teacher was also very positive. When asked for their views on the overall experience, they commented:

I think it kind of blew us all away, actually, when we saw the diversity of notation that the young people provided in their 10-minute challenge ... and the fabulous musicians from Red Note were able to make sense of that, and then communicate with the kids to get them to work more on it. And then it became a much bigger entity than it had started off. But they really started from just words, shapes and some notation ... they had a go at playing everything and then asked the kids 'was that what you meant?', and that gave them more confidence to then try to write something more and add to it, and in some cases, it was more pictures and graphics, but it was just wonderful to watch ... and then the musicians turned it into something really wonderful. And we discovered one of the pupil's was on the lines of Pachelbel's Canon by the time it came out.

The composer/arranger commented 'The teacher was fabulous actually, doing some work on it with the kids in between the weeks that we dropped by. I know that a couple of the kids were really, really keen to do more composition, they were very interested kids.' One pupil commented that they intended applying to college to study music as a direct result of taking part in the project.

Primary Schools and nurseries

The composer/arranger also worked with children at Methilhill primary, plus two nursery groups in one of the churches, and an after-school group in an outdoor play area. The composer/arranger commented:

I went in and started to gather some ideas, and over a series of weeks put together some lyrics with them, and then came up with some sung material. And then they started to learn that, and we ended up with these three songs that the children had written in classes, with me bashing it out on the guitar. And we learned that and added this to the final performance and shared this with Levenmouth Academy. I coordinated it and led the choir of these kids for each of the songs.

For the nurseries, this took the form of workshops where the composer/arranger created new songs with input from the children. Parent/guardians and teachers who completed the survey noted the following one-word responses: 'inspiring', 'enjoyable', 'proud', 'inspiring', 'amazing', 'fun', and 'educational'. The survey responses from teachers and parents showed satisfaction from the project: 'An inspiring and educational project', with some teachers

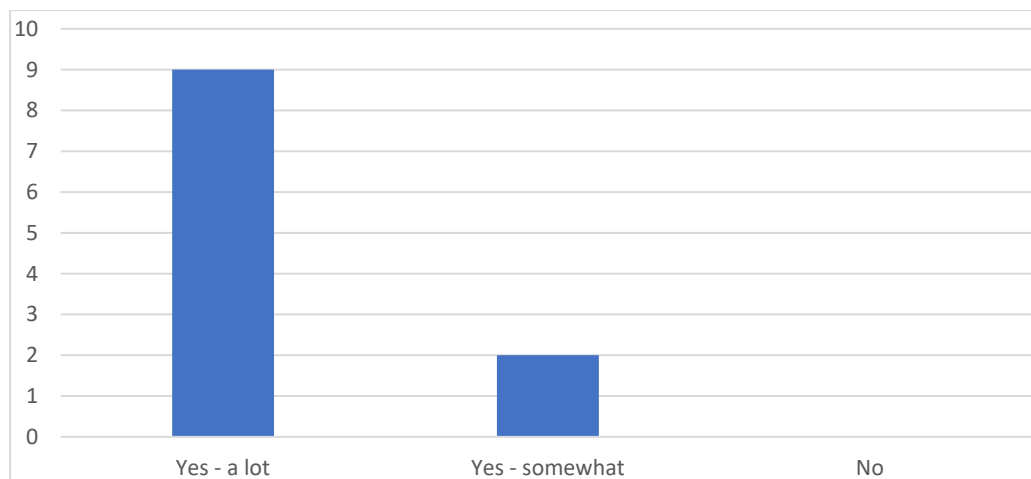
requesting longer and more frequent visits, and more access to instruments for the Primary pupils.

Community groups

The composer/arranger worked with two community groups for older people and people with disabilities and drew musical material together: 'In that role, you're leading a group of people by the hand, but I'd like to think that there is some kind of empowerment and authorship over the creative process for them.' The composer/arranger took lyrics created in the history group by one of the older people and crafted it into a song, and also made a string quartet arrangement which was then performed and recorded by Red Note Ensemble musicians. 'We sent the recording to the lady, and she was obviously very touched and very happy. So, that felt like a really strong project. Even that little thing hopefully had an effect for her and her family'.

