



Opening doors in music, in learning and in life

with young people outside the mainstream:

Case study: Alternative Schools Provision

Charlie learns she can achieve and cope



The photos in this document are from a range of our work: those pictured are not featured in this case study.

Brief description of the work and who's involved

The Music Works has been running weekly small group and one-to-one music mentoring sessions for young people who attend APS settings¹ in Gloucestershire. The aim is to engage young people and build their confidence in learning. This programme is part of the Inclusion Strategy of Make Music Gloucestershire, the county's music education hub. It is paid for by the APS service and occasionally supported by additional funding. The aim of the Strategy is to address gaps in music opportunities for young people in challenging circumstances who may miss out on music education, and to work with non-music partners to improve musical and non-



¹ An Alternative Schools Provision setting (also known as a pupil referral unit) is a type of school that offers short-term alternative education for young people who are excluded from school or not attending school for other reasons. Many of the children attending PRUs will have emotional and behavioral difficulties and some have special educational needs. The PRU will help them cope with difficulties they are having with learning, after which they may then be gradually introduced back into mainstream or special schools.

musical outcomes for children and young people. Find out more: www.themusicworks.org.uk
www.makemusicgloucestershire.org.uk

About Charlie

Charlie² is a 13-year old (in year 9 of school) who's been excluded from school and has been attending a Pupil Referral Unit for a year. The Music Works have been working with Charlie ever since she came to the Unit.

When Charlie came to the PRU, she had very little experience of singing. She attended one of The Music Works' sessions at the Unit with a friend, and since then, she has been taking part in weekly one-to-one music mentoring sessions, has sung on stage as part of a Gloucestershire Music Makers showcase and another local showcase, and is working towards a Bronze Arts Award.

Charlie: "I started Arts Award in November. I didn't have a clue what it was. It's better than doing nothing, at least it's something."

Music leader 2: "One of the things you said, was that you wanted to show people, that you could actually achieve something, like the staff here, and people that didn't believe in you."

Charlie: "Yeah."

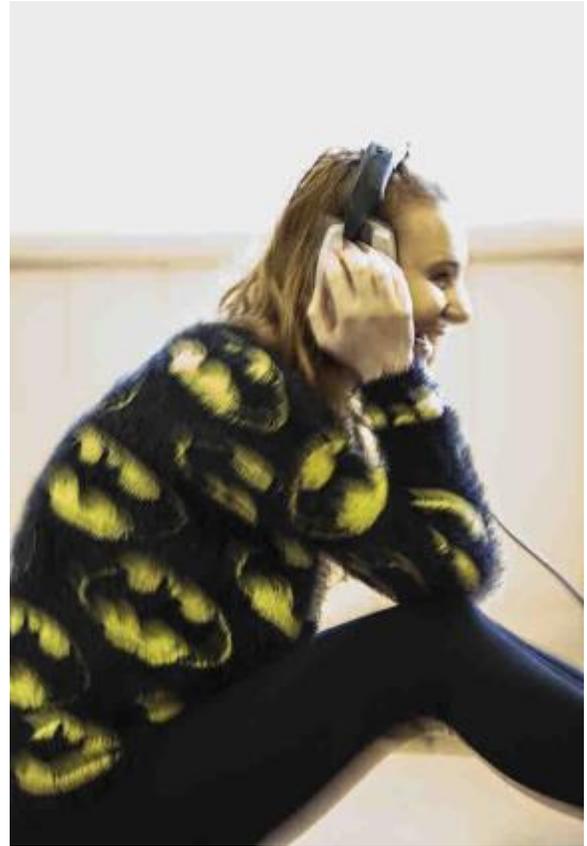
Whereas the music leader's experience of Charlie tends to be that she occasionally doesn't want to work: "She'll say, I'm tired, I don't want to work, can we leave it until tomorrow?", Charlie's behaviour outside of music sessions is often challenging, including swearing, and climbing or hiding behind furniture in order to avoid working, and occasional physical violence.

Music leader: "Charlie said at one stage, you're one of the few teachers that believes in me. It's easy to believe in her because she has good skills. But the early stages of that were here having a go at a song, saying it was all wrong and [over-reacting]."

Through her music work, Charlie has shown an ability to apply herself and achieve high standards:

Music leader: "There was a song she sang early on, she [got very frustrated], said she could never sing it ... it was because there were two notes that were too low for her range. I explained that, and that with the backing tracks, we could put them up a couple of keys ... We had to keep doing that phrase, persisting until she could get those two notes ... and when it came to recording

² Names have been changed to protect the identity of this young person.



the songs in the studio, without me around and with no teachers present, she struggled with those two notes and so she insisted on re-recording it six times. She chose to get it right and she had the confidence to use her own ears. I'd been consistently telling her that she can spot stuff. She has a strong perfectionist streak. I see

that in her graphics, and her idea of what's good has changed since she worked with us."