Survey responses

Question 3. Do you think the pupils have benefitted from participating in this project?



- Yes – a lot: 9 (82%)
- Yes – somewhat: 2 (18%)
- No: 0 (0%)

Question 4. If you have answered Yes above (Q.3), please outline what you think were the key educational, wellbeing and wider benefits of this project for the pupils involved.

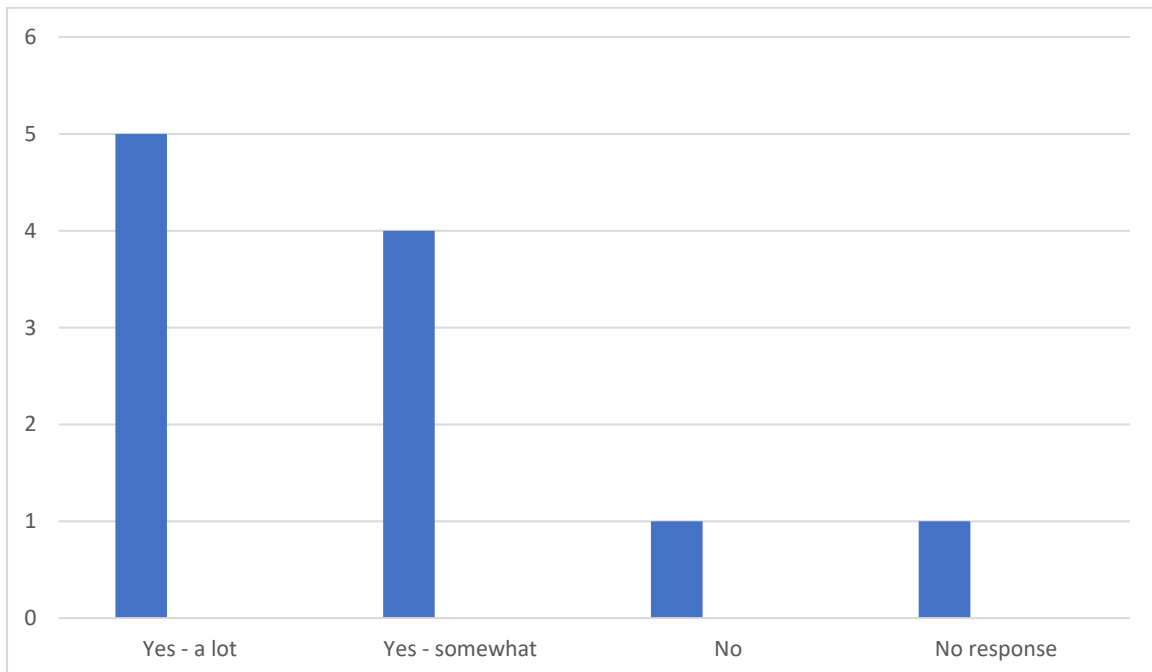
Sample of responses:

- Great experience working with professional musicians. Building confidence in their own ability to create Music. Learning new playing techniques and how to notate them and use them effectively.
- Being able to produce their own piece of music.
- Learning new music/singing in different notes, helps with build confidence also.
- It was great to have musical input from experienced practitioners in this field - the children learned a lot about the instruments as well as many other musical concepts.

The children really enjoyed the inputs and the performing element helped to build confidence.

- They were made aware of different instruments and how they could be played in different ways to create a different sound.
- Pupils were given the chance to learn about instruments they may not have heard about before. The children also got the opportunity to involve themselves in music, which is an opportunity not normally provided outwith school time, too.
- It encouraged their use of fine motor skills, independence, imagination and sharing with other children.
- Red Note provided invaluable input for our children and allowed them to have experiences that they would not have had otherwise.

Question 5. Have you benefited or learned from this project as a parent/guardian or musician?



- Yes – a lot: 5 (45.5%)
- Yes – somewhat: 4 (36.5%)
- No: 1 (9%)
- No response: 1 (9%)

Question 6. If you have answered Yes above (Q.5), please outline any of the benefits to you.

Sample of responses:

- It gave me some ideas to use in class when teaching music - such as stating a different mood to play an instrument in.
- I have learned about different ways I could involve music in my teaching, as well as ways to involve the children should there not be enough instruments to go around.
- Awareness of instruments and musical notes.

Question 7. What was the most enjoyable part of the project for you and the pupils?

Sample of responses:

- Watching the interaction between the pupils and the RNE professionals and hearing the successful compositions.
- Watching my child learn something new they enjoy doing, the show was great.
- We really enjoyed creating the lyrics to our own song and then being given the opportunity to perform to a wider audience with a wide range of instruments.
- To see the pupils light up and develop.

Question 8. What was the least enjoyable part of the project for you and the pupils?

There were four 'no responses'; four 'enjoyed it all'; three other comments were:

- It would have been beneficial to have had the performance in school time so that all children could take part, but this was minor in comparison to how much the children enjoyed it.
- The weather - the session was held in Jan and it was cold (Teacher at outdoor nursery).
- It could have went on for longer.

Question 9. Please write one word that best describes your experience.

- Amazing (3)
- Fun (2)
- Enjoyable (2)
- Inspiring (2)
- Proud
- Educational

Question 10. Is there anything you would like to change if the project was to be held again?

There were six 'no' responses and five comments:

- Having instruments for [primary school] pupils to try (2)
- Half-day sessions
- The same again please:)
- Longer and more frequent visits

Question 11. What do you think is the main legacy of this project?

Sample of responses:

- To get children involved in the creation of their own lyrics and involved in performance.
- To encourage youngsters to compose music.
- Children having experience of listening to music being played live, first hand.
- Children's pieces of written music played by professionals
- The children and their enjoyment of music!

Question 12. If you are one of the musicians involved, please give details of what this project meant for you.

No responses.

Question 13. Please write any other comments.

- An inspiring and educational project.
- It was good to see people coming together. We use some of the ideas in our sessions. (Teacher, Woodlands Nursery/Family Nurture Centre)
- Thank you, it's been absolutely fantastic!
- Brilliant chance for the kids to be involved with, great experience.

Legacy

The responses to the project were all positive. A high school pupil commented: 'It's a nice thing to continue as it gives other people the opportunity to compose their pieces and see the development ... which makes them feel proud of it.' Other pupils commented that the project had a positive impact on the community and that they would like it to be developed: 'It is really good for the community, because it gives us something to really notice ... it would be such a great thing to expand it.'

The composer/arranger commented:

The big thing for me is it was the teachers supporting the classes and being really positive about the project, and parents as well who came along to the final sharing ... there were a number of other people from the community that turned up to the events in Levenmouth Academy and said how great it was, and how wonderful it was to see the kids working together. And I get the sense there's not normally a huge amount of that type of activity.

It felt like they [the schools] have got a good relationship with Red Note ... it very much feels like they've got something that they could carry forward. The legacy for me would be if you could build on it ... and we could do a bit more ... the opportunity to go back into the same schools, again, would be great. And if you could try and follow kids through school ... and create another project for them, then you're really building that into the fabric of the community a bit more.

Survey responses showed the importance of children being involved with creating their own music and lyrics, hearing and seeing that music performed live, being part of a performance, and fostering their enjoyment of music as a creative and participatory experience.

Next steps

The comments from the high school pupils in the focus group, the teachers and parents/guardians from the survey, and the composer/arranger showed that all were keen for the project to continue.

The composer/arranger commented:

I would have loved if we could have found a local musician that I could have mentored as part of the process. And I think that's the one thing that we didn't do, that under the circumstances, I think we could have quite easily achieved, and we never quite got there. There's plenty of local musicians in that part of Fife and it would have been good if we teamed up with them and then I just gave them that

support, and they were able to do a bit more of that creative activity with the kids in the community as well. And then that would have been quite nice to have their input and then you've got somebody who wants to do more of it and is there all the time, rather than just us shipping folk in from the central belt and going 'here we go, now we're going to do a creative project'. That would be the one big thing.

Conclusion and recommendations

The project delivered a high-quality musical experience for the community in the Methil area. Young people from the high school, primary school and nurseries were able to engage with a professional composer and arranger and professional musicians from Red Note Ensemble who facilitated their musical creativity. The composer/arranger also worked with two community groups and developed musical material with the schools and community groups. The project culminated in a community concert featuring performances and compositions from the young people in conjunction with musicians from Red Note Ensemble.