As part of the Award, she's been putting together a portfolio of work which has involved her reading (a biography of her musical hero), writing, designing and presenting (a critique/analysis of a performance she attended, along with information about her musical hero). These are all notable achievements, as Charlie dislikes reading and writing and will try to avoid both.

She's learned how to pass on her skills, reflect on and analyse her work, and to create meticulous design work – aided by the positive feedback that is a fundamental part of the music leaders' skills and training:

Music leader 2: "Good, accurate feedback skills are essential in this work, as is emotional intelligence, properly attending to the person you're working

with, and seeing yourselves as co-learners. I'm learning how to teach them all the time, just as they're finding out how to learn from me."

Music leader 1: "Through Arts Award, she had to teach someone a skill ... we found she's a very patient teacher ... What was really good was, I did it a bit wrong, and Charlie was able to go back and identify exactly what was wrong and show me what to do ... We've also discovered she has a superb eye for design ... she wanted to do three versions of her PowerPoint presentation before she was satisfied with it, and each one took it up to another level of excellence. We were determined it wouldn't be a case of 'that'll do', weren't we Charlie?"

When asked about the music leaders' abilities, Charlie, says:

"Well if I do something wrong, or if I don't want to do something, they'll [the music leaders] persuade me to do something. I don't know how, they just manage it! Yes, it's a good thing!"

She continues: "I don't really get on with teachers ... [the music leaders³] respect me and I respect them ... I find you just don't get that with teachers."

Music leader 1: "It's hard work because it's one-to-one, we push that bit harder, we're striving for excellence all the time. I do ask if I'm pushing too hard but so far she's risen to all the challenges. She may be tired when she first comes in but then she'll be so focused, it's been an absolute pleasure."

Charlie's musical journey hasn't been completely smooth, as one of the music leaders describes:

"One day she refused to do work for a whole hour. I came in the next week, and said look, I want you to continue, I'll be honest, it looks good for my organisation and for me, but also, I think it'll be good for you. And you said you'll do it. But if you really don't want to and it's going to make my life and your life hell for the next month, let's forget it, save ourselves the pain ... She asked if she could think about it, and sat there in silence for at least 5 minutes, and then said, I'll do it."

³ Charlie presented the PowerPoint to the writer of this case study, and took great pride in the standard of presentation, checking at one point with the music leader "Does that make sense?"; stopping to point out that she'd put a slide in the incorrect order, and saying "I should have written down the comments from the teachers"; the music leader reassuring her that she had done. Charlie spoke to both music leaders with respect but very much as collaborators, working together to make sure the learning and work is of a high standard.

Charlie is now hoping to move back into mainstream school, and has been discussing future pathways with her music mentor, including BTEC music, graphics or dance.

Insights into the approach

Learning to learn

The outcomes that the team – and the Pupil Referral Service – are aiming for are engagement, learning skills and confidence. As Mark Bick, music leader, explains:

"A lot of these young people have got into poor learning habits ... When they come across a difficulty, they will have an emotional reaction. I always try to approach it by identifying what's positive. I'll say, one, I'm glad you care about it



being right or wrong, that shows you care about music and two, you obviously have musical ears because you can hear something wrong, so three, let's find out what's wrong so we can put it right."

"They often get very skilled at avoiding work. So rather than look a fool at not being able to do

something, they form elaborate tactics to try to avoid it, and once they've got into that spiral, and they're better at avoidance tactics than work, they put all their energy into that."

Feedback

"Good, accurate feedback skills are essential, you have to identify the positive, without being dishonest, and then keep reinforcing it. An [emotional outburst about something not being right] in itself doesn't sound very good, but usually there are two good things in there 1) [they can] hear something's wrong 2) they care."

Attending

Another key skill for the music leader is 'attending', as Mark describes it: "The primary thing is the skill of properly attending to the person you're working with, really attending to their body

language and being willing to allow empathy, but balanced empathy. That attending, and caring yourself, that emotional engagement is important.”

Co-learning

“Then there's that attitude of being co-learners. I've said to Charlie, and the primary age kids we work with: I'm learning to teach you, and you're learning to learn from me, and this isn't easy, either of us can get it wrong. And that's a different attitude. It's actually the reality as a teacher, you're always trying to learn, and the students are trying to adapt to a particular teacher { but it isn't necessarily talked about].”

Could we help the young people you work with to re-engage in learning and in life?

Contact us:

www.themusicworks.org.uk