The responses to the survey and focus group showed how keen the pupils, parents/guardians, and teachers were for the project to continue and to be expanded. High school pupils reported having increased confidence in composing music and music in general, with one pupil intending to apply to college to study music as a result of taking part in the project.

The composer/arranger also noted how eager and supportive the schools and teachers were, and how enthusiastic the pupils and parents/guardians were for the project to continue, but also noted the problems of trying to deliver the project with schools and community groups during the pandemic.

If the project were to continue, recommendations were as follows:

- Involve local musicians in working with young people and community groups.
- Develop community ensembles and choirs.
- Facilitate closer links between the community groups and the school groups.
- Increase the frequency and length of visits to the primary schools.
- Give primary school pupils increased access to instruments.

APPENDIX A



Royal Conservatoire
of Scotland

Participation Information sheet for focus groups

Researcher's Name: Ben Redman

The below text will be read out by the researcher or the teacher.

Hello, I am Ben Redman, a researcher from Glasgow, I am looking forward to hearing what you have to say about your experiences with the music project with the Red Note Ensemble. Your names will not be disclosed, and this is not compulsory for you to participate in, so you are very welcome to withdraw from this discussion at any point.

I will ask you a few topics to discuss and gather your feedback through discussions.

Thank you for agreeing to be here today and please do not hesitate to ask any questions or doubts that you may have regarding the project.

Discussion points

- Your experience of participating in the project.
- What was the most enjoyable part of the project?
- What was the least enjoyable part of the project?
- One word that describes your experience.
- Any suggestions for future projects?

Contact Details

Researcher: Ben Redman b.redman@rcs.ac.uk

APPENDIX B

Red Note - Woodlands Nursery | Methilhill Primary School | Levenmouth Academy

The survey will take approximately six minutes to complete.

My name is Ben Redman and I am a researcher based at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. This project has been commissioned by **Youth Arts Access Fund/Creative Scotland** to explore how children view the world through the creation of their own words and melodies, arranged and performed by **Red Note Ensemble**. Results from the questionnaire will contribute to the production of an impact report of this work from the perspectives of the pupils and adults involved.

In filling out the questionnaire you give your consent to the following:

- I understand my participation is voluntary and there is no financial benefit to taking part
- I understand that any information given by me in the questionnaire may be included in a report and published journal article
- I understand the information I provide will remain anonymous in the research and that any information that is confidential will remain so
- I understand that all data will be stored securely and is covered by the Data Protection Act 2018
- I agree to the researcher analysing my comments in the questionnaire
- If I agree to take part and then change my mind, I can withdraw from the project, without giving any reason.
- I note however that data gathered anonymously cannot be withdrawn.

We take your privacy very seriously. Please find a copy of our privacy notice

at: <https://www.rcs.ac.uk/policy/privacy/>

Thank you for taking part and please remember there are no right or wrong answers - we just need your honest thoughts! If there are any questions you'd prefer not to answer, please leave them out. If you have any questions, please contact me at b.redman@rcs.ac.uk

1. Which project are you/your child/your student involved in?

- Levenmouth Academy
- Methilhill Primary School
- Woodlands Nursery/Family Nurture Centre

2. What was your involvement in the project?

- Parent/guardian
- Teacher
- Red Note Musician

3. Do you think the pupils have benefited from participating in this project?

- Yes - a lot
- Yes - somewhat
- No

4. If you have answered Yes above (Q.3), please outline what you think were the key educational, wellbeing and wider benefits of this project for the pupils involved.

5. Have you benefited or learned from this project as a parent/guardian or musician?

- Yes - a lot
- Yes - somewhat
- No

6. If you have answered Yes above (Q.5), please outline any of the benefits to you.

7. What was the most enjoyable part of the project for you and the pupils?

8. What was the least enjoyable part of the project for you and the pupils?

9. Please write one word that best describes your experience.

10. Is there anything you would like to change if the project was to be held again?

11. What do you think is the main legacy of this project?

12. If you are one of the musicians involved, please give details of what this project meant for you.

13. Please write any other comments

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